

The Anarchist Library (Mirror)

Anti-Copyright



# The anarcho-syndicalist movement in China in 1910s and 1920s

Vadim Damier

2006

Vadim Damier

The anarcho-syndicalist movement in China in 1910s and  
1920s  
2006

Retrieved on 4<sup>th</sup> February 2021 from libcom.org

*From: Vadim Damier. The Forgotten International: The  
International anarcho-syndicalist movement between two world  
wars (in Russian). Vol.1. Moscow, 2006. P.220–221, 232–239,  
585–591, 593–594*

**usa.anarchistlibraries.net**

The history of anarchism and anarcho-syndicalism in the East is generally little known outside of the region. The few foreign historians who addressed this topic were unanimous in stressing big difficulties in its study. The main factor here is perhaps the fact that the Eastern libertarians did not fit into the framework of those myths and beliefs by which the “winners of history” in this region of the globe (liberal democracy, on the one hand, and the ideology of the Communist Parties, on the other) sought to legitimize their victory<sup>1</sup>. However, the studies show that the anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists in many Asian countries were at the beginnings of the socialist

---

<sup>1</sup> Cf. f.ex.: Philippe Pelletier. Un oublié de consensus: l’anarcho-syndicalisme au Japon de 1911 à 1934 // De l’histoire du mouvement ouvrier révolutionnaire. «Actes» du colloque international «Pour un autre futur». Paris, 2001. P.176; Jean-Jaques Gandini. Aux sources de la révolution chinoise. Les anarchistes. Contribution historique de 1902 à 1927. Lyon, 1986. P.7–8.

movement, and they were often not inferior in strength and influence than their Marxist rivals or even sometimes surpassed them. They were able to leaving their specific and very vivid mark on the workers movement in their countries. The reason for this should probably be sought in the special nature of the Eastern societies of the early twentieth century: in the bitter resistance of communitarian social and ideological structures to capitalism and to ruthless invasion of a capitalist — industrialist modernization. Anarchist ideas were here (more than anywhere else) the banner of resistance. “Nul doute que l’aspiration kropotkinienne à un communalisme décentralisé unissant le champ, l’usine et l’atelier sur une base communiste a touché les fibres d’une société asiatique profondément rurale et collective, marquée par les pratiques et valeurs quasi communitaire de la rizi-culture irriguée », F. Pelletier, a French historian noticed. It was a tentative to combine the technical and scientific progress with our own communitarian structures and values, “débarrassée(s) des pesanteurs féodales, patriarcales et bureaucratiques”<sup>2</sup>. The psychology and the feelings of rural communes perceiving themselves as “village – State – microcosm” (utilizing the words of the famous Japanese writer Kenzaburo Oe) which opposed to the central government and lived according their own rules<sup>3</sup>, were very close to the idea of self-governing and mainly self-sustaining Commune.

+ + +

First groups of Chinese anarchists were created in the early twentieth century by the Chinese students studying abroad — in France and Japan<sup>4</sup>. The antimonarchical Revolution of 1911 allowed the anarchists to operate openly. Anarchist organizations emerged in Guangzhou (Canton), Shanghai, Beijing, Nanjing and other cities. Leading theorist of Chinese anarchism

---

<sup>2</sup> Pelletier Ph. Op.cit. P.220.

<sup>3</sup> Cf.: Kenzaburo Oe. The Game of Contemporaneity.

<sup>4</sup> Jean-Jaques Gandini. Aux sources de la révolution chinoise. Les anarchistes. Contribution historique de 1902 à 1927. Lyon, 1986.

the left trade unions existed, which organized the first big strikes. Numerous strikes and manifestations flared up in the port and in the fabrics under the slogans “Down with the Capitalists, owners of fabrics and factories!”, “Down with British Imperialism!”<sup>43</sup>. The Chinese schools became centers of the left and radical moods; and the authorities succeeded in the control of them only in the beginning of the 1930s. The anarchist movement was mostly strong among the Chinese population in the city areas of Straits-Settlements colony and in the most developed Malaya states. It got exhausted only after the unsuccessful attempt at the Straits-Settlements governor in Pinang and after a bomb blast in the Chinese population area. After 1925, the anarchist influence came to naught<sup>44</sup>, and the Kuomintang obtained a dominant influence among the Chinese population in Malaya; after 1930 it was pushed aside by Communist party.

---

<sup>43</sup> Г. Чуфрин. Сингапур. Москва, 1970. С.19 (G. Chufirin. Singapore. Moscow, 1970. P.19).

<sup>44</sup> Malaysian Culture Group Events. March 2003. Communism in Malaya // [www.malaysianculturegroup.com](http://www.malaysianculturegroup.com).

Liu Shifu, or Shi Fu (died in 1915) in the paper “Ming sheng” (edited by him since 1913 in Guangzhou, and then in Shanghai) argued that unfair social organization is guilty of troubles and poverty in China, and only the World Revolution can destroy all existing authorities and give freedom to people. “Our principles, the paper, wrote, are communism, anti-militarism, syndicalism; we oppose the family, for vegetarianism, international language and universal harmony. We also support all the scientific discoveries that lead to the progress of human livelihoods”.

