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# **Anarchism in Malaya, Singapore and Malaysia**

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pore. The group managed to create an “illegal” trade union at a factory in Kuala Lumpur and start the organization of trade unions at a factory in Ipoh and another enterprise in the Malaysian capital. The goal is the universal formation of workers unions and their federation at the country level. Primary attention is paid to agitation and enlightenment among the working people and to the explanation of anarchism: the Kukong Press publishing house was established for the translation of books, brochures and fanzins to the Malay. The “Black Book”, first book on anarchism in the Malay language was published. The group conducts discussions with other collectives and seeks to unite all anarchists.<sup>68</sup>

In Singapore, a small state with a rigidly authoritarian regime, the opportunities for anarchist work are even more severe than in Malaysia, although in the country in the 2000s there were individual activists who maintained contacts with like-minded people in Indonesia and Malaysia. Any attempt at an open speech is immediately followed by severe repression. So, on May 9, 2014, five 17-year-old young people were arrested and charged with “vandalism” only because they wrote anarchist symbols and slogans directed against the ruling People’s Action Party.<sup>69</sup> In February 2016, several workers from Singapore attended the presentation of the International Workers Association in Melbourne, Australia, organized by the Anarcho-Syndicalist Federation (ASF) of Australia and the secretariat of I.W.A. In September 2016, the ASF held a discussion on anarcho-syndicalism in Singapore with local activists. In Singapore, an anarcho-syndicalist initiative group was formed.

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<sup>68</sup> A. F. Anarchism in South East Asia...

<sup>69</sup> S. Perera. Taking notes 35: The symbol of Anarchy in Singapore – philosophersforchange.org-...; K. Chee. 5 youths arrested for Toa Payoh graffiti case // The Straits Times. Singapore, 2014. May 10.

smoke bombs and firecrackers, tried to attack the McDonald’s branch, painted the showcase with paint and threw stones at the bank building. The police used tear gas and water cannon to disperse them and detained about 30 people.<sup>64</sup> After this, repressions against the anarchist movement intensified. On August 28, 2015, armed with automatic weapons, policemen, under the pretext of searching for weapons and explosives, broke into “Rumah Api” during a night concert, confiscated musical equipment, computers and books. More than 160 people, including guests from the US, Germany, Spain, the Philippines and Indonesia, were detained for several days.<sup>65</sup> Commenting this police raid, activists noted that earlier in 2015 the “Wall” center in Batu-Pahat was set on fire: it had been working since 2010 and served as a kind of a link between youth sub-cultures in Kuala Lumpur and Singapore.<sup>66</sup> On January 24, 2016, during a protest demonstration against the agreement on the Trans-Pacific Partnership in Kuala Lumpur, the police arrested seven anarchists, accusing them of causing property damage.<sup>67</sup>

Some of the anarchists in Malaysia in the 2010s. began to show interest in the labor movement and anarcho-syndicalism. One of them recalled that his group “Kaum Babi” initially met hostile attitude from anarcho-punks and antifascists from “Antifa Malaysia.” Although the workers, he said, are afraid of the word “anarchism”, the group considers it necessary to organize radical trade unions. The decision to intensify work in the anarcho-syndicalist direction was taken at a meeting between the anarchists of Indonesia and several anarchists from Singa-

<sup>64</sup> Two masterminds behind May Day rally chaos identified // The Rakyat Post. News. 26.05.2015 – [www.therakyatpost.com](http://www.therakyatpost.com)-...

<sup>65</sup> Kuala Lumpur: Police raid anarchist space Rumah Api (Malaysia) – [325.nostate.net](http://325.nostate.net)

<sup>66</sup> [class-struggle-anarchism.tumblr.com](http://class-struggle-anarchism.tumblr.com)...

<sup>67</sup> One individual allegedly linked to anarchist group detained // The Sun Daily. News. 23.01.2016 – [www.thesundaily.my](http://www.thesundaily.my)

## Contents

The emergence of a workers’ and anarchist movement	5
Anarchist Agitation . . . . .	10
The rise and destruction of the anarchist movement	16
In modern Malaysia and Singapore . . . . .	21

film screenings and discussions were held. The same work continued in 2012.<sup>60</sup>

In addition to the Kuala Lumpur initiative, in the early 2000s, there was an info-shop in Trengganu, “A-Mince”, but by 2012 it was closed. In Bangsar, an anarchist from the punk environment organized the “50B” center, which ran weekly film screenings and discussions (about the protests of May 1968 in the world, the movement of “Students for a Democratic Society” in the USA in the 1960s etc.). This activity was oriented toward the student public.<sup>61</sup>

The intensification of anarchist work began to bear fruit. May Day manifestations were becoming more energetic and militant. On May 1, 2014, a group of anarchists and anti-fascists under red-black flags, after participating in a general march in Kuala Lumpur, tried to break through to the place of Independence cordoned off by the police and entered into a fierce confrontation with the youth of the Islamic Party.<sup>62</sup> In 2015 an anarchist column marched on a demonstration on May 1, which was organized by the movement against the tax on goods and services and by the opposition. Protesting against the rise in the cost of living, cutting on social payments and raising taxes, about 30 anarchists, joined by some other demonstrators, refused to disperse at the end of the demonstration. They entered into skirmishes with the police, trying to grab trucks with food and drinks for the marchers.<sup>63</sup> In addition, a group of anarchists threw colored

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<sup>60</sup> Kuala Lumpur: interview with Pustaka Semesta infoshop – [disacords.wordpress.com-...](http://disacords.wordpress.com-...)

