

*In Their Own Voice*  
*“Democracy”*  
as Perceived in Burma/Myanmar  
1921 - 2010

Franziska Blum, Friederike Trotier, Hans-Bernd Zöllner (eds.)

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## Foreword

The documents assembled and contextualised here aim at providing material which may help to see the current developments in Burma/Myanmar in a historical and therefore somewhat balanced perspective. Thus, the editors wish to both contribute and enrich an informed dialogue about “democracy” particularly in the light of the upcoming elections on November 7, 2010.

For being rather incomplete, the documentation cannot be considered as a systematic academic study. However, there is the hope that the assembled material will stimulate further research and, maybe, lead to a joint endeavour to discover the secrets of the failure of Burma/Myanmar to become as free and prosperous as all friends of the country and its people wish.

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Passau and Hamburg, October 2010

## **I Introduction**

### 1 The Project's History

This working paper contains some material from Burmese sources showing how “democracy” was perceived - and practiced - in Burma/Myanmar in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century. The texts presented here are the result of a project which aims at collecting and contextualising quotations about “democracy” as well at summarizing documents that inform about how the current form of Burmese government was put into practice. The project started in early 2009 and was completed in late 2010.

The project's starting point was the information that on some day in 2010 elections are supposed to be held in Myanmar as the fifth step of the seven-step roadmap proclaimed in August 2003. The roadmap aims at establishing a “disciplined democratic system” in the country under the guidance of the military junta that rules Burma since 1988. Similarly to the late announcement of the date of the referendum on the constitution (step 4), the date of the election was only announced in the middle of august. According to the announcement, the election will take place on November, 7, 2010. The basic idea of the project was to make use of this occasion by combining two aims. The first one was to collect some

information about the Burmese understanding of “democracy” throughout the country's modern history and, second, to invite students to participate in a very basic research on this interesting topic. Both objectives are connected by the attempt to prop up two neglected fields of academic studies related to Burma. Up to now, no thorough studies on the indigenous view on the country's political culture with regard to various forms of government have been undertaken. Second, there is a lack of academic new blood in Germany that is necessary to continue with the research on Burma in the broader context of Southeast Asian studies.

Beginning in March 2009, some seminars and workshops were held at the universities of Berlin, Hamburg, Heidelberg and Passau. The participants were provided with some information about Burmese history since the beginning of the colonial period after the first Anglo-Burmese War in 1926 as well as with some of the material available about Burmese political culture. They were asked to choose texts from the material collected by the editor in English language that might be appropriate to be included in the documentation.

Finally, it was envisaged to hold a symposium in late 2009 or early 2010. Here, the participants from different places should have the chance to meet and to discuss their findings with some senior experts on Burma. This meeting took place at Hildesheim University,

Northern Germany, on February 5 and 6, 2010. At this workshop, most of the material assembled here was introduced by the participants and discussed with the audience attending the venue.

## 2 Background

As with most issues related to Myanmar / Burma, the elections as well as the whole roadmap are very controversially assessed. The junta maintains that the chosen way is the only one preserving the unity of the country. The opponents label the constitution<sup>1</sup> under which the elections will be held as “undemocratic” in many regards. One main argument is the provision that only 75 % of the seats will be filled by way of election whereas 25 % are appointed by the military. Another argument put forward by advocates of the ethnic nationalities criticizes the lack of autonomy attributed to the different states of the future “Republic of the Union of Myanmar”.

The controversial discussion clearly shows that “democracy” is differently defined and assessed by diverse stakeholders involved in Myanmar politics. Given the variety of understandings of “democracy” in the field of political sciences, the controversy can be regarded as quite normal. It may be asked, however, on what arguments the discussion is based. This paper intends to provide some material for such a discussion and a rational assessment of what “democracy” may mean in the Myanmar historical context and thus help to analyze the upcoming elections on the backdrop of how “democracy” was defined and appraised in former periods of the country’s history.

## 3 Details

The core of this paper lies in the quotations on “democracy” the contributors have chosen out of the material examined. They are listed in a chronological order in five chapters: Colonial period (up to 1948); Parliamentary Period (1948-1958); Period of Transition (1948-1962); Socialist Period (1962-1988); The Uprising of 1988 (March to September 18, 1988); Period of Antagonism (September 19, 1988-Today). Subdivisions are introduced at the beginning of each chapter. Thus, some basic information about the history of Burma/Myanmar with a focus on the development of conceptualisations of “democracy” is provided.

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<sup>1</sup> For the English text of the constitution see [http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs5/Myanmar\\_Constitution-2008-en.pdf](http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs5/Myanmar_Constitution-2008-en.pdf).

In order to facilitate the reading the quotations were shortened as much as possible. Correspondingly, efforts were made to provide information about the context of the quotations and excerpts to give the reader an idea about the whole text from which the excerpt is taken. In some cases it is indicated that the context was not known as the quotations had to be taken from secondary sources. However, this scheme of short quotations could only partly be realised. Some contributors chose to quote at length because they took the project's title – *In Their Own Voice* - particularly seriously.

Obviously, “democracy” can be looked at from different sides. Quotations inform about the ideas behind this form of government but not about how these ideas were practiced. Therefore, it was attempted to include some material about the realisation of political concepts.

From 1922 to 1988, several constitutions have been tried in Burma. The first one was the so called “Dyarchy system” implemented by the British after World War II in accordance to the constitutional reforms realized in India. It was followed by the “91 department constitution” which was named after the 91 sections of the Government of Burma Act of 1935 that separated British Burma from British India and was put into practice on April 1, 1937. According to the “interim constitution” promulgated after the Japanese granted some kind of independence on August 1, 1943, a “Constituent Body” was envisaged which was entitled to write a permanent constitution.

After World War II, a Constituent Assembly elected in April 1947 drew up a constitution for the independent Burma. It was adopted on September 25 of the same year and lasted until its abrogation on March 2, 1962 following the military coup under Ne Win's leadership. It took twelve years until a new constitution was drafted and implemented. On September 18, 1988, the constitution of 1974 suffered the same fate as its predecessor as it was abrogated. In January 1993, a National Convention was assembled and given the task to write a third constitution for the country. After some long lasting breaks, this task was only seriously performed after the announcement of the roadmap between 2004 and 2007.

With the exception of the interim constitution of 1943, all constitutions contained provisions for a parliament and thus at least some elements of democracy. The procedures of the parliaments' sessions during the colonial period are well documented in English language but not yet evaluated. The sessions of the Pyitthu Hluttaw, the Burmese name for parliament, are not available outside Myanmar and written down solely in Burmese.

In order to offer some first insights into the practice of parliamentary democracy in Burma, some debates taking place in the colonial parliaments were analysed and compared with the discussions within the institutions that fought the British and their implementation of democracy. In regard to the Pyitthu Hluttaw after independence, some newspaper reports on singular sessions as well as some general commentaries on the parliamentary practice are added.

#### 4 Limitations

This documentation faces many limitations. Only a few of them shall be mentioned. One concerns the limitation with regard to language. With only a few exemptions, only English texts could be taken into consideration.

Second, there was no time (and money) to conduct a thorough investigation into the libraries and archives of Germany let alone of Britain and other countries.

Third, with a few exemptions, the plan to have a thorough look into the proceedings of the Burmese parliaments from the beginning of the introduction of constitutional reforms in the early 1920s to the socialist democracy practiced by the Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) could not be realised. For the colonial period there is no lack of sources but a lack of resources – researchers and money - to evaluate them. For the time after independence, only material in Burmese is available.

