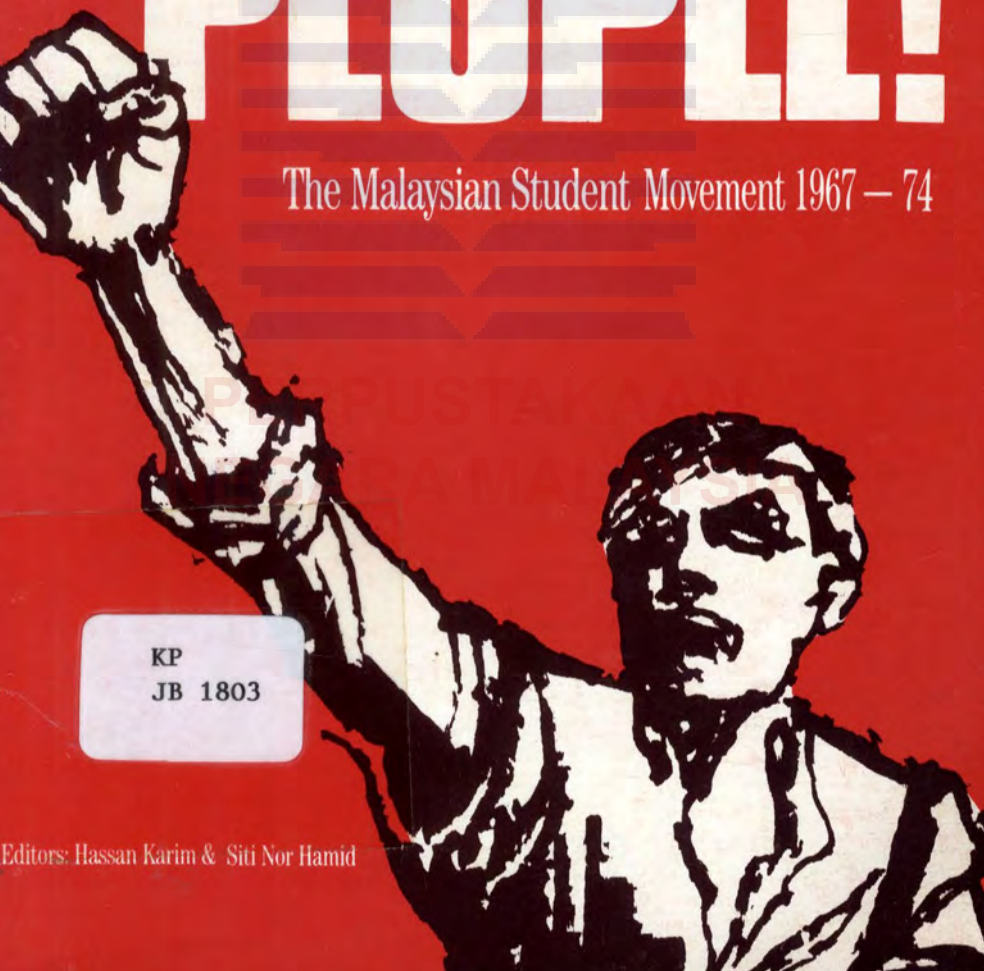


WITH THE PEOPLE!

The Malaysian Student Movement 1967 — 74

KP
JB 1803

Editors: Hassan Karim & Siti Nor Hamid



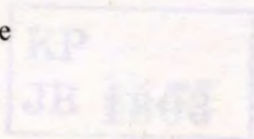
CONTENTS

The Student Movement in Malaysia, 1967-74	1
<i>Hassan Karim</i>	
Tasek Utara 1974! Student-Squatter Solidarity	27
Baling 1974! Malaysia's Emerging Rural Revolution	49
<i>Denzil Peiris</i>	

**PERPUSTAKAAN
NEGARA MALAYSIA**

PHOTOGRAPHS

UM students listening to Sharifah Mahani	19
Land Occupation	20
Land Occupation	21
Student leader addressing the crowds, 1974	22
'The people suffer, the rulers forget their obligations'	23
Protesting students	24
Students arrested	25
After the demonstrations	26
Tasek Utara demonstration, 1974	45
Squatters' camp. Tasek Utara, 1974	46
Tasek Utara squatters camp outside the court, 1974	47
Hishamuddin Rais, secretary-general of UMSU addressing a crowd of students and squatters.	48
Peasants march to Baling, 1974	57
Peasants march to Baling, 1974.	58
Baling, 1974.	59
FRU versus the people	60



817681

18 SEP 1995

THE STUDENT MOVEMENT IN MALAYSIA, 1967-74

Hassan Karim

The student movement in Malaysia has its origins before the second World War. In the early 1930s, teacher trainees from the Sultan Idris Training College established the KMM or Kesatuan Melayu Muda (Young Malay Union), which opposed British colonialism and desired independence.