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Boo Su-Lyn, P. Subramaniam, Ar Z. In the thousands, GST critics hit streets in May Day rally // The Malay Mail online – [www.themalaymailonline.com-...](http://www.themalaymailonline.com-...) S.J. Zahiid. Despite court ruling, home minister insists rallies wrong choice for dissent // The Malay Mail online – [www.themalaymailonline.com-...](http://www.themalaymailonline.com-...)

<sup>63</sup> Ahmad Awang leads prayer to help smite GMS // Malaysiakini – [www.malaysiakini.com](http://www.malaysiakini.com).

took part in 2010 in an anarchist meeting in Medan (on the Indonesian island of Sumatra), where they got acquainted with the experience of anarchist Info-shops in Japan and Germany, and also visited the punk-autonomous center “Black Hole” in Singapore. Taking the former Gudang Noisy into their own hands, they renamed it “Rumah Api” (Lighthouse or House of Uprising), which opened in September-December 2010. There were located such projects as Info-shop, a hall for concerts, film screenings and discussions and the kitchen of the “Food, Not Bombs” initiative. Most of the materials that were distributed by the group, were received from Indonesia. They were mostly in English and Indonesian, but also the anarchist editions of the US-based groups Crimethink and Slingshot, the Malayan fanzines. The library had also books and pamphlets in German, Chinese and French. Since in Malaysia at that time there were no anarchist publications, in the proper sense of the word, “Pustaka semesta” began the publication of its own magazine “Bidas” in the Malay language.

The work was supported by 5 Malay people living in the house; on weekends, up to 20 or more people gathered. A blog and a web page were organized. Posters on the street with information about the opening and operation of the Info-Shop activists were not hanging out, fearing reprisals. The activists preferred oral agitation. Among the visitors and interested were not only anarchists, but also many non-politicized punks, students and even members of the Socialist Party. The police did not leave the center without their attention.

One of the most important directions of the work of the collective was the student movement. Its activists tried to attract students to participate in the demonstrations on May 1, seeing in them the opportunity to take to the streets and to declare themselves openly. Already in April 2011, May Day leaflets of anarchist content were distributed, and in “Rumah Api” daily

## **The emergence of a workers’ and anarchist movement**

The British Malaya, which consisted of the Straits Settlement colony (Singapore, Penang, Malacca), the Federated and the Non-Federated Malay States under the British protectorate, at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, turned into one of the centers and a kind of foreign base of the Chinese revolutionary movement. Chinese immigrants began to appear on the Malay Peninsula in the first half of the XIX century, but at the end of the century their inflow increased sharply. The main area of their employment was tin mines, and then timber harvesting and other industries. The British authorities actively encouraged the import of labour from China and India. During the first decade of the twentieth century, only 150,000 to 200,000 immigrants from the Celestial Empire traveled to Singapore every year, and although many of them, after working for a while, returned home, a growing number of people remained in Malaya. In 1911, almost 917 thousand Chinese lived on the peninsula, which was more than 34% of the population. Of these, 225 thousand worked in difficult conditions at tin mines.<sup>1</sup> Chinese residents also prevailed in the cities: among them were workers, employees and other intellectuals, as well as the richest businessmen and traders. In cities such as Penang and Malacca, the Chinese were the overwhelming majority.

The Chinese of Nanyang (“South Seas”, as they called the region of Southeast Asia) were mostly from the southern provinces of Guangdong and Fujian. In Malaya, they were not under the authority of the imperial government in Beijing, and this allowed spreading oppositional and revolutionary sentiments among them.

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<sup>1</sup> V.A. Tyurin. *Istoriya Malaysii. Kratkiy ocherk*. Moskva, 1980. P. 93–95, 119.

In February 1906, Sun Yatsen, who came to Singapore for the third time, helped organize the first branch of his United League (UL) there. Then the branches of this organization appeared in other cities (Seremban, Kuala Lumpur, Penang, Malacca, Ipoh, etc.). The headquarters of the UL groups in Nanyang were located in Singapore until 1908, and in 1909–1911 in Penang, and Sun Yatsen visited the peninsula several times.<sup>2</sup> In 1912 – 1913, a new political party replaced the UL groups, the Kuomintang (KMT). Although the British authorities officially banned it in 1914, the organization continued to operate illegally. The KMT activists were engaged in raising funds to help Sun Yatsen and sending them to China. They organized and controlled Chinese schools and libraries, where political propaganda was also conducted.<sup>3</sup>

After the temporary defeat of the Chinese Revolution of 1911–1913, the center of the Chinese labour movement was transferred to Nanyang. In 1913 in Southeast Asia, the branches of the so-called “Workers ‘Party” (or Workers’ Union / “Gongdang”, or “Kung Tong”, in Cantonese) emerged.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> C.F. Yong, R.B. McKenna. *The Kuomintang Movement in British Malaya 1912–1949*. Singapore, 1990. P.11–13.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* P.237.

<sup>4</sup> Kung Tong originated originally in China in December 1911 on the wave of anti-monarchist uprising and combined many different tasks: defense of the interests of the working people, political association, self-defense and social-cooperative movement of mutual aid. The founders of Kung Tong were Xiu Jiwen, UL activist, and industrialist Zhu Zhiyao, who became her first chairman. The tasks of the “party”, according to its charter, were the unification of workers, regardless of professional and regional differences, the development of modern industry, the increasing of the technical knowledge of workers, the “reducing the suffering of workers”, the creation of “working guilds”, the promotion of political and military requirements and the adoption of labour legislation. The May Day manifesto of Kung Tong in 1913 contained a call for the organization of workers’ cooperatives. The branch of the organization in Hunan Province opened a working bank, and after a strike of masons, it organized a cooperative of employees of this specialty. In Shanghai, a metallurgical workshop was created. The “Workers’

Coloan, Johor), “Sadis” (Ampan, Selangor), “Revolted” (Kota Tinggi, Johor), “Solidarity” (Kuala Trengganu) etc.<sup>57</sup>

In the capital of Malaysia, the group “Food, not bombs” existed. In 2003 anarchists of Malaysia created an Internet forum for communication and establishing contacts. The Black Cross organization for helping political prisoners and the persecuted was formed.

