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Interview with Malaysian anarchists

Sean Matthews interviews Malaysian anarchists

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While in South East Asia recently Sean Matthews caught up with two Malaysian anarchists who told me about the issues they face as workers and anarchists in their country. Over a few drinks and few hours we discussed the current political and social situation including the problem of race and religion in their country. We exchanged ideas and experiences, the wider international anarchist movement and most important what we can do to assist anarchists in this part of the world.

Below is a slightly edited version of the interview. For security reasons their names are anonymous.

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 an workers movement. There are some independent organizations or committees which focus on struggles for civil right liberation but normally these organizations participate from activist society and bourgeois class. Last year there where some people trying to build local Marxist organizations (CWI – committee 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 Malaysia), but have no direction or strategy to build workers movement. There is a single anarchist group which focuses on youth activism and doing Food Not Bomb 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 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 anarchism method or idea. Now I believe in building up an anarchist group among friends to introduce and empower 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 movement today?

There is some anarchist history before we got independence (1957). Radical ideas coming from immigrant Chinese workers at the time. One our friends in

CNT-AIT Paris, just informed us they found some historical document that had been sent from anarchists in Malaysia to to the Spanish CNT-AIT during the the Spanish Revolution [Malaysian anarchists were subscribers of *Informa Bulteno*, the esperanto magazine of the CNT-AIT during the Spanish Revolution]. The communist party was banned by 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 permit from the police. We also have act of publishing which is all literature monitoring by government, printing company. We do not want to take risk to publish radical literature. The government also monitors radical websites and social networking sites such as facebook. In these weeks one of anonymous hackers group declares to attack government website after Malaysia government announces to block some of file sharing website. We also have Internal Security Act (ISA), where the government can detain anyone without trial. Our communication such as mobile phone and internet connection is being controlled by government agency, such as required identification registration for every mobile number. Religion always become an issue with Muslim population because their historical perspective on communism as well understanding of ideology caused by government education policy. So, people are scared to get involved in workers movement because they believe they will force them to abandon from their religious belief.

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 Asiato 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.