Fourth, a chapter planned to cover perceptions of democracy from the side of Burma's ethnic nationalities could not yet be realised.

Finally, there was not much time to discuss at length about details such as which material should be selected and what could be omitted and how it could best be introduced.

#### 5 A Note on the Burmese Word for Democracy

A note on the Burmese wording of “democracy”: Today's Burmese dictionaries translate “democracy” as ဒီမိုကရေစီ which is a transcription of the English word in Burmese letters.

According to Dr. Tin Hlaing, some other translations were tried but abandoned:

**Related to *democracy* is the interesting term, *Pyithu Ahnar*, which seems to have come ahead of time in Burma. It translates identically as ‘People Power’. *Pyithu Ahnar* is the title of the book by Thein Pe which is a translation of Dr Sun Yet Sen's work. Quite remarkably, he uses *democracy khaw pyithu ahnar (pyithu ahnar***

known as democracy). Thakin Nu is another writer who uses *pyithu ahnar* in his work ‘Way out of Poverty’. We do not notice it in the works of other Nagani authors, nor does it seem to occur in other contemporary writings. After the war, the Burmese communists are known to have used *Pyithu Ahnar* during their failed revolution. One could wonder if *pyithu ahnar* (People Power) had come too early for acceptance. It has remained unused since the communist rebellion broke down. Even after ‘people power’ has become internationally popular in the media after the 1980’s we find *Pyithu Ahnar* has not found its resurgence.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Tin Hlaing, Translation of Political Terms and Concepts with Reference to Nagani Publications in: Zöllner, Hans-Bernd (ed) *Papers at the Burma Studies Conference Singapore*, 2006, Myanmar Literature Project Working Paper 100, 45.

## II The Colonial Period

### Introduction

The Colonial Period in Burma extends from the Treaty of Yandabo, signed on February 24, 1826, ending the first Anglo-Burmese War to January 4, 1948 4.20 a.m. when Burma became independent from Great Britain. The former date seems to signify the beginning of the end of absolute monarchy and thus the system of an “Oriental Despotism” in Burma, the latter date the commencement of a system of parliamentary democracy. Both characterisations, however, are disputable. As the label of “military dictatorship” affixed to the post-1988 (and very often retroactively to the post-1962) era shows, “despotism” might be very strongly rooted in any Burmese political system. Furthermore, there are reasons to be cautious about regarding the period between 1948 and 1962 as a “democratic” one.<sup>1</sup>

There is one simple reason often overlooked for the difficulty of the assumption of a linear progress from “authoritarian” to “democratic” rule: The British who conquered Burma and from whom independence was wrenched finally were “democrats”. Quite naturally, they tried to implant their own democratic system into their newly acquired colonies, of course by way of adapting it to the conditions of the native people and their culture. This process started in Burma after World War I around 1920 following the constitutional reforms implemented in British India of which Burma was a part until the administrative separation that came into effect on April 1, 1937.<sup>2</sup>

On the other hand, the Burmese nationalists striving for independence had to fight a democratic system in order to achieve their goal. The beginnings of the nationalist movements are usually traced back to the foundation of the Young Men’s Buddhist Association (YMBA) in December 1906 and reached a first peak with the students’ strike of December 1920 that is celebrated as the county’s National Day until today.

Based on these deliberations, the first part of this chapter starts with the year 1920. Two years later, in June 1922, the British Parliament passed the bill that opened the way of the system of limited self-government known as the “Dyarchy System” because it discriminated between “transferred” subjects like education and forestry that were supervised by two Burmese ministers and “reserved” subjects still looked after by the colonial government. In December 1922 the first elections to the Burmese Legislative Council, the first partly elected Burmese parliament, took place.

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<sup>1</sup> See Callahan 1998.

<sup>2</sup> For details see Cady 1965.

The next constitutional change occurred between 1935 and 1937. After lengthy deliberations, Burma was given the status of a separate Province within the British Empire under new provisions laid down in the “Government of Burma Act” passed by the British Parliament on May 30, 1935. On November 26 of the following year, elections were held. The elected 132 members of the House of Representatives had the task to elect a Chief Minister who appointed up to ten ministers. Within the next five years, five Chief Ministers who were later called Prime Ministers and their cabinets were sworn in. As the Second World War broke out in Europe in 1939 and in Asia in 1941, no further elections were held. Part 2 of this chapter covers this period of time.

On March 8, 1942, the Japanese Army accompanied by the Burmese Independence Army led by Aung San reached Rangoon. The Japanese occupation lasted until May 3, 1945 when the Allied Forces recaptured Rangoon assisted by the Burmese Army now named the Burma National Army (BNA) that had turned against the Japanese on March 27 of that year. After the recapture, the final struggle for independence started leading to the Independence Day of January 4, 1948. The period between 1945 and 1948 is covered in part 3.

## **1 1920 – 1937**

### 1.1 Overview of the elections between 1922 and 1932

In 1922, a so-called „Dyarchy“ system was established in Burma following the implementation of a constitutional reform in India. A Legislative Assembly entitled to discuss the affairs of the Province and particularly the duties of two Burmese ministers who were responsible for the so called „transferred subjects“ like agriculture, forests and education was to be elected by the people. The Governor and his British staff still looked after the more important „reserved subjects“, such as money, military, foreign relations. This first quasi-parliament – and the following assemblies – was meant as an opportunity for Burmese politicians to gain their first experience in democracy.

The first elections under the new constitution were held in November 1922. Not all adults were entitled to vote, only those who paid taxes. Suffrage was thus restricted. The exact numbers are not known but supposedly 10 % of the adult population of Burma had the right to vote. From this electorate only 6,93 % went to the polls. Thus less than 1 % of the whole population voted. The refusal of the majority to go to the polls was due to a boycott campaign by the GCBA (General Council of Burmese Associations) which was strongly supported by

monks. In other words: The elections resulted in an overwhelming victory of the election boycotters, a negative election victory, so to speak.

Another result of the elections was the first split of the GCBA. There were opposing opinions on the issue of participating at the elections. A minority – later known as the 21-Party because the group initially had 21 members – decided on taking part in the political process organised by the British. Others advocated boycott and emphasized the striving for complete home rule, for complete independence.

Partly due to this split, the turnout was a little bit higher in the next election held in 1925 – 16,16%. But despite of the generally low participation of the electorate, the British administrators regarded the people elected to the Legislative Assembly as representatives of the whole Burmese populace. They were considered as the vanguard of a future democratic country modelled after Great Britain. The so-called „hill people“; Shan, Kachin, Naga and Chin, were totally excluded from elections until 1947. There were thought to be too „backward“.

The next elections did not take place until 1932 due to the big debate over the question of separating Burma from India and also due to the Saya San rebellion which began in late 1930 and could be suppressed only more than one year later.

In the elections of November 1932, some two million Burmese were entitled to vote. Around 40% went to the polls. Two blocs competed against each other in the election, one campaigning for the separation of Burma from British India, the other for a continuation of the *status quo*. The campaign was rather muddy, as it is told, and the winners, by a wide margin, were the Anti-Separatists, the parties that campaigned against the creation of a separate Province of Burma.