In the 2000’s, the anarchist scene in the country became more differentiated, which was reflected in the difference in flags in actions and events: less politicized activists raised black and white banners, politicized radicals black and red, green anarchists green and black. The lack of anarchist literature in local languages and the high cost of books remained a big problem. Most anarchists in this period were young people from poor families, unemployed, etc.<sup>58</sup> The spread of anarchist ideas in Malaysia is also hampered by the existence of repressive legislation: public meetings can be held only with the permission of the police; The Press Act of 1984 hampers the publication of radical literature; authorities closely monitor websites, networks and communities on the Internet, they control mobile phone communications. The law on internal security of 1960 allows arrest of “dangerous” persons without trial. An important problem remains the influence of Islamic religion among the Malay population.<sup>59</sup>

Since 2005, the center of attraction for the punk scene in Kuala Lumpur has been the Gudang Noisy center in Ampang. However, in 2010, its participants decided to abandon the continuation of the project, and it moved to the group of anarchists who decided to organize an Info-shop “Pustaka semesta” (“Universal Library”). The initiators collaborated early with the radical team “Kudet” in Yogyakarta (Indonesia),

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<sup>57</sup> F. Mohd (DRSA’zine). *Obzor scen: Malaysiya // Evrobotylka*. Moskva, 2000. P.22–23.

<sup>58</sup> A. F. *Anarchism in South East Asia...*

<sup>59</sup> Interview with Malaysian anarchists – [www.wsm.ie](http://www.wsm.ie)

lapse of the Marxist-Leninist movement liberated space for the search for alternative radical ideas.

The first signs of the revival of anarchism in the region began to be noted only in the 1980s. So, in September 1984, a delegation from Malaysia took part in the international anarchist meeting “Venice 1984.”<sup>55</sup> A new wave of anarchist activists appeared in Malaysia and Singapore in the 1990s. As in other countries of Southeast Asia, its origins were youth, which was associated with the subculture of punks. Punk music experienced a rapid flowering in 1996–1998 in Kuala Lumpur, Singapore, Ipoh and Johor Bahru. Such musical groups as “Carburetor Dung” (founded in 1991 in Kuala Lumpur), “The Bollocks” and anarcho-skinhead group “ACAB” addressed in their texts to anarchism and the problems of the working class.<sup>56</sup> Also activist groups “Anarcho-punks Federation” and “Anti-racist action” existed for some time. There were some practical projects in those years, f.ex. fund for assistance to local residents, organized by anarcho-punks from the group “Liberated Aboriginal” in Selangor: it was engaged in the distribution of old clothes, fundraising on sales, and also arranged a free laundry. The “Kaulus” collective in Kuala Lumpur collected funds to help those in need: its members conducted charity concerts and distributed cassettes; all proceeds went exclusively to the poor. Various small fanzines were published: “Broken vision” (anarcho-punk, Johor), “D.R.S.A.” (Kuala Trengganu), “90’s choice” (feminist,

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<sup>55</sup> In(con)troductio // Black Rose. Boston, 1985. №11. Winter / Spring. P.4. ; Congressi e Convegni della Federazione Anarchica Italiana. A cura di Ugo Fedeli e Giorgio Sacchetti. Chieti: Centro Studi Libertari “Camillo Di Sciuolo”, 2003. P.425.

<sup>56</sup> A. F. Anarchism in South East Asia // A-Infos. A multi-lingual news service by, for, and about anarchists. 28.09.2015 – www.ainfos.ca

The “Workers’ Party” of Penang became the base and support for the organization of its branches in various cities of Nanyang. In fact, they worked in almost every port in the region: in Malaya, in the Netherlands India and the Philippines. Although the Kung Tong in Malaya was closely associated with the KMT, the Chinese anarchists played a leading role in it.<sup>5</sup> The group “Pingmin” (“The Ordinary People”) created by them published the eponymous newspaper in Penang in 1913, which became the printing organ of the “Workers’ Party.”

The first anarchists on the peninsula actively worked in contact with the revolutionary and enlightenment organizations associated with the KMT.

Anarchist agitation among the Chinese of Nanyang was launched by organizations from China, created by Liu Shifu:<sup>6</sup>

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Party” supported or even organized strikes of Shanghai foundry workers (July 1912), and of manufacturers of soybean paste. The Kung Tong leaders tried to create a hospital for workers and an employment office. In 1913, they expressed their solidarity with the striking workers in the arsenal in Hanyang and sent a delegation to the Chinese parliament, demanding the establishment of a free weekend, guaranteed minimum wage and insurance for workers. The Kung Tong consisted of more than 70 local branches in China, mainly from the Yangtze Valley region. The most active groups were in Hunan, Guangzhou and Tangshan ... The formal number of members, as announced at the congress in November 1912 in Nanjing, reached 400,000, although this figure is considered highly exaggerated. When in May 1913, in the south of China, with the support of the KMT, an uprising broke out against the dictatorship of President Yuan Shikai, members of the “Workers’ Party” took an active part in it. Xu Jiwen, together with a group of workers tried to seize the arsenal of weapons in Jiangnan, but was seized and executed. After that, the Kung Tong was banned in China, and only in Tangshan for a few years there was preserved a department created by immigrants from Guangzhou, which dealt with issues of mutual aid and education. However, the “party” sections in Nanyang not only did not cease to exist, but also expanded their activities. See J. Chesneaux. Le mouvement ouvrier chinois de 1919 à 1927. Paris; La Haye, 1962. P.202–203.