The elimination of power and the establishment of communism, Shi Fu wrote, are leading to equalization of classes and to stop of fighting for the money. The life will become free, and the society of mutual hostility will change to society of mutual love. “If we can destroy the struggle for ownership and thirst for wealth and power, eliminating the institutions of private property and marriage, 80–90 percent of deaths will be removed. Evil and immorality stems from society, not from man”.

Shi Fu spoke in favor of a communist version of anarchism: “Anarchism stands for complete freedom of the people, free from any control, with the elimination of all superiors and organs of authorities ... And since the most dangerous authority in the modern world is capitalism, the anarchists are at the same time socialists. Socialism advocates that the means of production and their products belong to the society”. In the anarchist communism, according to Shi Fu, “all the means of production should be in public ownership, but the producers, that is all people, should be free to take what they need. It will be a classless society in which everyone will have to work. There will be no government, no army, no police, no prisons; will be neither laws nor regulations, only the groups freely organized to solve their problems and to produce in order to supply the people according to their needs. There will not be the institution of marriage. Mothers and children will obtain the

public maintenance since birth. All children from 6 to 20 years will receive a free education. After receiving a diploma of education they will work before they turn 45–50 years and then they will obtain maintenance in community centers ... Every religion will be eliminated, and instead, the complete development of *ethics and mutual aid* will be encouraged. Everybody will work 3 to 4 hours a day; education will be in Esperanto; native languages will be gradually eliminated”. Shi Fu believed, that the methods for achieving this ideal are the spread anarchist ideas, acts of popular resistance (boycott of taxes and of military service, riots, strikes and assassination of enemies), and, “when the time will be ripe”, the World Revolution, which “will overthrow the government, topped by the establishment of communism”. Such a revolution, in his opinion, was to start in Europe and in Russia, and then spread to China<sup>5</sup>.

Guangzhou anarchists led by Shi Fu created the first trade union of modern type in China and they were the organizers of the first strikes. There were about 40 such unions; they operated mainly in the field of crafts and services. In March 1918 in Shanghai, the first paper dedicated entirely to the problems of labour, “Laodong” (“Work”) appeared. Its chief editor was Liang Binsyan, a comrade of Shi Fu. The paper called the Chinese workers to celebrate on May 1. In 1918, anarchists held China’s first May Day demonstration. It was held in Guangzhou, which was called by Shi Fu “Barcelona of the East”. The May Day demonstration of 1920 was held in Shanghai<sup>6</sup>.

The anarchists enjoyed influence among workers in a number of cities, primarily, among the dock workers and rickshaws of Guangzhou and Hong Kong<sup>7</sup>. In the period 1920–

the local organization of “Black Youth League” of Japan. It developed a broad promotion of libertarian ideas and organized hundreds of public meetings and lectures attended by dozens of thousands people. 1 November 1929, Chang Weixian, returning from Japan, created “Mutual help association of Taiwan workers”, a prototype of anarcho-syndicalist organization. But the movement was crushed soon: already in February of 1927, there were first mass arrests of League activists, and in August of 1931, members of Mutual help association were charged with illegal possession of weapon, and the powerful wave of arrests followed<sup>40</sup>.

The Anarchists worked actively among Chinese population in South-East Asia. In 1926 in Hong Kong, the Union of mechanics operated, which had a syndicalist orientation and included until 60 thousand members. This organization had also sections in Malaya, Dutch India and Philippines<sup>41</sup>.

Malaya was since 1910s a trans-shipping point for transportation of Chinese anarchist literature; in Singapore, some anarchist groups and association emerged. In the beginning of 1920s in Malaya and Dutch India, the group “the Truth” operated, which edited more as 10 thousands brochures on Anarchism. In answer to propagandist activity, the colonial authorities deported most active propagandists from Singapore, Java and Sumatra<sup>42</sup>. In Singapore in the 1920s,

---

<sup>40</sup> Ph. Pelletier. Taiwan: Schmelztigel Asiens // *Trafik*. Nr.21. S.10.

<sup>41</sup> Е.Ю. Стабурова. Утопии китайских анархистов // *Китайские социальные утопии*. Москва, 1987. С.212 – 213 (Е.Yu. Staburova. *Utopias of Chinese Anarchists // Chinese Social Utopias*. Moscow, 1987. P.212–213)

<sup>42</sup> Е.Ю. Стабурова. Анархизм в Китае. 1900 – 1921. Москва, 1983. С.100 (Е.Yu. Staburova. *The Anarchism in China. 1900–1921*. Moscow, 1983. P.100); *Анархистский вестник*. 1923. Ноябрь – декабрь. № 5–6. С.76–77 (*Anarchist Herald*. 1923. November – December. No.5–6. P.76–77); Jean-Jaques Gandini. *Aux sources de la révolution chinoise...* P.170; [www.flinders.edu.au](http://www.flinders.edu.au); C.F. Young. *The May Fourth Movement and the origins of the Malayan Chinese Anarchism 1919 – 1925 // Asian Culture (Singapore)*. 1996. June. No.20. P.26–44.