This election result seems to be rather surprising. One may argue that the majority of the people was uneducated and did not know well about the issue. But, maybe, the main reason for this outcome resulted from an anti-British sentiment. The colonial rulers had advocated the separation. Therefore, the people were persuaded by the leading politicians to oppose the move. Dr. Ba Maw who led one wing of the anti-separatists, was one of the most educated men in Burma of that time having obtained his Ph.D. in France. But he was suspected to use the simple minds of his followers in favour of his personal ambition. Furthermore, Dr. Ba Maw and others lied under the suspicion of having received money from the Indian business community that – besides the British – dominated the Burmese economy. The Burmese

politicians needed funding for their election campaigns and the Indians were interested in a continuation of their activities in Burma which they saw endangered by separation.

### 1.2 February 1921: Discussion of Constitutional Reforms

The 30 – mostly appointed - members of the Legislative Council discussed the issue of reforms after a statement of the Governor, Sir Reginald Craddock. One of the Burmese members of the Council substantiated a resolution calling for “at least” the same reforms as implemented in India:

**It may be said that in India the races are as different from each other as the Esquimau is from the Spaniard or the Irishman from the Turk, but in our country there is practically one caste, one religion, one race and one language.**

**Our Lord Buddha was a Great Democrat, our religion is the most tolerant of all the great religions. The people are a democratic race, no aristocracy, and their standard of life is practically the same. Their women are free and enjoy a status higher than that of women in all other countries in Asia.**

**Burma is an agricultural country, its people are one, their interests are identical and there is no difference of interest to clash if it is ruled by its own people.**

**Apart from the question of fitness or unfitness, a nation has the natural right of liberty and freedom. (Legislative Council: 751)**

### 1.3 February 1922: A Debate on the Anti-Boycott Bill in the Legislative Council

Shortly before the implementation of the Diarchy system, the Legislative Council, comprising 30 members of which only two<sup>1</sup> had not been appointed by the governor, held a debate on a bill which was to counter the growing boycott movement. The GCBA had adopted measures which resembled the method of social ostracism implemented by Irish farmers against the English estate agent Charles Boycott in 1880 through whom the term entered the English language.<sup>2</sup> Burmese citizens serving as government officials were threatened with the stoppage of the necessities of life like buying food on the market and including the denial of religious services by monks.

The mover of the bill, the Secretary of the council, Mr. Lewisohn, in introducing the bill stated:

**Your Honour, I beg for leave to introduce a Bill to secure and to protect freedom of speech and thought in political life in Burma. The object of this Bill is to deal**

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<sup>1</sup> The Burma Chamber of Commerce and the Rangoon Trades Association were entitled to elect one member each.

<sup>2</sup> For details see Zöllner 2009, 86.

**with an evil which is spreading slowly over the whole Province. That evil is the use of the boycott or the threat of the boycott to suppress freedom of political thought and action, an evil if unchecked leave the future political life of this country ... in the strangle hold of that section of the community which uses this weapon in the most unscrupulous manner.** (Legislative Council: 947)

After presenting a number of examples illustrating the measures taken, the speaker put forward some fundamental arguments:

**Democratic institutions are about to be introduced into this country and democratic institutions can only flourish in a soil where there is individual liberty of opinion. One paper which I recently read states that a European mentality may find it difficult to understand their horror of this measure because the boycott is an immemorial practice of the East. It may be so, but I say, deliberately, that if you want Western institutions of liberty and democracy introduced into this country you have got to shed some of the immemorial practices of the East, for they are not compatible with those Western institutions, and this is emphatically one of those practices which has got to be shed. You have got to choose between English liberty and English democracy and the right to outcast your neighbour for a failure to observe the rules of a particular political caste. This Bill I claim to be a stroke for the raising up of the untouchable, as you may say.** (Legislative Council: 949)

The few Burman members of the Council who opposed the bill although they stressed that they did not approve the boycott did not take up the argument of democracy. Instead it is argued that the introduction of the bill would increase the existing antagonism of “the people” towards the government. This antagonism was identified as the “root cause” of the problem.

**If you will thrash out the real cause you will find that the boycott has its origin in the present political movement. The fact that Government servants, and some non-Government servants, and some public men have been boycotted [...] goes to show that they have been boycotted on account of their connection with the Government [...]. The people at present are against the Government and ask for political reforms. There are now in existence the Government party and the people’s party, and there is no intermediate party between these parties at all, and these two parties are now, as it were, as to the form of reforms that should be introduced into the country.** (Legislative Council: 956)

From the 26 members of the Council present, 21 voted for the passing of the bill, 5 against it.

#### 1.4 1931-1932: The Burma Round Table Conference, London<sup>1</sup>

The conference was to discuss about the constitution of Burma after a separation from India. It was attended by 9 British and 24 Burmese delegates, among them 12 Burmans, 3 British, 2 Shan Sawbwas, 2 Karen, 2 Indians (one Hindu, one Muslim) , 1 Arakanese Muslim, 1 Anglo-Burman and 1 Chinese. The Burmese delegation thus reflected the ethnic diversity of Burma

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<sup>1</sup> See: Burma Round Table Conference. 27<sup>th</sup> November, 1931 – 12<sup>th</sup> January, 1932. Proceedings. Rangoon, Supdt. Govt. Printing and Stationary, Burma. 1932. (Quotes as “Round Table”)

as well as the composition of the Legislative Council. The question if this formation was a fair one, was one hotly debated issue. In his statement at the end of the first stage of the conference, the Chairman stated:

**I should like to actions against state [...] that we had the great advantage of hearing an expression of views from the different [Burman] parties. I have heard a great deal about these parties in the course of this discussion. I have learnt, for one thing, that each of these parties is the largest party in the Burmese Council and my Oxford training and mathematical training has been rather exercised to see how these things could be composed. (Round Table, 124)**

He was referring to the claim of Burman delegates representing parties in the Legislative Council to stand for the majority of the Burmese people. There existed thus a fundamental difference on the meaning of “representation”. The chairman expressed a numerical, quantitative understanding measured by the distribution of seats whereas the Burmans referred to the quality of unity among them despite the existence of a variety of parties inside as well as outside of the Council. “The people” as a whole wanted that the country was ruled without any British supervision and the different parties just chose different methods to put this common goal into practice. These “Burmese mathematics” can be illustrated by the following extracts of Tharrawaddy U Pu’s speech:

**Our demand is united. The Delegates from Burma, with the exception of very, very few – possibly only my friends the British Delegates from Burma – are in agreement with our demand for full Dominion Status,<sup>1</sup> or full responsible government. (Round Table, 72)**

A longer passage follows reviewing 3000 years of Burmese political experience that was put to an end by the British annexation of Burma. The political associations established during the last twenty years had local roots under the umbrella of the General Council of Burmese Associations (GCBA).

**We were then united and were in one organisation. With the advent of Dyarchy there was a split on the question of Council entry and acceptance of office, or boycott of the Council. ... There was also only one All-Burma Sanghas’ Council. The Sanghas number about 100,000 in Burma and the Sanghas’ Council is a very important factor which no statesman can forget. They are the real leaders of Burma. ...The villagers, 99 per cent, of whom are Burmans, worship them, build their [...] sanctuaries, and offer food to them. They have renounced worldly affairs. Thus they have influence over the villages who obey the village Sangha from childhood ... Now [...] for the first time since the split [happening in 1923 on the issue of taking part in the Council] the Separationists and Anti-Separationists are united again to put forward [...] a united demand for full responsible**

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<sup>1</sup> The Dominions referred to in the speeches of the Burman delegates possessing a status Burma wanted to obtain were Ireland, Canada and Australia.