In the fifties, students at the University of Malaya (established in 1949), then located in Singapore, enjoyed close relations with the anti-colonial movement, including nationalist journalists and unionists. Thus, university students were actively involved in the struggle for independence.

The development of the student movement at the University of Malaya in Singapore continued until the university moved to its Kuala Lumpur (K.L.) campus from 1959. In the early K.L. years, the character of student activities was different. Students focussed instead on campus issues, especially in connection with student welfare matters.

The emergence of the social and political dimensions of the student movement began around 1967. Various events during that year distinguish it as a year of transition in the history of the student movement.

From 1967, the student movement gradually advanced once again. In the following years, as it became more vocal, it became a force to be reckoned with in the political upheavals of the country.

Several more universities were set up from 1969, a development which helped to strengthen and increase the influence of the student movement. The universities formed were Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) and Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (UPM).

The increase in the number of universities meant an increase in the number of university students. At the same time, more and

more students from poor and rural backgrounds obtained places in universities.

These students were to play an important role in the student struggles in the years to come.

1967 : The Year of Transition

1967 is regarded as the transition year for the student movement as students began to raise vital issues relating to the lives of the people. In the historic Teluk Gong landless squatter struggle, both the University of Malaya Students Union (UMSU) and the University of Malaya Malay Language Society (PBMUM) were directly involved.

In 1967 also, a symposium on problems faced by rural communities was held at the University of Malaya. The fact that this symposium was sponsored by the PBMUM is significant, as prior to this, the PBMUM had mainly confined itself to issues of Malay culture and language.

In addition to this, 1967 saw the founding of the Socialist Club of the University of Malaya, the only political club in the University. Its founding represented a new era for the student movement, and its influence on the Malaysian student movement was not insignificant.

In 1967, the student movement was still concentrated in the University of Malaya, though teacher-training colleges had their own student organizations. This can be explained by the fact that conditions in the University of Malaya differed from the conditions in these colleges.

Various student bodies were to be found in the University of Malaya. The largest of these was UMSU, which represented all students of the University of Malaya. By virtue of this, it had members from all racial groups. Other important student bodies included the PBMUM, the Chinese Language Society (CLS), The Tamil Language Society (TLS) and the University of Malaya Islamic Students Society (PMIUM) all of which were affiliated to UMSU. Only the Socialist Club maintained autonomy.

In 1967 too, several student bodies were led by progressive individuals like Syed Hamid Ali, who became the Secretary General of UMSU, and Sanusi Osman, who became President of the PBMUM. Both were also members of the Socialist Club.

The Teluk Gong Struggle

The Teluk Gong struggle began as a struggle by poor landless peasants to obtain land. In 1967, the peasants, led by Hamid Tuah, cleared some forest land in the Teluk Gong region of Selangor where they tilled the land and built houses. Not long afterwards, the government destroyed the crops and demolished the houses of the peasants. Hamid Tuah and his followers were arrested.

The cruelty inflicted by the government upon the poor peasants of Teluk Gong was angrily denounced by the students of the University of Malaya. Both UMSU and the PBMUM came out in open support of the unfortunate peasants. Several lecturers followed suit and also supported the struggle of Hamid Tuah and the peasants.

The involvement of students in the Teluk Gong incident was an important event in their struggle to uplift the poor, though their awareness of the life of the poor had previously been expressed in the form of seminars and symposiums. The Teluk Gong incident enabled them to come forward to declare their stand.

The Teluk Gong events clearly and dramatically highlighted the problem of rural poverty. Poverty, which had its roots in landlessness or land hunger captured the attention of students, and became an important issue in the student struggle in the years to come.

1968 : National & International Issues.

An important national issue raised in 1968 was the National Education Policy; the PBMUM held a symposium on this subject. For the PBMUM and many Malay students, the struggle for the sovereignty of the Malay language and the National Education Policy were important dimensions of their struggle. In 1968, while the PBMUM was involved in the above causes, UMSU the National Union of Malaysian Students (PKPM) and the Socialist Club to raise such issues.

The invasion of Czechoslovakia by the Soviet Union in 1968 was met with widespread international opposition. The students of the University of Malaya joined the protest and staged a demonstration outside the Soviet Embassy in Kuala Lumpur. Being

the first demonstration by the students outside the campus, this was a historic event. For the first time too, students were confronted with police brutality and tear gas.

Undeniably, events outside the country contributed to increasing political awareness amongst students. The revolt of French students against De Gaulle in 1968, for example, had a big impact on students all over the world.

So it was to be that in the years that followed, international issues were raised by students from time to time. In 1971, the oppression of Muslims in Pattani was championed as was the Palestinian issue in 1973.