<sup>5</sup> Cited in: *Ibid*. P.79–82.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*. P.122, 150; Jean-Jaques Gandini. *L’anarchisme, matrice de la révolution chinoise // L’Homme et la Societe*. Janvier-juin 1997. No.123–124. P.121–123; *Новейшая история Китая 1917–1927*. М., 1983. С. 45–46 (*Noveyshaya istoriya Kitaya 1917 – 1927*. Moscow, 1983. P.45–46).

<sup>7</sup> Jean-Jaques Gandini. *Aux sources de la révolution...* P.178.

In a situation of union and later (from 1927) of confrontation between the Kuomintang and the Communist Party, the libertarian movement in China finally split. The proponents of “pure” line do not want to interfere in the ongoing struggle for power. In 1925 – 1927 years, they claimed that the alliance between the CPC and the Kuomintang against foreign capital does not question the essence of the system, on the contrary, the Kuomintang has the support of the national bourgeoisie and the CPC stands for state capitalism. The pragmatists believed in the contrary, that the people’s revolution is coming, and it should be involved as much as possible, trying to influence it. On the other hand, some anarchists followed the anarchist veterans Li Shizeng and Wu Zhihui and associated herself with the Kuomintang, interpreting it as a revolutionary force, as opposed to military dictators of the North of the country, and to the Communists. These persons have occupied important positions in the leadership of the Kuomintang regime. They tried to present rule of the Kuomintang as a transitional period towards anarchism<sup>38</sup>. Most anarchists sharply criticized both the policy of alliance with the Kuomintang and the accession to the Communist Party. They blamed “politicians” of treason, but had been henceforth very few opportunities for social activities<sup>39</sup>.

+ + +

In Taiwan which was a colony of Japan, the anarchist movement in the 1920s developed under a strong influence of Japanese libertarians. 1919 anarchist Yu Gingfang (who contacted the Japanese like-minded activists) headed a popular revolt, but it was brutally suppressed by colonial authorities. December of 1926, Fang Pengliang (former student in Japan), Lian Weng and the Japanese anarchist Ichi Kozawa founded

---

<sup>38</sup> Jean-Jaques Gandini. *L’anarchisme...* P.126; Idem. *Aux sources de la révolution...* P.106, 214; *Anarchismus in der chinesischen Revolution – ip.casmaron.net*

<sup>39</sup> A. Dirlik. *Anarchism in the Chinese Revolution...* P.255.

1923, workers associations and unions of different directions worked in Guangzhou, and, as the Chinese Communists in the Moscow Red International of Labour Unions reported, the anarchist tendency had “a very big latent force”. The workers being under the influence of the anarchists were united in the Workers’ Mutual Help Society (WMHS). Some anarchists also worked in the General Labour Union of Guangzhou arisen initially in Singapore and being influenced by the Republicans, as well as in the “neutral” trade unions. In 1923–1924, WHMS gradually disintegrated, and the adjoining workers unions became independent or joined the Federation of the Canton Labor Unions<sup>8</sup>.

In November of 1920, anarchist students Huang Ai, Pang Renquan and other former students of “First Industrial School of Hunan” created Workers’ Society of Hunan Province (WSHP) in Changsha.

The program of this Society included both union and political points: the increase of welfare and educational level of workers; the country’s unification; restoration of a “national dignity”, etc. It included miners, steelworkers, electricians, casters, weavers, varnishes, embroiderers, builders, hairdressers, etc. There were in the leadership of the organization, in addition to students anarchists, also master and administrators, and there were almost no workers in the governing bodies of Society. In winter 1920 – 1921, the conflicts between Huang Ai, Pan Renquan and their associates, on the one side, and chiefs, on the other, flared. The anarchists demanded to ban the speaking on behalf of workers for “people who are not working and have no consciousness of the workers”. The influence of these non-proletarian strata was felt during a strike in March 1921 against the purchase of unique existing

---

<sup>8</sup> РГАСПИ. Ф.534. Оп.7. Д.342. Лл.110–111. (RGASPI, i.e. Russian State Archive of Social Political History. Archive Fund 534. Archival Inventory 7. Act.342. P.110–111)

in the province silk textile manufactory “Hua Shi” by an entrepreneur from another Jiangsu Province, who was supported by the local authorities and by the military ruler of the region Zhao Hengti. Putting forward the requirement to give the work to Hunanese only, the workers actually supported the local bourgeoisie. But at the same time, the strike showed the power of the workers. After the demonstration, with the participation of one thousand people, the talks begun brokered by persons appointed by Zhao.

The “Hua Shi” incorporated some of the leaders of the Society in the Administrative Council, but Huang and Pang refused to participate. After settlement of conflicts, they continued their agitation among the workers and participated in actions to destroy the machines.