**government. [...] The voice of the Burma Legislative Council, therefore, is not the voice of the people of Burma.<sup>1</sup> [...] The General Council of Burmese Associations are united in their political creed. They have one political creed, and that is to boycott the Legislative Council. They are united with us. Most of them, almost all of them, are united with my friends. Thus we claim 99 per cent, of the masses as a following. (Round Table 76-81)**

This was one line of argumentation put forward by the Burman side to underline their joint statement to represent all the people of Burma. The exponents of the minorities, on the other hand, presented arguments to substantiate their claim for guarantees of representation in the new parliament. Here is the line of reasoning of a Karen delegate:

**The Karens have taken to education early and earnestly. Schools have been opened in the villages and in the large towns, with the result that tens and tens of thousands have been enabled to avail themselves of the benefit of education. The result is that literacy is quite high among us. We therefore repudiate any suggestion of being a backward race or a “hill tribe”. If any race is ready for democratic institutions we claim ours is.**

**The Karens have contributed to the welfare of the country in various ways. Our schools, maintained and largely financed by us, open their doors to all alike, and have given education to Burmese and other races. The majority of Karens as agriculturalists have also contributed to the prosperity of the country, but it is with deep regret that I have to say that many of their lands have fallen in the hands of the nonindigenous races.**

The last sentence alludes to the loss of land to Indian moneylenders and includes a call for special protection. The question of special safeguards for various minorities was one of the hotly contested ones of the conference. Here, no agreement was reached.<sup>2</sup>

The last quotation contains one of three direct references to “democracy” in the whole conference report. Here, the term is related to education as a precondition of the building of institutions in line with those practised in Britain. The two other citations clarify the difference between the Burman and the minorities’ point of view with regard to representation. The spokesman of the Burmans stated:

**We would once again emphasise the necessity of keeping the popular Assembly, that is the House of Representatives, thoroughly democratic and fully representative of the people by removing all nominated and communal elements. The Burmese people are strongly opposed to communal representation on principle and as there is no justification for it in Burma and because the retention**

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<sup>1</sup> The speaker was a member of that Council, but one of those who had promised to destroy the Dyarchy System from within.

<sup>2</sup> The conclusion of the Committee dealing with the future constitution stated: „The Committee failed to reach agreement upon a number of the Heads of Discussion contained in the Agenda submitted to it by the Chairman. Among such matters must be included the claim of the Minorities to separate representation in the new Parliament, the question of the franchise, and the method of election to elected seats in the Senate.” (Round Table 169)

**of this vicious system would, while failing to achieve any useful object, only accentuate and perpetuate narrow communal feeling to an undesirable extent.**  
(Round Table 193-194)

One of the Indian delegates responded:

**What is the true principle of democratic government? Is it not that the Government of the country must be truly representative of all the component elements in the population of the country? If my friend could devise any means to ensure that the Indian community could be represented in the Legislative Council of the Province of Burma by the adoption of any other scheme I would give my attention to that point of view, but no such scheme has been put forward.[....]. Without [...] special electorates a member of the minorities will not have the slightest chance of being elected to the Legislative Council of Burma [...] for many years. There is, unfortunately, a feeling of hostility not only against the community that U Pu represents but against all communities who do not form the indigenous population of Burma. Unfortunately, that feeling of hostility has increased and is increasing.** (Round Table 198)

#### 1.5 Thant on democracy (1936 and later)

The adoption of the “Government of Burma Bill” by the British Parliament in May 1935 as well as the preparations for the elections that were held according to the new constitution’s provisions further heated up Burma’s political climate which had somewhat cooled down after the scandals made public after the fight of the secessionists and the anti-secessionists dominating the 1932 elections.<sup>1</sup>

One of the central issues of the public debate was how to deal with the enlarged space of political decision making offered by the new constitution. The associations within the GCBA had tried to boycott almost everything conceived by the British administration. In this tradition, some parties contesting the elections openly declared that they would accept their seats just to destroy the new constitution from within. The most radical party in this regard was the parliamentary wing of the “We-Burma-Association” (*Do-Bama Asiayone*) named Komin-Kochin (literally translated “Our King, Our Kind”) that won three seats in the elections. Later on even the Premier Dr. Ba Maw promised to destroy the constitution by making use of it.

Along with these political actions, there were some more detached reflections on the country’s situation. One main organ stimulating such discussions was the magazine “World of Books” founded by John S. Furnivall in 1924 in order to encourage intellectual exchange.

Two of the main contributors were the brothers Thant and Khant, the former being a close friend and associate of Nu who became prominent as the third General Secretary of the United Nations.

The following quotations were taken from a biography of the later UN General Secretary Nu published in 1966. The first citation reflects the impressions gained from monitoring the elections at his home town Pantanaw in the Irrawaddy Delta.

**Democracy is lovelier at a distance; seen at close quarters it is nothing to write hymns about. .... We found a number of queer fish among the candidates. Whether they were conversant with District Council problems or not, they were certainly familiar with all the odd electioneering tricks. The West has nothing to teach us in this respect. The election day itself was marked by the usual miracles. The dead came back to life, the absent were present, and many an individual assumed sundry personalities.<sup>2</sup>**

Later, he added some principal remarks:

**That in the domain of politics, parties have got their special value is admitted in all hands. They unmistakably demonstrate a healthy current in the political life of a people. But a multiparty system instead of doing any good, spoils the onward march of progress ... jut as too many cooks spoil the dinner. It is all the more true in the case of a dependent country like Burma.<sup>3</sup>**

And, maybe as an answer to the failure of democracy in Germany and Italy:

**Democracy means nothing less than despair of finding any fit to govern. Democracy professes to believe all men are equal in their mental capacities. This absurd dogma of human equality results in the suppression of the superior, reducing all to a common level of dull mediocrity. The consequence is that humanity is without leadership.**

#### 1.6 1937: Thein Pe, The M.L.A.

This satirical short story of the writer who became famous after the war as Thein Pe Myint is about a Member of the Legislative Assembly (M.L.A). It expresses the public opinion that becoming a parliamentarian led to total corruption. At the end of the story, the “hero” dies thus receiving what he deserves according to the Law of Kamma.

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<sup>1</sup> Shortly before these elections, Su – one of the Burmese delegates at the Round Table Conference – published a long “testament“ describing in detail how the anti-separationists had been influenced by Indian advocates of non-separation including the acceptance of money by the GCBAs.

<sup>2</sup> Bingham 1966, 121.

<sup>3</sup> Bingham 1966, 122.

**Thein Pe, The M.L.A.**

(Translation: Usha Nagayarma)<sup>1</sup>

"Oh! how quickly my world has changed! Within a month I have become the great M.L.A., U Po Koo, and not an unknown villager any more. I had to spend Rs 3000 and I have suddenly become a Member of the Legislative Assembly which is much higher than the District Commissioner! Now I am a famous person after all." The newly elected M.L.A., U Po Koo, was thinking thus while waiting on the platform with his followers for the train to Rangoon - his eyes not wavering from the first class ticket in hand. He looked at himself, very elegantly dressed in a pale yellow formal silk jacket and a silk longyi in light olive green. Also wearing a pair of velvet slippers, he thought of himself as a handsome gentleman.

Tin Pe, a young graduate lawyer, came near him and whispered, "Oh! great Uncle, you look so different now - so grand and so... elegant. We can make out that you

are the great M.L.A., U Po Koo!" This flattery bloated U Po Koo, producing a smile on his face as he replied: "You see, now that I have become an M.L.A., I have to be dressed like a gentleman. After all, I have to sit with the other Honourable members of the Assembly." Meanwhile, the President of the Regional Sangha, the Rev. U Thumana, who was responsible for his success in the election, came near him. U Po Koo took off his slippers and knelt down before him. The Reverend felt elated to have such respectful attention paid to him by the M.L.A., a rich man of the village.