<sup>5</sup> Ou Xi. Nanyang wuzhenfu zhui yundung zhi gaikuang // raforum.info

<sup>6</sup> In addition to Liu Shifu himself, three of his brothers played an active role in spreading anarcho-communism in China and the “Southern Seas.”

“Heart Society”<sup>7</sup> and the Society of Anarcho-Communist Comrades (formed in Shanghai in 1914). Already in 1914–1916, the island of Penang and Singapore served as points for the transportation and dissemination of propaganda for anarchism. An active work in Malaya was led by many prominent anarchists from China. A friend of Shifu, Liang Bingxian began in 1914 in Singapore edition of the journal “Zhen Sheng” (“Voice of Truth” or “Voice of Justice”), but soon moved the publication to Rangoon. In the autumn of 1915, he returned to Singapore with Liu Shixin, a younger brother of Shifu. Both of them worked in the Chinese school “Yangzheng Xuexiao” and led anarchist agitation there. Liang advocated the ideas of the radical trade union IWW (Industrial workers of the world), in 1917, he published in Singapore the journal “Shijie fengyun” (“World Revolutionary Movement”) and the brochure “Shijiegonghui” (Industrial workers of the world). Both enjoyed considerable respect among local Chinese, but at the beginning of 1918 they returned to Shanghai.<sup>8</sup>

In the meantime, after the coup in South China and the formation there in 1917 of a government headed by Sun Yatsen, the Nanyang “Workers’ Party” resumed its activities in

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One of them taught at the Normal College in Guangzhou; another (Liu Shixin) in 1918–1919 published a Chinese newspaper in Medan in Sumatra, until he was expelled by the authorities of the Netherlands India; the third (Liu Kafei) published a newspaper in Manila in the Philippines, and then moved to Malaya. See: C.F. Yong. *The origins of Malayan Communism*. Singapore, 1997. P.43.

<sup>7</sup> The “Heart Society” (Xinshe) was established in Guangzhou in July 1912 and had branches in Southeast Asia, primarily in Manila and Singapore, known as the “Society of Truth.” It proclaimed the task of replacing the “false ethics and malicious system of modern society” with “a new ethic stemming from the minds of people.” The British authorities in Malaya mistakenly translated the name of the organization according to consonance as “New Society.” See: C.F. Yong. *The origins of Malayan Communism...* P.43.

<sup>8</sup> E.S. Krebs. *Shifu, Soul of Chinese Anarchism*. Boston, 1998. P.153; D.S.S. Cairns. *Anarchist Publications of the May Fourth Era* // [anarchiststudies.mayfirst.org](http://anarchiststudies.mayfirst.org)

as 1926–27 was felt in the branch of the Hong Kong Union of Mechanics.<sup>51</sup>

The place of the extreme left was taken up by the Leninists. The emissaries of the Chinese Communist Party tried to launch agitation in Malaya back in 1921–1923.<sup>52</sup> Bolshevik ideas were spread in the country through communists from China and the Netherlands India from 1924–1925, and from 1926 through the members of the Communist Party of Indonesia, who took refuge in Malaya after suppressing the uprisings in Java and Sumatra. Having joined the local KMT, the Communists formed a Revolutionary Committee headed by them.<sup>53</sup> After the KMT split in 1927, supporters of Bolshevism created the “Workers ‘and Peasants’ Movement,” and in 1930, the Communist Party of Malaya.<sup>54</sup> The presence of anarchists came to naught, although Singapore remained one of the centers of ties between Chinese anarchists until the 1960s.

## In modern Malaysia and Singapore

For many decades in Malaysia (gained independence as Malaya in 1957) and Singapore (independent since 1965) there was no anarchist movement. The left movement was firmly associated with the banned communist party and associated groups. The activities of the Communists were subjected to repression, and the Communist Party of Malaya itself, which was engaged in a bitter guerrilla war, brutally suppressed dissent in its own ranks, until in the 1970s did not break up into factions that begun the armed struggle among themselves. Only the col-

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<sup>51</sup> About syndicalists on the Union of Mechanics s.: E. Yu. Staburova. *Anarhizm i rabochee dvizhenie v Kitae v nachale XX veka* // Kitay: gosudarstvo i obshchestvo. Moskva, 1977. P.213.

<sup>52</sup> C.F. Yong. *Origins and Development...* P.630 ff.

<sup>53</sup> Cheah Boon Kheng. *From PKI to the Comintern, 1924–1941: The Apprenticeship of the Malayan Communist Party*. Ithaca, 1992. P.8–10.

<sup>54</sup> V.A. Tyurin. *Op.cit.* P.152–154.



Governor of Straits Settlements and High Commissioner of the Federated Malay States, on Penang during his inspection trip, but their plan fell. Then the authorities of the Federated Malay States were chosen as the target of the attack.