April 13, 1921 about two thousand men seized a businessman from Jiangsu and went to the residence of the provincial authorities, demanding justice. The demonstration was dispersed, and the factory closed. Military provincial governor Zhao invited Huang Ai to negotiate and ordered his arrest, and sent troops to force the workers to return to work. But the “chiefs” have continued to demand the expulsion of “foreigners” of Jiangsu, and the conflict was settled only after the company invited one of the leading merchants of Changsha to enter the administrative council. Some concessions were made also to the workers, and at the beginning of May 1921 the situation has calmed down. Huang Ai was released, but not satisfied. He said to a crowd of supporters which met him: “The military masters and the masters of finances must be overturned, but the despotism of officialdom-shenshi protects them”. On the occasion of May 1 Huang and Pang declared: “the force of the masses and the organization of labor” have nothing to do with politics.

The result of these social conflicts has been the rapid growth of the Society, and the “chiefs” were now in the minority. By the end of 1921 the Society had about 4–5 thousand

of Sacco and Vanzetti, calling for a boycott of American institutions<sup>35</sup>. But in 1928, the anarchist movement in China has been on the decline. Liu Chenbo reported to IWA that only a few anarcho-communist organizations remained in the country. There were among them the Anarchist Youth Federation in Shanghai, the Anarchist Federation of the East formed in Shanghai by Chinese, Korean, Japanese and other Asian anarchists, as well as the Union of Black youth of China. The last of these groups published the newspaper “Black youth”, and at the end of 1928 produced a number 1 of bulletin “Black News”, which contained: an article about the situation in China and the dominance of the warlords; the condemnation of former Anarchists which became members of the Kuomintang leadership; the manifesto of “Black youth” on the occasion of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Congress of the Kuomintang called for the overthrow of the Kuomintang government and for combat all centralist parties, including the Bolsheviks; as well as another “Black youth” manifesto directed against imperialism and deceptive policy of the USA. Some former anarchists, who went to an cooperation with the Kuomintang government, published the magazine “The Revolution”<sup>36</sup>. After the 1928, the regular communication between the IWA and Chinese anarchists had been lost. In 1930, Chinese anarchist Mau reported to European correspondents that in May a few libertarians (including the editor of “Workers Youth”) were arrested in connection with the preparation of the May Day speeches. As a result of repression, the paper of “Federation of proletarian youth of Northern China”, “The Proletarian” stopped the publication. The Chinese anarchists called European comrades to save the prisoners<sup>37</sup>.

---

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Presse-Dienst... 16.11.1928. Nr.13 (103).

<sup>37</sup> Le Combat syndicaliste. 1930. Septembre.

lection of translated materials, which included “The Modern anarchy” and “The Social technique as a tactic” by Udo Alle<sup>31</sup>.

The information about the participation of anarchists in strikes and uprisings in Shanghai in early 1927 is very contradictory<sup>32</sup>. With the defeat of the February 1927 uprising in Shanghai, a new wave of repression against the workers movement in the city expanded, characterized by the Anarchists as “white terror”<sup>33</sup>. The Anarcho-syndicalists reacted negatively to Kuomintang power. After the split in the Kuomintang on “right” and “left” wing in the spring-summer 1927, the Anarchist Youth Federation of China, formed on the basis of the FPA, released an appeal to the workers of the world, saying that the Chinese revolution is under threat: the “white capitalism”, the “red Bolshevism” and the Kuomintang oppress people and trying to take control of the action of the proletariat. Both wings of Kuomintang seeking to establish the dictatorship, although the “left” faction expresses recognition of the class struggle. The appeal reported that the 3 months prior to this, the member of FPA in Suzhou were executed on the orders of the Nanjing “Right Kuomintang” government of Chiang Kai-shek. In Hunan Province, Anarchist Lin Pei, who worked in the trade union of agricultural workers “Ka Ho Hsien”, was arrested as a “Bolshevik”. When angry peasants demanded his release, the Kuomintang forces opened fire, killing two and injuring 68 people. Lin Pei was executed. The Anarchists claimed that expelled from its ranks a number of former comrades who were in favor of cooperation with the “revolutionary government” of Kuomintang<sup>34</sup>.

At the end of the 1920s, the Chinese and Korean anti-authoritarian organizations continued attempts to work in Shanghai. They held protests in connection with the case

<sup>31</sup> Presse-Dienst... 27.11.1926. Nr.31 (73); 10.03.1927. Nr.4 (78).

<sup>32</sup> Jean-Jaques Gandini. Aux sources de la révolution... P.200–202.

<sup>33</sup> Presse-Dienst... 10.03.1927. Nr.4 (78).

<sup>34</sup> Presse-Dienst... 29.09.1927. Nr.13 (87).

members, and by May 1922 it consisted of over 20 trade unions (miners, railroad workers, printers, coiners, students, etc.), uniting seven thousand people. The Society published a magazine “Laodong”, which conducted propaganda of anarcho-syndicalist general strike idea.