"Hon'ble M.L.A." said the Reverend. "When you reach Rangoon, do not forget us here. You must work for this constituency and, remember, you have to ask questions about our monastery land here."

"When Your Grace has given me an errand to do, how can I forget it? Anything else I can do?"

"Nothing else. Please give my regards to H.E. the President of Burma. By the way, you look entirely different today, like royalty. After all you are now the M.L.A.!"

"Yes. Thank you, Your Worship", U Po Koo said, his face lighting up with pleasure.

Then he turned around to Tin Pe and said, "Look after my household and my affairs, Tin Pe. I rely upon you." He nodded towards his wife, Daw Shwe Toke, to come near and said, "Do look after yourself. Supervise all the sales at home. By the way, has that astrologer come again? The one who predicted that I would win the elections? If he turns up, give him three rupees. Also send food to the Eastern Monastery regularly". Madame M.L.A. was a fat lady wearing a flower - patterned satin longyi and diamond earrings — she cut quite an impressive figure. She told him not to worry about anything.

The M.L.A. turned around and asked his wife to light a cheroot for him. At this Tin Pe sidled up to him and whispered, "Uncle, please forget your village habit. You are dressed up like a gentleman now. You are traveling First Class. How can you possibly smoke a cheroot? Here, please take this cigarette."

Thus, U Po Koo tried to get rid of his village habits and airs and began to breathe the city air and to follow city manners. Soon the train came into the station with a

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<sup>1</sup> Thein Pe Myint 1999, *Sweet and Sour. Burmese Short Stories*. Translated by Usha Narayanan, New Delhi, Sterling Publishers, 11-21.

**rattling sound. He kowtowed to the Buddhist priest and got on to the carriage. From the door he said goodbye to all, and the rest of the passengers were very impressed. With the eyes of the crowd on him, U Po Koo felt like the solo danseuse on stage. He felt like dancing himself saying, "Me — the one and only Po Koo." U Po Koo closed the door of the compartment and sat down on the plush sofa seat. He looked round the First Class compartment observing how the wooden panel was well-polished, how all the sofas and their velvet covers looked very grand. Oh yes — U Po Koo had started enjoying the comforts of being an M.L.A., feeling the smooth texture of the velvet seat-cover.<sup>1</sup>**

### 1.7 A note on the 1936 elections

The British implemented the division of Burma from India despite the election results of 1932 and passed a new constitution for a separated Burma in 1935.

The new constitution preserved some regulations of the Dyarchy system such as the voting along communal lines: The Indians, the Karen, the Europeans, the Anglo-Burmans and the Chinese were guaranteed to get a certain number of seats in Parliament. On the one hand, the parliament had the right now to elect a Prime Minister who was entitled to form a cabinet of eight ministers who were responsible for almost all political departments except – as before - military and foreign affairs. But on the other hand, the Governor could veto any decision by the Burmese government. The Burmese nationalists strongly opposed the constitution, Maung Nu, the later Prime Minister, together with some other young men, burnt the Union Jack on the day when the constitution came into effect on April 1, 1937.

The first and only elections under this constitution were held on November 9, 1936. The voter turnout was again about 40% but more voters participated because the suffrage was enlarged due to a relaxation of the restrictions on the preconditions of the right to vote. After the elections and some negotiations, the parliament elected Dr. Ba Maw as Prime Minister. Before the election, he had vowed that his main aim was to wreck the constitution from within.

## 2 1937 - 1942

The year following Burma's separation from India, 1938, or 1300 according to the Burmese era, was – in retrospect - termed „the year of strife“ or „the year of the revolution“ by Burmese nationalists. Differently from the time before the governmental change the protests

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<sup>1</sup> For the whole story, see the collection of Thein Pe Myint's short stories (previous footnote) and Myanmar Literature Project Working Paper 2 (Available under: [http://www.phil.uni-passau.de/fileadmin/group\\_upload/45/pdf/research/mlp2.pdf](http://www.phil.uni-passau.de/fileadmin/group_upload/45/pdf/research/mlp2.pdf) [October 7, 2010]).

against government policy was taken to the streets. Striking workers who walked from Upper Burma to Rangoon and public meetings signalled a change in the methods of boycott against the policy dominated by the British and the rules and regulations introduced by them. One year later, in 1939, the outbreak of the war in Europe contributed heavily to the increasing dynamics of the Burmese fight for independence resulting in the establishment of a Burmese army under the leadership of Aung San. This army joined the Japanese forces to drive the British out of Burma.

Parallel to the growing activism within a global context the rhetoric of the independence fighters became more “internationalised”, too. In 1938, the *Dobama Asiayone*, the most radical nationalist organisation, split into a more “nationalist” group of mostly older traditionalists and a group of “internationalists” which was joined by ex-students like Nu and Aung San. One outstanding enterprise exemplifying the attempt to catch up on worldwide developments was the establishment of the Nagani (“Red Dragon”) Book Club by Nu and some other young men close to the *Dobama*. They published books in Burmese language in order to educate their compatriots and thus make them fit for a type of independence other than the one envisaged by the British.

## 2.1 February 1938: Ba Khaing, Political History of Burma

The book *Political History of Burma* written by *Ba Khaing* provides an overview over pre-colonial political history of Burma as well as a very detailed description of political developments and events during the British occupation until the year 1937. It was probably in the following year that the book was published (1938). The focus of the book lies on recent political events as the author dedicates almost the entire book to the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. *Ba Khaing* tries to describe and analyse the political scenery in the expectation of independence for his country. His approach is on the one hand objective fact-based and thorough and on the other hand with very critical eyes. He conveys a critical point of view towards the behaviour of politicians and the political developments in Burma. The fundamental idea of the book lies in the motivation for Burmese independence. Although *Ba Khaing* is in favour of independence he points out the obstacles that could prevent a successful development after the end of British occupation. Thus, he criticises the missing leadership and qualification of politicians or stresses the importance of economical development and independence.

The target reader groups of the book are students of politics and politicians as the author states in the preface. His aim is to throw light on the weaknesses in the political scene in Burma in order to encourage the young generation to improve the situation as soon as independence is gained by learning from the failures of the past.

*Ba Khaing*, who was born in 1906, was not only a writer but also a politician and like the later president U Nu a founder of the Burmese *Fabian Socialist Party*. As he participated actively in Burmese politics his perception about the development in Burma and the roles of the different parties was shaped by his experiences and more important by his own socialist view. *Ba Khaing* died in the year 1940 and little is known about his short life. In addition to the *Political History of Burma* he published a book about Germany and wrote statements about the world war and Burma.

*Ba Khaing* develops his ideas on the bases on Burmese thoughts and self-perception as well as on world-wide disputes over ideologies. His book gives examples how he tries to adapt ideas about policies from the west to the Burmese situation and also how he integrates Buddhist ideas into the political context. Concerning the world-wide struggle for the “true” ideology *Ba Khaing* sees them as essential for policies. It is not important which ideology to follow but to do so. His reproach towards Burmese parties lies in the lack of ideology and on the concentration on one leader.