On January 23, 1925, in morning, 26-year-old anarchist Wong Sau Ying (Wong Sung / Huang Suying) attempted to kill the British official for the Chinese affairs in Selangor (protector of the Chinese), Daniel Richards. A short-haired woman in a white jacket, black skirt, in white shoes and socks, entered the Chinese protectorate building in Kuala Lumpur, holding a small brown attaché in her hand. Seeing Richards and his collaborator W.L. Blythe who sat at the table, she put the attaché on the table and turned to Richards, who was talking on the phone. Then she opened the briefcase's lock and pushed him to Richards. There was an explosion. Richards, Blythe and woman were injured. Wong Sau Ying was seized and sentenced to 10 years in prison. Later she hung herself in Pudu prison.<sup>50</sup>

After this incident, repression against the left in Malaya intensified. In July 1925, the British government instructed the Governor of the Straits Settlements to take "the necessary measures to suppress" the Malayan branches of the KMT; this decision was also extended to anarchists. Many of them were arrested, the most active were deported from Malaya. From these blows the anarchist movement no longer recovered and soon disappeared, although the syndicalist influence as early

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<sup>50</sup> Ou Xi. Op. cit.; Bomb Mystery: Protector of Chinese Seriously Injured // The Straits Times. Singapore, 26.01.1925. P.9; The Bomb Outrage: Satisfactory Progress of The Injured // The Straits Times. Singapore, 27.01.1925. P.10; Bomb Outrage: The Outcome of Anarchistic Ideas // The Straits Times. Singapore, 28.01.1925. P.10; Bomb Outrage: Bobbed Hair Woman Charged With Attempted Murder // The Straits Times. Singapore, 30.01.1925. P.10; D. Khoo Kay Kim, R. Singh Malhl Op.cit.; C.F. Yong. The origins of Malayan Communism... P.32.

Guangzhou and served as the basis for the revival of the labor and trade union movement in this city and the entire province of Guangdong. With its assistance, the "Industrial Federation of Overseas Chinese" was formed, which became the basis of the "Universal Labor Union" of Guangzhou.<sup>9</sup>

Kung Tong in Malaya became, in fact, the center around which more traditional guilds were grouped, as well as new trade unions created by anarchists. At the same time, the organization was not anarchist. The Chinese anarchist communist Liu Shifu criticized it for the fact that one of her program points called for "striving for the political power of the workers."<sup>10</sup>

By the end of the 1910s, according to greatly exaggerated estimates by the British authorities, Kung Tong included up to 200,000 members in the Straits Settlement and the Federated Malay States, and the organization cooperated closely with the KMT.<sup>11</sup> According to British intelligence, the anarchist work in the Kung Tong was conducted through the Pingmin society, which acted "in the closest contact with and most probably under the control of Chinese Anarchist Societies", and searches in Malaya showed close ties between local Chinese anarchists and mother societies in China.<sup>12</sup> It was alleged that the "Workers' Party" (based in Guangzhou) exercises control over Chinese workers, especially in the ports from Shanghai to Singapore, and, as the strikes show, can paralyze the whole economic life

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<sup>9</sup> Report on the Canton Trade Union Movement // Russian State Archives for Social and Political History (RGASPI). 534/7/342. P.110; J. Chesneaux. Op.cit. P.202, 225.

<sup>10</sup> E. Yu. Staburova. Anarhizm v Kitae 1900–1921. Moskva, 1983. P.99.

<sup>11</sup> C.F. Yong, R.B. McKenna. Op.cit. P.238; Yeo Kim Wah. Political Development in Singapore 1945–1955. Singapore, 1973. P.203.

<sup>12</sup> British documents on foreign affairs: reports and papers from the Foreign Office confidential print. Part II, From the First to the Second World War. Series E, Asia, 1914–1939. Ed.by Ann Trotter. Vol.26. October 1921 – February 1922. Bethesda, 1994. P.72.

of the region between Vladivostok and Singapore if desired.<sup>13</sup> In Singapore, these revolutionary workers' unions organized the first major strikes. Numerous strikes and demonstrations took place in the port and at enterprises under the slogans: "Down with the capitalists, the owners of factories and plants!", "Down with British imperialism!"<sup>14</sup> Although in 1919 the activity of the Kung Tong in Malaya was banned, and its organizations merged with the KMT, the underground work of trade unions in the country continued.

As is evident from the report on the employment of labour for the construction of a naval base in Singapore (this work begun in 1923), the anarchist groups amalgamated with the "Workers' Party" and interacted with the KMT. As the strikes demonstrated, the orders of Kung Tong and KMT were followed by "all classes of Chinese workmen in Hong Kong, Singapore, Amoy, and other ports."<sup>15</sup> In Malaya, anarchist publications from Guangzhou were distributed.

## Anarchist Agitation

During the First World War, a group of Chinese anarchists came to British Malaya to establish the foundations of a radical revolutionary movement. Among them were Cheung Hong-sen (Zhang Hongchen) from Fujian Province, who soon moved to Sumatra, Hu Tu-tsu (Hu Duchu), Fan Chang-pu (Fan Zhangfu) from Guangzhou who were close to Shifu group in China. In 1919, Hu, Fan, Goh Tun-ban (Wu Dongmin) and a number of activists from the Federated Malay States (all originated from Guangzhou) organized the "Society of Truth"

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<sup>13</sup> Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919–1939. First Series. Vol.XIV. Far Eastern Affairs 1920–22. London, 1966. P.415.

<sup>14</sup> G. Chufirin. Singapur. Moskva, 1970. P.19.

<sup>15</sup> Khoo Kay Kim. A Brief History of Chinese Labour Unrest Before 1941 // Malaysia in History. Journal of Malaysian Historical Society. Kuala Lumpur, 1982. Vol.25. P.60.