Local Communists led by Mao Zedong tried to increase its influence in the labour movement. They invited Huang and Pang to join the “Socialist Youth Corps of Hunan” and talked about the alliance between Marxism and Anarchism. The Anarchists who fought the “chiefs”, accepted the offer of cooperation, and it allowed the Communists to gain a foothold in the Society. In autumn, the organization was reorganized: mandatory fees were introduced; departments for propaganda, organization and relations were created. The Anarchists and the Communists held a joint propaganda tour among workers of neighboring Jiangxi Province, where in 1922 “Workers Club of Anyuan miners” was created, but it quickly turned, however, in the stronghold of the Communists.

In November 1921 the delegate of Society, Wang Guanghui represented it at the preparatory meeting of Congress of the workers of the Far East in Irkutsk. He returned to China, shocked by the poverty in Soviet Russia and by the communist party control over the meeting.

In early December 1921, the Society of Hunan workers organized a big rally against the Washington Conference, followed by the 10-thousand anti-imperialist demonstration, organized together with other groups. Finally, December 31, 1921 at the factory “Hua Shi” a strike broke out after the administration’s decision to cancel a New Year bonus. The workers demanded to restore the premium, to raise wages and to improve working conditions. In this strike led by the anarchists, over two thousand people participated. The workers resorted to acts of sabotage: machines were destroyed, glass were broken, etc. January 17, 1922 the strikers sent Huang Ai and Pang Renquan for negotiating with the provincial governor Zhao Hengti, which

satisfied most of the demands of the strikers but immediately ordered to behead Huang Ai and Pang Renquan. The Society of Hunan workers was disbanded, and its publication is prohibited. Most leading anarchists from it fled to Shanghai. The remains of the organization soon fell under Communist party control<sup>9</sup>.

The issue of Chinese anarchist newspaper "Voice of Labor" from May 1, 1922 was about "direct action and the general strike". Anarchists presence was felt at the First Congress of Labour, which was held in Guangzhou in 1922, especially in the adopted resolutions in memory of Huang and Pang (proposed by the delegate of the Society of Hunan workers Zhang Lijian), about the organization of a national federation of rickshaws and especially about the railway line "Yuehan". The last of them proposed by Wu Haitang, the delegate of the "Workers' Club Xu Jiapeng", stated that the Chinese labor movement must be economic and not to engage in politic struggle<sup>10</sup>.

After 1918, the Chinese anarchists often worked together with Marxists and supporters of Bolshevism. So in the summer of 1919 Juan Linshuang, continuator of Shi Fu's activities, created in Beijing "Socialist Alliance" with Chen Duxiu, the future first secretary general of the CPC, and Li Dazhao, known as "China's first Marxist". Beijing circle took shape officially in October 1920; along with the Marxists (Li Dazhao, Zhang Guotao, Luo Zhanglung, Liu Renjing), it included five anarchists: Huang Lingshuang, Chen Derong, Zhang Bogen etc. Their cooperation continued until November 1920, when sharp, irreconcilable differences were revealed. Li Dazhao proposed to make some concessions to the Anarchists in order to preserve the unity, but Zhang Guotao and others insisted. In late 1920, the anarchists leaved the circle, rejecting an item on the dic-

---

<sup>9</sup> Jean-Jaques Gandini *Aux sources de la révolution...* P.172-176, 179; *Новейшая история Китая...* С.115 (*Noveyshaya istoriya Kitaya...* P.115)

<sup>10</sup> Jean-Jaques Gandini. *Aux sources de la révolution...* P.170, 177-178.

Association. It urged Europe to send propaganda materials to China<sup>27</sup>.

In the time of III Congress of the anarcho-syndicalist International, the FPA was seen by it as a friendly organization<sup>28</sup>. The main press organ of the Federation was the paper (in the first time weekly) "People's arms", which began publishing in 1926 in Shanghai. Its number 9 (Spring 1927) was released in large quantities. It contained: a critical analysis of events in the country; the material about "Kropotkin on the Russian Revolution"; Liu Chen's article about "Sexual liberation and an anarchist revolution"; a translation of the anarcho-communist manifesto of Russian anarchist Novomirsky; and the review of the situation in the world<sup>29</sup>. In addition, the FPA produced in Shanghai the bulletin "Black Surf". It highlights, in particular, the problems of the international labor movement. The number 3, released in the spring of 1927, comprising: a call for the working class of the world to oppose the imperialist intervention and sending foreign troops in China, the appraisal of Kuomintang victory as a deception of the people which give nothing to the workers; an article about the revival of anarchist youth; the call to send materials per address of Liu Chenbo<sup>30</sup>. Finally, Liu Chenbo and Liu Chen published a small sheet "Black Flag". In the spring of 1927, it was reported about the preparation of its third issue. In addition, the Shanghai anarchist publishing house "People's Bell" released in 1926 the first volume ("Conquest of Bread") of the planned complete works of Kropotkin. Also the book of "B.P.", "A Critique of Marxism" was published. In the spring of 1927, it was reported the publication of the col-

---

<sup>27</sup> Presse-Dienst... 27.03.1926. Nr.21 (63);

<sup>28</sup> Protokoll des III. Kongresses der Internationalen Arbeiter-Assoziation // Die Internationale. 1928. August. Nr.10. S.22.