**A pathetic state of Burmese politics is that political parties do not have definite ideology. (...) However, in Burma no ideology will remain after the death of U Ba Pe, U Chit Hlaing and Dr Ba Maw. As the parties are named after persons there can be no definite –ism; only activities that follow the will of the leader prevail.**

In regard of Buddhist elements in *Political History of Burma* one comparison presented below shall demonstrate the link between Buddhist symbols and the author’s ideas and arguments. In the conclusion *Ba Khaing* states that the politics of his time is at the lowest level. But his criticism does not only focus on the politicians but also on the Burmese people. He considers them as selfish and dependent on the legislative assembly formed by the British.

**They [the village folk] are reluctant to take pains, but rather follow the path of least resistance. The grandeur of independence is out of sight; the people are tangled in the vicious cycle of thirty one realms of existence.**

The term “democracy” appears in the passage about Dr Ba Maw gaining power. *Ba Khaing* displeases the way Dr Ba Maw acts on the political scenery.

**Dr Ba Maw and his followers went into the legislature after promising to introduce socialism; once there they abandoned socialism to take ministerial jobs by forming a coalition government. In a democratic society, such drastic change in policy**

**would require MPs to resign out of respect for voters, and stand re-election on the new policy platform. New election is needed because the voters have elected the members because they liked the policy they have declared; when their policy changes, they need to confirm the voters approve it.**

In this passage the author refers first to Dr Ba Maws “Five year socialist plan” which was part of his election program. In order to form a coalition the socialist plan was abandoned. This fact is one of the major failures of the party of Dr Ba Maw the author points out.

*Ba Khaing* emphasises the importance of the people and their participation as the foundation of democracy. “The people” as a undefinated unity with one common will is a periodically returning element in the book. In his conclusion *Ba Khaing* compares the abilities and qualification of the different parties in the expectation of the coming of independence. As he rejects all existing party he looks for another political solution.

**Who can we rely on? (...) The people need to give full backing to a party that is unselfish, and devoted to the nation’s good. One day the people will have to rally behind such a party. But first, the people must identify who are selfish, and who are not; and then they ought to face hardships to work for the independence of the country.**

These last phrases of the book convey the idea of “unity” as all people should unit behind one party. This one party must embody the virtues of unselfishness and devotion to the people. Unity and virtue are key elements in *Ba Khaing*’s idea of successful politics in an independent Burma.

## 2.2 Mid 1938: Soe, Socialism

The seventh book published by the “Red Dragon” was the first textbook introducing Socialism to Burmese people in their mother tongue. Soe was regarded as one of the leading political thinkers of the younger generation. He co-founded the Burma Communist Party in 1939 and was the chairman of the smaller of the two Communist Parties that fought the Government after independence was gained. His main impact on Burmese politics, however, was through his influence on many students in the civil as well as the military sections of Burmese society who did not join or left the communist parties but subscribed to some kind of socialism.

The following quotation reproduces the only reference to “democracy” in his book.

**Elections do not reflect the will of the people. They are dominated by the capitalists. Democratic governments under capitalist system only serve to facilitate**

**unbridled oppression of the workers by the capitalists. They are governments empowered to suppress people.**

**In today's terminology, what is called democracy is only an instrument employed by a small group of people against the majority. It is a "minority democracy", or "capitalist democracy."**

**The current dictatorships in Germany and Italy are openly oppressive systems. The English and French systems are milder; they coax the subject before torture.**

**Farmers and workers should demolish the capitalist establishment and set up a 'majority government' or 'socialist democracy government', to look after their benefits.**

**Socialist democracy government and capitalist democracy government are different concepts. In the capitalist type, the army and police are the instruments for oppressing the masses. To build a socialist democracy, the workers, being the majority, must take control of the army and police who are the minority. By doing so, the residual capitalists will be eliminated.**

**In this way, a democratic government will change from being an instrument of the capitalists to one of the working people.<sup>1</sup>**

### 2.3 September 1938: Article in the Nagani News<sup>2</sup>

**What shall we do?**

**"This era is an era of struggle. The weak will be lost under the feet of others. Those who possess the best physique, the best ability, the greatest popularity and the best of the bests will survive." Darwin said so of the law of nature's selection. Darwin's words are better suited to this era than that of his time. We should not shirk our duties, nor should we lessen our due efforts in this current era. We will live only when we jostle, struggle and stay over others.**

**We cannot advance just by moving forward. We need a guide. We cannot get far just by working. We can work only when we find work. So what shall we do?**

**In ancient times in this world, power was vested only in one person who practiced monarchy. In those eras, monarchic rule brought the people far. In the western part, the Roman Empire, that shocked the entire world, emerged. So did the kingdom of Greeks. In Burma, the Pagan Era emerged. Those who did not deserve power are like babies in the cradle who are given embers. The world fell into darkness under these people. Their ruling system was uprooted at a time when people were awakened.**

**About 100 years ago, Thomas Paine<sup>3</sup> of America, Rousseau and Voltaire of France, and Shakespeare enlightened the people and had them extirpate monarchism. Then, the ruling system changed into democracy in which power was shared by people. Democracy came to dominate the entire world and continued to exist for 100 years. In a democratic nation, everyone enjoyed rights of freedom. Everyone had a say in administration. Those who had done as they pleased were under the**

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<sup>1</sup> Myanmar Literature Project (MLP) 10. See: <http://www.phil.uni-passau.de/die-fakultaet/lehrstuehle-professuren/suedostasien/suedostasien/forschung/myanmar-literature-project.html> [October 7, 2010].

<sup>2</sup> Vol. 1, 9, pp. 1-3

<sup>3</sup> 1737-1809, one of the founding fathers of the United States.

**influence of the majority. People were free to profess the religions of their choice, and choose the business they liked. The people felt as if they were pre-historic humans who were happy to see the moon and the sun for the first time. People of the democracy era experienced machinery and science that contributed to prosperity seen never before. They thought that they were born into an age when trees of plenty grew.**

**However, the era of democracy that the people had a high opinion of was not without flaws. The power and authority derived from monarchic eras gradually fell into the hands of businessmen. The capitalists held iron chains to tie round the people. A thousand people could not rival the power of a rich man.**

**If a rich man wished tens of thousands of people reduced to poverty, his wish came true. If he wished them rich, they became rich. The capitalists became magicians.**

**The democracy column that had stood upright, gaining advantage over others without any rival for more than 100 years was in fact a wooden column, not a stone one, its core bitten by termites. When the war raged in Europe in 1914, it broke into two. At that time, people were overwhelmed with anxiety. The mountain they had regarded as their world had collapsed and they were left without anything to rely on. The beliefs they had stuck to disintegrated like a boat that shattered on colliding with a rock. After setting their old beliefs adrift, they sought new ones. Considering civilization useless, they craved for animal life. They shouted, “Turn to animal life! Turn to animal practices!” They tried staying without clothes. Nude clubs were formed. Speeches on nudity were given. They behaved like buffaloes wallowing in mud pools, and smeared with mud, they engaged in a kind of practice, sitting in the sun. Just like testing or sampling a product, they sampled a marriage.**

**It was an era without order and people were in disarray without any aims set. Some said if democracy did not work, a mature democracy should replace it and they adopted communism. Russia was the leader in practicing communism. Some thought that democracy was not well suited, and so power should be withdrawn from the people and vested in one person only and turned to Nazism and fascism in which Hitler and Mussolini were the greatest masters respectively. They combated democracy which put up resistance, rallying its strength. The two sides took advantage alternately, pushing, struggling and seizing each other by the scruff of the neck. The audience cannot predict which will win. We are the audience. Some still say that they prefer democracy. Others are inspired by the ear-splitting roars of Nazism and fascism from Europe.**

**But execution of our tasks will not be complete just by aspiring to others. We still have to struggle. We should stop being an on-looker. We need to do something. What shall we do?**

**When people were crazy about democracy or specifically when they sacrificed even their lives for democracy, socialism or a branch of communism emerged. At its infancy, communism was considered their enemy by advocates of democracy. In fact, communism gets rid of the system of classes such as landlords, capitalists and the poor. It is an ideology that propounds a system in which the people own and manage assets such as land, farmland, mines, and factories for the benefits of the people with the strength of the people.**

**However much rights to freedom (freedom of casting vote, freedom of standing for election, freedom of expression, freedom of assembling, etc.) are given, the poor**

workers will remain poor as long as their livelihoods are controlled by the capitalists, the minority.