On February 6 and 7, 1924, 13 delegates from Ipoh, Kuala Lumpur, Singapore, Penang Island and from Songkhla (Siam / Thailand), gathered at the meeting of the Anarchist Federation of the Peninsula, which took place in Penang. The issues of creating a solid organization, opening working schools and expanding agitation work were discussed.<sup>45</sup> It was decided that teachers should be more active in agitation among students in schools, and workers among colleagues at work. It was also planned to expand street agitation.<sup>46</sup> However, the headquarters of the anarchist federation in Guangzhou did not approve some decisions of the meeting as the creation of separate sections on finance, propaganda and vigilance, the propaganda among all sections of the population and the organization of local anarchist groups.<sup>47</sup>

After the end of the congress, some participants were arrested by agents of the British authorities. Having managed to leave, Ai Zhen sheltered in Singapore, but after the order for his arrest was issued, he had to leave Malaya and flee to Bangkok.<sup>48</sup>

In the same year, the anarchists published a brochure, "Kwong Ming" ("Light"), which was printed in the in the printing house of "Yik Khwan Po" and distributed among members of labour unions, guilds and school students, as well as members of other organizations throughout Malaya.<sup>49</sup>

The the colonial authorities were seriously worried by the growth of the anarchist movement and its influence. The pretext for its crushing was the assassination attempt, organized by anarchists in Malaya in 1925.

On January 3, 1925, in response to the repression, two anarchists were about to assassinate Laurence Guillemard,

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<sup>45</sup> Ou Xi. Op.cit.

<sup>46</sup> Khoo Kai Kim. Sedikit informasi...

<sup>47</sup> C.F. Yong. The origins of Malayan Communism... P.32–33.

<sup>48</sup> Ou Xi. Op.cit.

<sup>49</sup> C.F. Yong. The origins of Malayan Communism... P.30.

In 1922, new libertarian publications were distributed in the country: “Khung Sai Yam” (“Hungshiyuan” / “Saving of the World”) and “Khun Chan Tong” (“Gongchandang” / “Communist Party”), as well as P. Kropotkin’s book “Anarchist Ethics.”<sup>40</sup>

In 1923, a representative of the Chinese anarchist federation, Ai Zhen, came to South East Asia from Guangzhou to establish contacts with his comrades in Malaya and to regularize organizational and publishing work. He went to work at the Zhonglin High School on Penang Island and simultaneously tackled the issues of working education. A night school was opened in Penang, as well as in Singapore. Ai Zhen helped organize the branch of Anarchist federation. Soon, however, the authorities began to monitor the activities of this anarchist activist, sent spies to him, and in December of that year deprived him of the right to teach.<sup>41</sup>

In 1924, the anarchist movement in Malaya became noticeably more active. New activists came out: Lai Wan; Ng Chi San (employee of a jewelry store); Tham Cheuk Ming and Fu Hon Wah (collaborators of “Yik Khwan Po”) and Ho Taan – in Kuala Lumpur; Chu Keung (Zhu Jiang; shoemaker) in Ampang; Wong Kheung Ah in Ipoh; Fu Mong Sang and Thai Sui in Penang; Fu Wahi Shang in Seremban; and Leong Yat Yu in Singapore.<sup>42</sup> At the same time, the core of the movement remained small: according to the British report of 1925, there were about 50 activists in the Anarchist Federation.<sup>43</sup> However, it enjoyed wide influence among the Chinese of Malaya, especially among school teachers and printers<sup>44</sup>, especially in the urban areas of the Strait Settlement colony and in the more developed Malay states.

<sup>40</sup> D. Khoo Kay Kim, R. Singh Malhl. Op.cit.

<sup>41</sup> Ou Xi. Op.cit.

<sup>42</sup> Khoo Kai Kim. Sedikit informasi...

<sup>43</sup> C.F. Yong. Origins and Development... P.630.

<sup>44</sup> D. Khoo Kay Kim, R. Singh Malhl. Op.cit.

(Zhen She) in Singapore.<sup>16</sup> It operated as a branch of the “Heart Society” based in South China’s Guangdong Province.

The chairman of the Singapore “Zhen She” was Hu Tu-tsu, and Fan Chang-pu was in charge of propaganda work. “The Society of Truth of the Southern Seas” actively disseminated anarchist literature. One of the tasks in 1919 was the organization of a subscription to the printing of anarchist books in Manila, which was dealt with by the publisher of “Pingmin”, the anarcho-communist Wa Lam (Hua Lin).<sup>17</sup> In addition, Hu Tu-tsu produced materials in the Malay language.<sup>18</sup> In total, according to available information, more than 10,000 copies of pamphlets on anarchism were published.<sup>19</sup>

A significant impetus to the upsurge of the movement was given by the events of May 4, 1919 in China, the mass protests that began with manifestations against the decisions of the Paris Peace Conference on the transfer to Japan of former German possessions in Shandong and developed into a general social upsurge... This enthusiastic movement”, said one of the leading anarchist activists in Malaya, “had a great effect upon the whole nation, and later on the South Seas (Nanyang). Many propertyless men in the South Seas long sunk in slumber were awakened. And for the first time they began to know that there has existed such a thing as Labour Day”.<sup>20</sup>

The protest movement, which was influenced by the events in China, swept the Streets Settlement colony in May-June 1919, accompanied by anti-Japanese demonstrations, riots and a boycott of Japanese goods. The British police took the

<sup>16</sup> C.F. Yong. The origins of Malayan Communism. P.17–18.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. P.18.

<sup>18</sup> Ou Xi. Op.cit.

<sup>19</sup> Anarho-kommunisticheskaya federaziya Kitaya. Kitayskie anarhisty i internatsional’nyi anarhicheskiy kongress // Anarhicheskiy vestnik. 1923. №5–6. November – December. P.76.