<sup>29</sup> Presse-Dienst... 27.11.1926. Nr.31 (73); 10.03.1927. Nr.4 (78).

<sup>30</sup> Presse-Dienst... 7.04.1927. Nr.6 (80).



ing to Chinese libertarians , “there is no benefit from that, this or that military force will win”, because they all stand for private property, capitalism and the military dictatorship. The Anarchists complained about the lack of financial resources. Nevertheless, they continued efforts to unite and educate workers. Winter 1926, anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists from Sichuan, Hubei, Hunan, Guangxi and other regions united in the “Federation of People’s Arms” (FPA). The Anarchist Federation of China also joined this organization. The center of Chinese workers’ movement, Shanghai was elected as residence of the executive committee<sup>26</sup>.

The FPA was characterized by the Chinese anarchists as a “proletarian organization with the libertarian socialist base”. In January 1926, the FPA has published a manifesto to the Chinese proletariat in the fourth anniversary of the murder of Hunan anarcho-syndicalists Huang Ai and Pang Renquan. It condemned all authorities and political forces fighting for power over the country. “The Kuomintang Party and with it the Communists, or Bolsheviks, involved in the infamous campaign against the libertarian labor movement”, it was said in a statement. “They are deceiving the masses and spend tactics of capture of organizations. Some want a national revolution, while others stand under the canopy of the communist party flag, to create a “dictatorship of the proletariat”. In fact, this dictatorship will suppress the proletariat with an iron hand”. The manifesto accused Communists of having betrayed China to Soviet Russia, of accumulating property, sabotaging strikes, etc. The manifesto ends with a call for the arming of the workers and the slogan “Emancipation of the workers must be the act of the workers themselves!”

The “Federation of People’s Arms” promoted in China the goals and methods of struggle of the International Workers

---

<sup>26</sup> Presse-Dienst... 7.04.1927. Nr.6 (80).

tatorship of the proletariat in the “provisory program” project proposed by the Marxists; and the Marxist group was reorganized into an embryo national communist organization with a purely Bolshevik paper “Communist”. Central point in the platform of this organization was to establish a “dictatorship of the proletariat” and the implementation of a uniform discipline<sup>11</sup>.

In Guangzhou, the socialist circle was formed at the initiative of the Soviet Bolshevik G.N. Voytinsky in September-October 1920. Along with the Soviet Communists K.A.Stoyanovich and L.A. Perlin (representants of Soviet Central union of consumers societies), it consisted of seven Chinese anarchists. At the meetings of this circle the socialist literature was discussed and the history of workers movement was studied. Most members of the group rejected the thesis about “dictatorship of the proletariat” proposed by Voitinsky, and the circle was dissolved<sup>12</sup>.

The gap between the Chinese anarchists and party communists came after discussions in 1921 between a leading Chinese Anarchist Wu Shengbai and Communist leader Chen Duxiu.

Chen Duxiu claimed that anarchism is impossible, as an “absolute freedom” is incompatible with the existence of organized groups. He assured that the Bolsheviks and Anarchists seek the same goal: a society without the state and capitalists, but argued that to achieve such a system, a centralized organization will require, allowing to win political power. The coercion is inevitable and effective to achieve the putting goals, to ensure economic development and to avoid the chaos that would be inevitable consequence of the implementation of theses of Anarchists. Wu Shengbai answered to Marxists that the Anarchists do not deny the

---

<sup>11</sup> Jean-Jaques Gandini. L’anarchisme, matrice de la revolution... P.124; Новейшая история Китая... С.76–77 (Noveyshaya istoriya Kitaya... P.76–77).

<sup>12</sup> Новейшая история Китая... С.76–77 (Noveyshaya istoriya Kitaya... P.76–77).

existence of groups, only the despotism of the group over the individual. He saw syndicalism as a means to make a revolution and to provide post-revolutionary social order. The anarchism, he continued, is ready to use force against the social evil, to destroy the authorities; it seeks to overthrow capitalist society, as it opposes to any institutionalized power and the law, which will inevitably lead to the oppression of man by man. Human freedom is impossible without a free society. It is conceivable only if the laws will be replaced by the free agreements on the basis of the people's will. There is no contradiction between Freedom and Association, because each person is free to join or leave it, argued the Chinese anarchist.

Wu Shengbai insisted that people in today's society are made stupid due to insufficient knowledge, and he hopes for the spread of education, both before and after the revolution. In response to allegations of Chen Duxiu that the masses are guided by emotional motives and therefore needs conscious vanguard, Wu Shengbai emphasized: the rationality of people will grow with the progress of science, and antisocial mores will decrease. The purpose of the revolution, he emphasized, is not to create a new class, but the elimination of all classes; the notorious "dictatorship of the proletariat" simply would reproduce again the evil of the old society. True social revolution is possible only within the framework of voluntary association of convinced personalities coming to the free communist society<sup>13</sup>.