The democracy in England, France and America is better than fascism. But the situation under democracy is much like an instance given by a scholar. “In a town, all the water sources such as wells and ponds are owned by a few persons. So, all other townspeople are without any means for free water. When an election is held in the town, all the town residents are qualified to stand for election, and to cast vote. Owners of the wells and ponds say if the townspeople do not cast vote in favour of them, they won’t share water with them. Thus, the townspeople have to comply with their demand.”

The case is more or less the same in the democratic countries and the countries under their influence. Democracy will not be a success as long as the lives of the majority are in the hands of the minority, however much political rights and the right to participate in the formulation of administrative rules are given.

Communism only can help people’s power to grow without flaws. Democracy will succeed when people secure not only participation in the legislature and election but also management of the places of relations such as factories, farmlands and shops.

Success of communism means success of democracy. In this world, there are two main classes only, the capitalists and the poor. When the poor have eradicated capitalism, the practice of manipulation of man by man will disappear. At that time, democracy will rear its head, and history will take a new course.

#### 2.4 December 1939: The Manifesto of the *Dobama Asiayone*<sup>1</sup>

The paper was drafted by Aung San and adopted by a conference of the association. It starts with some fundamental political statements.

##### **Our Policy**

**Our fundamental policy is aimed at the final emancipation of all toiling masses in Burma and the world at large from all kinds of political, economic and social bondage. We stand therefore, in the first instance, for complete independence of Burma (including the areas excluded under the Government of Burma Act, 1935) from the present imperialist dominated exploitation and for the introduction of a free, independent people’s democratic Republic, which shall observe the following fundamental rights and principles to the sovereign people.**

##### **Political**

- 1. Complete independence of Burma from Imperialist Rule.**
- 2. Abolition of feudal autocracy in the Shan States and other „Excluded Areas“.**
- 3. Democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry.**
- 4. Freedom of expression, organisation, demonstration by placing printing presses, meeting halls etc. at the disposal of the toiling masses.**
- 5. The right of every citizen to bear arms.**

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<sup>1</sup> Zöllner 2000, 514-523.

It follows an analysis of the international situation from which conclusions are drawn for Burma.

## **I. International**

**1. The British and French Governments in their holy war upon the Nazi Germany, declared their war-aims in which they professed to defend the democracy and freedom of weak nations.**

**However, (a) the fact that the fallen Polish Government, which was a class Government of landlords and industrialists, had to flee from Poland abandoning the Polish people to their fate, rendering an easy victory to the invading Germans - which is a clear evidence of moral and political bankruptcy of the Polish Government [...]**

## **II. Burma**

**Our reading of the international situation is in complete contrast with that of our imperialist rulers. But we cannot shut our eyes to true fact as we know them in spite of our imperialist censorship of news. As to the true character of the present war, we need not have any information about it. It is our own experience. Burma is still unfree. And yet our imperialist rulers have the cheek to declare that they are for democracy. [...]**

**It is often pointed by our rulers as well our constitutionalists that the present constitution of Burma, though not fully satisfactory, is an advance towards democracy. But how can it be so, when it retains feudal autocracy in the “Excluded Areas”, when it protects vested interests in several of its sections, when it confers dictatorial powers upon the Governor who comes from a land eight thousand miles away? It is indeed a far cry from democracy.**

2.5 February 23, 1940: Debate in the Parliament on the issue of Burma’s Attitude towards the War<sup>1</sup>

The debate was induced by a resolution condemning the war in very general terms and deploring the declaration of war by the Burmese government without consulting the Burmese people on this issue.

The last part of the resolution that was finally passed was worded thus:

**c) That this House is of opinion that Government should convey to the British Government, that in consonance with the avowed aims of the present war, it is essential in order to secure the co-operation of the Burmese people that the principles of democracy with adequate safeguards for the preservation of the rights and interests of the minorities, be immediately applied to Burma and her policy be guided by her people and that Burma should be recognised as an independent nation entitled to frame her own constitution and further that suitable action should be taken in so far as it is possible in the immediate present to give effect to that principle in regard to the present governance of Burma**

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<sup>1</sup> Burma Legislature. Proceedings of the First House of Representatives, Vol VII, Seventh Session, February-April, 1940, 355-420.

Here are some statements illustrating the varying role of “democracy” in the eyes of different speakers.

U Kun spoke for the Freedom Bloc formed in October 1939.<sup>1</sup> The Bloc linked the Burmese support of the British in the war to the immediate promise of independence.

**We have [...] in good faith started the propaganda for the freedom of Burma from bondage. It is our own lookout. That was how we came to found the Burma Freedom Bloc. [...] As the time at our disposal is short, I hope we shall not take up the time of the House longer than is absolutely necessary and have this matter not only discussed here but decided and the decision sent on to the British Government. Those who try to lengthen the debate unnecessarily will not be serving the peoples of Burma but might even be the spies of those who do not want Burma to get freedom. Whether it should be the restoration of monarchical Government as desired by the *Nepyidaw* Party or democracy as envisaged by the Americans or the British or Dictatorships as those in Germany, or Italy or even of Bolshevism as in Russia, it is for the Burmese people to decide for themselves (*Hear, hear*). If the British declaration that all peoples should be free is to be credited, it follows that those peoples should have a right to decide their own form of Government. That is all I have to say on this subject.**

Mr. Bourne represented the British Chamber of Commerce:

**Mr. Speaker, there seems to be a certain air of unreality about this motion. It seems to me that war and war aims are being made an opportunity for the expression of Burmese opinion on the question of constitutional advance. The speeches we have heard are not only unreal but display some confused thinking. [...] Let this be made quite clear. The successful issue of this war is of as great importance and a defeat of the Western democracies as great a disaster of Burma as for any other unit of the British Empire and for that matter, for the whole world. And let this also be clear. He who is not prepared to stand by the right, and fight for it, is shirking a grave responsibility and this must strike at the very root of Burma's claim for freedom. For how can the responsibility of freedom - the responsibility of full self-government - be granted to one who puts his sense of duty in one scale and his bargainings, heavily loaded, in the other? That right is on the side of the democracies is admitted by nine-tenths of the world. Nothing would so antagonise opinion - world opinion - nothing would be so damning to Burma's cause, as hesitation in the present danger to support the right without reservation.**

2.6 August 1940, Hla Pe and Nu „Political Dictionary“ (1940)

Possibly the first dictionary written by Burmese for Burmese people in Burmese language was a “Political Dictionary” compiled by Nu and another ex-student of Rangoon University, Hla Pe.<sup>1</sup> Two entries of the work directly referred to the term “Democracy”.