1969: A Year of Upheaval

Student became increasingly involved in national politics from 1969. In the months of April and May, before the May General Elections, PMUM held several public rallies throughout the country. As many as 13 rallies were held, with a total attendance of 100,000 people. Over 100,000 PMUM manifestoes were distributed at these rallies.

The contents of the PMUM manifesto for 1969 are important as they represent the issues that students were then championing. Democracy was an important element in the manifesto as students wanted the people to be more involved in the decision-making processes and for national politics to be truly based on democracy. They demanded that freedom and justice be guaranteed, an improvement of the economic status of the people, land reform and a truly national education policy. Students also demanded the unconditional release of all political detainees and called for the withdrawal of foreign military bases on Malaysian soil.

The demands of the 1969 PMUM manifesto clearly reflect the progressive character of the student movement then, which had also become a political force to be reckoned with. The government was unhappy over the good response the rallies received in several big towns, and disallowed students from holding rallies in towns, particularly on the East Coast.

The rallies organised by UMSU were an important development in the history of the student struggle. It involved a direct involvement by students in the political process in Malaysia. Students raised the issues of democracy and social justice, and

denounced political parties that capitalized on racial issues. Students who were socialists formed the backbone of these UMSU rallies.

After May 13 : The Campaign to Topple the Tunku

The period after May 13th was one of great challenges. In the aftermath of May 13th a campaign to replace Tunku Abdul Rahman, the Malaysian Prime Minister erupted. In this heated campaign, students particularly Malay students urged the Tunku to step down. The students were forthright and brave in their demands. A series of demonstrations were held within the campus as part of this campaign. UMSU, led by Syed Hamid Ali, and the PBMUM, led by Anwar Ibrahim, played important roles in this campaign against the Tunku. The efforts of the students were not in vain, and finally the Tunku was forced to relinquish his Prime Ministership.

Historically, the fall of the Tunku was connected in no small way, with the opposition of students to his continued leadership.

In fact Syed Hamid Ali and Anwar Ibrahim had different reasons for wanting to see the last of the Tunku. Anwar Ibrahim's opposition was mainly based on the Tunku's and not on the weaknesses of the system of government led by the Tunku. He felt that the Tunku had conceded too much to the Chinese Community and had not endeavoured enough to overcome the problem of the Malay Community. He saw the Tunku as failing to advance the status of Bahasa Malaysia sufficiently and the implementation of the National Education Policy. Anwar at no time actually opposed the system of government led by the Tunku.

Syed Hamid Ali and the Socialist Club, on the other hand, were particularly opposed to the Tunku's political, and economic, and social policies. The socialist students opposed the capitalist system, which they saw as being the root cause of poverty. They were opposed to the influx of foreign investment, which still dominated the economy and wealth of the country and left the majority of the rakyat living in poverty and misery. They also felt that it was his leadership that had led to racial riots.

Students And University Autonomy

On the 29th August 1969, police invaded the University of Malaya campus with the intention of disrupting an anti-Tunku

demonstration. This was the first time that the police had ventured on to the campus to disrupt student activities. Several students, involving Syed Hamid Ali, then UMSU president were detained. The students protested against the police action, emphasizing that it was a violation of university autonomy.

In the years following, students have always opposed attempts by the government to encroach upon university autonomy.

1970 : The Malay Language And The National Education Policy

The struggle by the Malay students of the University of Malaya to advance the Malay language had been underway from at least 1966. However, it was only in 1970 that the issues of the Malay language and the National Educational Policy emerged as central issues. These twin issues also caused a racial rift, among students at the university. Even the PMUM and PBMUM differed on these issues.

The struggle to secure the position of the Malay language as the National Language and the National Education Policy have to be viewed in a wider context. The language issue was symbolic of the opposition to the rule of the Tunku, who was deemed to have failed in improving the lot of the Malay community. By raising the question of language and education, it was easy to draw the support of the Malay students and also of the Malay community at large.

In 1970, the National University of Malaysia (UKM) was founded. The setting up of this university was viewed as the culmination of efforts to ensure the sovereignty of the Malay language and the implementation of the National Education Policy.

1971 : The University Act

The growth of the student movement in the campuses threatened those in power. In 1970, two new universities – the Science University of Malaysia (USM) and the National University of Malaysia (UKM) – were set up. There was a general increase around this time in the number of universities and institutions of higher learning in Malaysia, many of which were concentrated around Kuala Lumpur. The implications of this for the growth of the student movement alarmed the political elite.

WITH THE PEOPLE!

WITH THE PEOPLE! traces the development of the student movement in universities and other institutions of higher learning in Malaysia, especially during the years 1967-1974.

After surveying the overall development of the student movement, several weaknesses are highlighted. The next two articles review student involvement in two popular struggles in 1974, i.e. of the Tasek Utara squatters in Johore and the rubber-growing peasants in Baling, Kedah.