The Anarchists also criticized sharply the persecution of their fellow by the Bolsheviks in Russia<sup>14</sup>.

Despite the growing differences between Anarchists, who managed to keep the prevalence until 1925, and the party

---

<sup>13</sup> Jean-Jaques Gandini. *Aux sources de la révolution...* P.101–102; Idem. *L'anarchisme, matrice de la révolution...* P.124.

<sup>14</sup> Arif Dirlik. *Anarchism in the Chinese Revolution*. Berkeley / Oxford / Los Angeles, 1991. P.200–201.

imperialism and capitalism. It is a matter of life and death of all mankind. This does not in any way the movement against foreigners, not a question of diplomacy. We do not rely on any kind of government; even if the success could be achieved by diplomatic means, this success would not have been ours. We, the workers, have nothing to do with these plans of the Government. We believe that imperialist oppression cannot be destroyed with the help of diplomatic fuss. Our economic resistance only acquires power by combining the forces of the workers". The Federation called the organized workers of whole world to help the Chinese proletariat: "Workers of all countries of the world! Maintain constant communication with us. Let's create a grand alliance of the proletariat of the world to destroy the barbaric exploitation and political oppression and achieve freedom and prosperity for all mankind"<sup>24</sup>. The wave of strikes in Shanghai subsided in late August 1925 only, after the communist leaders agreed to resume work on the Japanese and then on the English enterprises.

The Shanghai Federation of Trade Unions opposed to General Trade Union of Labour, which was under communist party control. In the Federation of Trade Unions participated 50 unions with some 50 thousand members. However, it was not a purely anarcho-syndicalist organization, and it included also some Kuomintang supporters dissatisfied with the predominance of the Communists. When the Kuomintang took over power, they lost interest in the preservation of the mass movement. Then the Kuomintang established full control over the Shanghai Federation of Trade Unions<sup>25</sup>.

The civil war between the Northern generals and the Southern government of Kuomintang greatly complicated the work of the libertarian movement. Both sides brutally suppressed the anarchist and anarcho-syndicalist movement, and accord-

---

<sup>24</sup> *Presse-Dienst...* 7.11.1925. Nr.16(58).

<sup>25</sup> Jean-Jaques Gandini. *L'anarchisme...* P.127.

ployees of Shanghai, the Union of shoemakers of Shanghai, the Union of friends Don-Te, the Union of silk dyers, the Association of restaurant employees of Hwa Yang, the Association of spinners of Shanghai, the Association of hairdressers of Shanghai, the Federation of workers producers of ink and Indian ink, the Union of bleachers, the Union of mechanics Wan-Shin, the Federation of electricians, the Union transport pushers (rickshaws) of Shanghai, the Shanghai Federation of construction workers, the Syndicalist Youth, the Association of tea preparation workers of Shanghai, the Union of miners Don-Te, the Section of China Federation of bookbinders in Shanghai, the Workers' Association U-Pei in Shanghai, the Union of seafarers, the Federation of tailors of Shanghai, the Association of workers Kiang-Pei, the Union of furniture makers, the Association of Che-Kiang in Shanghai, the Union of carpenters Hwai-Tai in Shanghai, the Workers' Mutual Help Society of Anhwei, the Federation of Trade Unions Jiangxu in Shanghai, the Workers' Mutual Help Society of Jiangxi in Shanghai<sup>23</sup>.

After the repression against Chinese workers in the Japanese factories in Shanghai and the police shooting at an anti-imperialist student protest May 30, 1925, the libertarian workers organizations of the city have actively participated in the general strike of protest. The wave of strikes lasted until September. The Shanghai Federation of Trade Unions issued a manifesto to the workers of the world, which remembered that the Chinese "people is oppressed by international imperialism and capitalism", deprived of his liberty and drag out a miserable existence. Now the oppressed awakened, they "should unite and demand our rights and our freedom". The Chinese libertarians emphasized that the workers are fighting against imperialism, but they are not nationalists: "We, the Chinese workers, are fighting for the well-being and freedom of all people against the barbaric international

---

<sup>23</sup> Presse-Dienst... 25.09.1925. Nr.14 (56).

Communists, the debate were still relatively restrained until 1922. Chen Duxiu and Wu Shengbai were previously friends. Perhaps many activists on both sides were hoping as yet for the possibility of cooperation<sup>15</sup>. Some communists have continued to believe that anarchism is the final stage of communism. Anarcho-Communist Huang Linshuang participated in the Congress of the Peoples of the Far East, organized by the Comintern in Moscow and Petrograd in January-February 1922<sup>16</sup>. However, in late 1922 there was a final break. Now Anarchists believed Bolshevik traitors to the revolution and the regime in the Soviet Union a new form of capitalism.