<sup>20</sup> Quot. in: D. Khoo Kay Kim, R. Singh Malhl. Chinese Anarchists Started Trade Unions // The Sunday Star. Kuala Lumpur, 12.09.1993.

Japanese merchants under protection. Most of the protesters were workers and students. In Singapore, as a result of the unrest, 3 people were killed and 8 were injured. The organizers of the disturbances were the Patriotic League and the anarchist "Society of Truth."<sup>21</sup>

The British authorities accused Hu and Fan of political crimes: organizing anti-Japanese boycott and strikes of Chinese workers on Japanese-owned machine-building enterprises in Singapore. The defendants claimed that they had used the right to resist "oppressive authorities" ("jianquan"). In November 1919, for the conduct of anarchist agitation, they were sent for life from Malaya, after which the Singaporean "Society of Truth" soon ceased to exist.<sup>22</sup>

Goh Tun-ban, who came to Kuala Lumpur in December 1917 or early 1918, rallied around him a circle of young intellectuals who shared the ideas of social justice and anti-authoritarianism. He also established contacts with the local KMT circles and, having received financial assistance from Chinese merchants, began in March 1919 to launch the publication of the newspaper "Yik Khwan Po" ("Yi Qunbao" / "For the Benefit of the People"). After taking up the post of editor, Goh published editorial articles in the newspaper

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<sup>21</sup> Khoo Kai Kim. Sedikit informasi tentang sejarah dari para revolusioner di tanah Melayu // [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com); Huei-Ying Kuo. Transnational business networks and sub-ethnic nationalism. Chinese business and nationalist activities in interwar Hong Kong and Singapore, 1919–1941. Ann Arbor, 2007. P.92–93.

<sup>22</sup> Yong C.F. Origins and Development of the Malayan Communist Movement, 1919 – 1930 // *Modern Asian Studies*. Cambridge, 1991. Vol.25. No.4. October. P.626–627; Sze-Chieh Ng. Silenced Revolutionaries: Challenging the Received View of Malaya's Revolutionary Past. A Thesis Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Master of Arts. Tempe: Arizona State University, 2011. P.12.

In an editorial article by Liu Kefei "The Intelligentsia and Revolution" (November 30, 1920), an attempt was made to examine the course of the class struggle on a world scale. In developed countries, the Chinese revolutionary wrote, the struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie is unfolding, and in the backward countries the task of the moment is the victory in the conflict between the masses, on the one hand, and the military dictators and government bureaucracies, on the other.<sup>36</sup>

Liu Kefei edited the newspaper until March (?) of 1921, after which time the anarchist agitation ceased for almost a year, but then resumed.<sup>37</sup>

In 1921, for the first time in the history of Malaya, the anarchists celebrated with great enthusiasm yje May Day, illegally. In a large meeting held in Ipoh, workers and students took part. The following year, they intended to repeat the success and disseminate tens of thousands of May Day leaflets and appeals, but none of the printer houses risked printing their propaganda materials. Nevertheless, on May 1, 1923 anarchists managed to publish special issues of papers "Tai Yeung" ("Sun"), published by the publishing house of "Yik Khwan Po" in Kuala Lumpur by the printer Luk Ngai Man from Penang, and "Yan Kheun" ("People's Masses"), which was released in Gopeng (near Ipoh) by Tsan Chan Tat (Xu Zhou).<sup>38</sup>

According to a Chinese anarchist source of 1927, Xu Zhou came to Malaya in 1922 and immediately engaged in establishing contacts around the country. He published "Tai Yeung" and "Yan Kheun", and then organized the work of the Anarchist Federation.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Idem. Origins and Development... P.629.

<sup>37</sup> Idem. The origins of Malayan Communism... P.43.

<sup>38</sup> D. Khoo Kay Kim, R. Singh Malhl, Op.cit.; Khoo Kai Kim. Op.cit.; D.S.S. Cairns. Op.cit.

<sup>39</sup> Ou Xi. Op.cit.

## The rise and destruction of the anarchist movement

The “Yik Khwan Po” remained press organ, through which the anarchist agitation continued. For some time the paper was headed by the socialist Pan Sichun (Fan Siqun), who analyzed the relationship between wage workers and capitalists from a class point of view, denounced the selfishness of entrepreneurs and the exploitation of hired labor, but advocated compromise and harmony between classes. In May 1920, the editor-in-chief became Liu Kefei (Lau Hak Fei), Shifu’s brother, who moved to Kuala Lumpur from Manila. He opened a new rubric in this publication, the “Free Speech”, announcing (in the issue of May 14, 1920) its task to spread a new culture, new theory, and new thinking, popularizing scientific discoveries and achievements. The column was used to analyze current events and such topics as freedom of speech, working education, world politics, Bolshevism in Russia, proletarianism, socialism and other social theories, the development of culture and the ethics of freedom, equality, fraternity, social transformations. Liu Kefei exposed the evil of the existing system and propagated anarchist communism.

In the editorial “Masses and Education” (June 5, 1920 ), the editor-in-chief openly agitated for the achievement of a free “people’s” society based on the principles of “absolute equality” and of “absolute freedom.”<sup>35</sup> The newspaper praised the revolution in Russia, which, in the opinion of its author Bei Hua, sought to reform society through overthrowing of various oppressors by the masses (article “Revolutionary Spirit” in the issue of July 5, 1920.) On December 18, 1920, “Yik Khwan Po” published an article on Russian Bolshevism.