+ + +

After the disintegration of WMHS in Guangzhou, in 1924, an amalgamation of the trade unions of the city were taken on the initiative of the Kuomintang and the Communists; and the Workers' Representative Union (WRU) arose, which included also the organizations being before members of WMHS. However, in late 1924, in the face of the deteriorating political struggle in Guangdong Province, a demarcation began in this trade union center. In October, during the anti-Kuomintang rebellion of Guangzhou merchant, an anarchist Barbers Union left the WRU. Later the General Labour Union and the Engineers Union (in which there were also some Anarchists) made the same, and the WRU remained under the influence of the Communists<sup>17</sup>.

Since 1923, the influence of Communists (who relied on an alliance with the Kuomintang) began to rise in the Chinese workers movement. The Communist Party managed to achieve dominance at the Second National Congress of Labour (of trade

---

<sup>15</sup> Anarchismus in der chinesischen Revolution — ip.casmaron.net

<sup>16</sup> Новейшая история Китая... С.106 (Noveyshaya istoriya Kitaya... P.106).

<sup>17</sup> РГАСПИ. Ф.534. Оп.7. Д.342. Лл.110–111 (RGASPI, i.e. Russian State Archive of Social Political History. Archive Fund 534. Archival Inventory 7. Act.342. P.110–111)

unions), which was held in Shanghai in 1925. Some of the Chinese anarchists collaborated with the Communists, others joined the Kuomintang. Others tried to organize the anarcho-syndicalist movement; and Shanghai became its center<sup>18</sup>.

One of the leaders of the crushed Workers' Society of Hunan, which, like other anarchists of this organization took refuge in Shanghai, founded the "Shanghai Bureau of Workers' Society of Hunan" which became center of attraction for the scattered activists. Together with other anarchists in Shanghai, especially the editors of "Chinese Herald", they have moved closer to other non-communist trade unions of the city (among which there were also some quite moderate), in the hope that it will allow the anarcho-syndicalists to keep their autonomy<sup>19</sup>. March 8, 1924 was created the Shanghai Federation of Trade Unions, with participation of 24 local unions. In its manifesto, the Federation declared that all the people should "work" and "have a right to life", but this situation is not possible in the present society divided into classes of idle parasites and hard working, exploited workers. The latter can't satisfy neither material nor spiritual and cultural needs. "If we want to protect your life, then we can't do it individually and alone: the workers have a common interest, and they should protect themselves. That is the main reason why we have created our Federation", it was stated in the document. – "Workers have a common economic interest, on the one hand, and the common ideal of a new society on the other. Our Federation is based on these two principles". The Federation proclaimed its intention to conduct the "struggle for improvement ... of material situation and for development of our intellectual facilities", to "promote continuing education of workers, to win higher wages, shorter working hours, etc.", and in the future to "create a world of produc-

<sup>18</sup> Jean-Jaques Gandini. L'anarchisme... P.124–127.

<sup>19</sup> Jean-Jaques Gandini. Aux sources de la révolution chinoise... P.178–179.

ers, the world of labour". It was emphasized that the working organization "should be a federalist, decentralized" because it "does not need useless leaders". The Federation expressed "against all capitalists and all governments" as well as "against all the so-called socialists". "Whatever we do, we should do it ourselves", it was said in the declaration. "We are completely independent from all parties, and we hope to come with our Federation to a creation of general association of trade unions of all workers' organizations in China". The Federation published the newspaper "Herald of labor", which was published firstly three times in the month and then weekly<sup>20</sup>. In the spring of 1925 it was reported that a newspaper was banned in Shanghai and moved to Guangzhou<sup>21</sup>.

The delegates of Federation wanted to take part in the II Congress of the IWA in 1925, but the civil war in China prevented these plans<sup>22</sup>.

In view of the intentions of Communist Party to convene the 2<sup>nd</sup> National Congress of Trade Unions (May 1925), the libertarian workers' organizations in Shanghai issued a manifesto in which warned workers of communist party dictatorship. The document stressed the importance of the Kronstadt rebellion in 1921 against the Bolshevik regime in Russia: "For the working class, the revolt of Kronstadt was a real proletarian revolution". Kronstadt tragedy should not be repeated in China. "The emancipation of the workers is the affair of the workers themselves!" The document was signed by the Union of carpenters, the Federation of textile workers of Shanghai, the Union of workers War veterans, the Federation of Chinese printers, the Association of railway workers of Shanghai-Nanjing line, the Union of painters, the Union of Anhwei workers (Shanghai), the Union of packet-shipping employees, the Union of hotel em-

<sup>20</sup> Presse-Dienst frsg. von Sekretariat der IAA. 7.11.1925. Nr.16 (58).

<sup>21</sup> Presse-Dienst... 9.05.1925. Nr.7 (49).

<sup>22</sup> Tätigkeit des Sekretariats zum 2. Kongress. Amsterdam, März 1925 // Die Internationale. 1925. Juni. Nr.5. S.74.