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<sup>35</sup> C.F. Yong. *Origins and Development...* P.628–629; *Idem. Chinese Leadership and Power...* P.207.

outlining anarcho-communist views, as well as materials about anarchism, Bolshevism, etc. written by other authors.<sup>23</sup>

“Yik Khwan Po” played a prominent role in the propaganda of the May 4 movement and the anti-Japanese boycott. Goh urged students to rebel and “save China.”<sup>24</sup> In the newspaper’s numbers for 16, 18, 19, 21, 23 and 24 July 1919 he published a series of editorial articles entitled “National self-defense”, “National self-determination” and “National self-government.” Characterizing the boycott of Japanese goods and the struggle to overthrow the militarist regime in Beijing as “self-defense” and “self-determination,” Goh advocated the establishment in China, following the example of the Russian revolution, of a system of Soviets, which he understood as “self-government”, the rule of the people and through the people, which corresponded to the “ideal of anarcho-communism.”<sup>25</sup>

Along with the agitation against Japanese imperialism and the reactionary regime in Beijing, Goh openly advocated the creation of a new society based on freedom and equality. On April 14, 1919, he published in “Yik Khwan Po” an article directed against the existing class society, emphasizing that the only way to a new, just system is through the elimination of the class system through a social revolution committed by the common people. But in order for the masses to do it, the author claimed, education and enlightenment are necessary, and here the intelligentsia is called upon to play an important role.<sup>26</sup> Goh openly called himself an anarchist, called for “humanism” and the destruction of “oppressive power.” Anarcho-communism, he declared in an article published in

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<sup>23</sup> Sze-Chieh Ng. *Op.cit.* P.13; Yong C.F. *Origins and Development...* P.627.

<sup>24</sup> Sze-Chieh Ng. *Op.cit.* P.14.

<sup>25</sup> Yong C.F. *Origins and Development...* P.627.

<sup>26</sup> Sze-Chieh Ng. *Op.cit.* P.14.

his newspaper on September 9, 1919, is the most sacred of the “isms”, and it will serve the good of mankind.<sup>27</sup>

In addition, Goh published articles on anarchism in the organ of the “Workers’ Party” of Semarang (Netherlands India), “Zhen Libao.” In June 1919, he was twice summoned in this connection to the British colonial organ for Chinese affairs, the “Chinese protectorate” in Kuala Lumpur, and subjected to exhausting interrogation.<sup>28</sup>

July 29, 1919 authorities in Kuala Lumpur arrested Goh and five other figures of the Chinese community (including the leader of the Confucian school, Song Muk-lin and 4 merchants). They were tried in September and in November 1919 they were deported to China.<sup>29</sup> It is interesting that in a press statement written by Goh before the expulsion and published in “Yik Khwan Po” on November 29, 1919, a certain contradiction and naivety of his views were reflected. So, urging compatriots to show perspicacity and accept new thinking, he suggested that the workers and entrepreneurs of China should unite in the struggle to buy only Chinese goods, open schools, open factories and build ships, reform society, get rid of “oppressive power” and establish “self-government.”<sup>30</sup>

The repression and expulsion of leading activists temporarily beheaded the anarchist movement in Malaya, but did not crush it. As stated in the report of Secretary for Chinese Affairs of the Federated Malay States Aubrey Goodman (January 26, 1925), in the country since 1919 there was an Anarchist Federation.<sup>31</sup> This association was also known as the “Anarchist Party” (Mo Cheng Fu Tong / Wuzhengfudang”) and was

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<sup>27</sup> Yong C.F. *Origins and Development...* P.628.

<sup>28</sup> Idem. *The origins of Malayan Communism.* P.23–27.

<sup>29</sup> Idem. *The origins of Malayan Communism.* P.26; Idem. *Chinese Leadership and Power in Colonial Singapore.* Singapore, 1992. P.206.

<sup>30</sup> Idem. *Origins and Development...* P.628.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. P.629.

a branch of the Society of Anarcho-Communist Comrades, created by Liu Shifu in 1914 in Shanghai. Its program stated:

“Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, Community of Goods, Cooperation; each does what he can and takes what he needs: no government, laws or military forces, no landlords, capitalists or leisured class. No money, religion, police, prison or leaders, No representatives, heads of families, no person uneducated or not working: no rules of marriages, no degrees of high or low, rich or poor, and the method to be adopted is given by organization of comrades by means of communication centres, by propaganda in pamphlets, speeches and education, by passive resistance to those in power.

Do not pay taxes, cease work, cease trade; by the method of direct action, assassinate and spread disorder. Anarchy is the great revolution”<sup>32</sup>

In 1920, anarchist groups operated already in Singapore, on Penang Island, in Ipoh, Kuala Lumpur and Seremban. Leading anarchist activists in the country during this period were Liu Kafei (in Cantonese Lau Hak Fei) – Shifu’s brother; Moh Kim Fung, teacher of the Lahat school in the principality of Perak, and Li Hui Chau, a teacher at the Pudu school, near Kuala Lumpur.<sup>33</sup> An important role in revolutionary propaganda in Malaya was played by the Chinese schools, and, as noted by the British colonial authorities, the ties between the KMT and the anarchists in this sphere were realized, in particular, through the so-called “Shiyan Tun” (“dozens”).<sup>34</sup> In an attempt to undermine the influence of radical elements, the administration introduced in 1920 a law on compulsory registration of schools.

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<sup>32</sup> D. Khoo Kay Kim, R. Singh Malhl. *Op.cit.*

<sup>33</sup> Khoo Kai Kim. *Sedikit informasi...*

<sup>34</sup> C.F. Yong, R.B. McKenna. *Op.cit.*