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<sup>1</sup> The Bloc was a three-party-alliance between Dr. Ba Maw's *Sinyetha* (Poor Man's) Party, the *Dobama Asiyone* and the branch of a party centred in Mandalay.

## ဒီမိုကရေစီ DEMOCRACY

**It is a Greek word meaning government of the people. The government in France, England and United States is not democratic; rather it is capitalist government. The population of England is more than 45 million, but the eligible voters are only 22 million. It only shows that the system is not democratic. In Burma also, out of the population of 14 million, only 1 million could vote, indicating that it is not a democracy at all. Only the party whose members are elected by all adults is the representative of the people. There is no disqualification because of property ownership; every grown up person can stand for election.**

## ပဒေသရာဇ်စနစ် FEDERAL UNION

**It is a preliminary proposal to unite all democratic nations before international unity can be achieved. To accomplish this idea, an association called the Federal Union was formed in 1939 in London.**

**The idea was proposed by Clarence K. Streit. He urged Britain, United States, France, Belgium, Netherlands, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Finland, Switzerland, Canada, Australia, South Africa, New Zealand and Ireland to be united.**

**This proposal was based on the fact that apart from some countries, most of them are geographically connected around the Atlantic Ocean, and they all share a common cultural development. Also, in commerce, they do 70 percent of their business among themselves.**

**The constitution of the Federal Union will be based on the United States'. There will be an executive board including all states. There will be laws to regulate army, navy and shipping, and also foreign relations. Each member state is free to self-govern, but the governments must be democratic (actually not yet true democracy; it is a system which benefits the minority, but claimed to be democracy in Britain and France.) Territories like Gibraltar, Suez Canal and colonies will be governed by the Federal Union.**

2.7 September 1940, Article in the Nagani Weekly<sup>2</sup>

**MPs in ding-dong fights - By a parliamentary Correspondent<sup>3</sup>**

**As some Opposition members had taken side with the government, no usual contention took place at the Lower House legislative assembly session this week.**

**When U Ba Thi was with the Opposition, he usually walked out when the Governor-General issued orders related to war.<sup>4</sup> He usually objected to proposals that called for more budgets. Now that the other Opposition members had set conditions on him, he encountered difficulties.**

**On September 16, he was made to represent the government at the parliamentary session to put forward the proposal on the latter's donation of K 36,000 towards the military relief fund. The chairman pointed out that consideration had to be**

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<sup>1</sup> Hla Pe later became one of the Thirty Comrades who formed the nucleus of the Burmese Army. He adopted the name Let Ya and was known after the war only under this name (see above 2.5).

<sup>2</sup> Vol 16, 2: .6 (16.9.1940).

<sup>3</sup> Translation from Burmese to English: Ye Nyunt.

<sup>4</sup> U Ba Thi tabled the „war resolution“ discussed on February 23, 1940 on Burma's stand towards the declaration of war against Germany.

made in conformity with the Administrative Law whether the purpose to use the public tax was in the interests of the nation. Eventually, the proposal had to be adopted by vote. Going against his former principles, U Ba Thi voted in favor of the proposal.

#### **Rally of strength**

As a “No-confidence” motion would be put forward at the September 17 session, the Opposition members were rallying strength while Chief Minister U Saw<sup>1</sup> was throwing a hint that the position of prime minister would be appointed not only in the 8<sup>th</sup> slot but also in the ninth. The number of persons gathering followers to vie for the post of prime minister amounted to nearly ten.

A candidate for premiership, who was a former prime minister, was rather irritated after four of his followers had been bought by another candidate. Those in the inner circle said there were persons pulling strings, by making phone calls to U Saw or visiting him by car.

There was excitement in entire Yangon on September 17, the day when no-confidence motion would be submitted. It also coincided with the day when Venerable U Wisara would be lauded with ceremony.

Not only civil police but also military police were assigned to various police stations in Yangon. RET buses were kept ready. Police officers in hired cars were on patrol.

#### **Demonstration**

About 100 persons in five buses went round the Secretariat Building, chanting slogans like “No more U Saw government!” Detectives put their heads together as they had found leaflets signed “Naganet” (black dragon) at all places of Yangon.

The Secretariat Building was placed under the police cordon, and the in and out exits on the Spark Street<sup>2</sup> side only were kept open.

Those with permission and clerks only were admitted into the building, and the House meeting room was guarded by policemen and detectives in plainclothes.

The lounges had been packed with people since 10.30, and there were also people betting on the downfall of the U Saw government. A monk asked a reporter nearly about the situation and challenged him to bet by taking a side.

Before the clock struck 11m U Ba Hlaing and Doctor U Thein Maung came into the meeting room, and the former was seen taking notes.

The meeting was attended by the chief minister and almost all MPs, but the talks were rather tedious. Chairman U Chit Hlaing teased U Ba Hlaing, who would table the motion, by teaching him how to address the prime minister and giving him an honorific “Honour Rabbi” before his name. Thus, he invited Honour Rabbi U Ba Hlaing to put forward the motion. At this invitation, all MPs burst into laughter, reverberating the room.

U Ba Hlaing said the present assembly did not have confidence in the Chief Minister U Saw’s government, and that U Saw, since when he was the minister of forestry, had wielded a bamboo rod with which he beat other and there was

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<sup>1</sup> U Saw had become Chief Minister only on September 9, 1940 after the previous government under U Pu was defeated in a non-confidence motion on September 7.

<sup>2</sup> Today: Bo Aung Kyaw Street.

bloodshed wherever he went. He continued to say that now that he was chief minister, the extent of danger posed by him was too great.

U Mya, leader of the impoverished patriots, seconded the motion, saying that U Saw government had not mended the mistakes left by the previous government, and also did not release political prisoners, and that he supported the motion, withdrawing the previous promise.

Kassaka U Po Mya, the next one to second the motion, made the entire session laugh. He said that before a week turned after the previous government was toppled, another was formed, and that the people called the Auk Hluttaw (Lower House) the Myauk Hluttaw (Monkey House).

U Aung Zan Wai said it was not Myauk Hluttaw, but was the Swe-cha Hluttaw (the House that aggravates situations), and enriched his talk with the recitation of poems composed by himself.

Leader of the Opposition party U Ba Pe said that when a new government came up in Britain, it had to declare its political ideology and the opposition members had the opportunity to discuss points dissatisfied in the ideology. In Burma, he said, the government ideology was known only when the no-confidence motion was made, and the current government did not have any ideology. He also called on the government to explain its proposals on the military.

Doctor U Thein Maung did not censure the government, and instead put all the blames on his former mentors U Ba Pe and U Pu, former chief minister, who were sitting on his right and left. He also remarked that U Pu had not deserved the position of chief minister.

U Pu, former chief minister, said U Saw was a selfish traitor who would never be a beacon light for the posterity.

U Ba Oo, leader of the Nay Pyi Taw group, seconded the no-confidence motion, saying the people did not like U Saw, and suggested holding an election to prove this.

From the government side, the minister of commerce said unity collapsed because of Au Yu Wa and Hoke Sein, who were disciples of U Pu and U Ba Pe, he said U Pu and U Ba Pe were traitors and as they could not lead uprightly faithful youths, they were not in a position to lead the country.

Chief Minister U Saw said U Ba Pe had been appointed to a position of prime minister in forming the government, and promised that he would transfer the post of chief minister to him in two to six months as he was well qualified.

U Ba Pe rejected the chief minister's proposal, giving the reason that he had painful knees, and seconded the no-confidence motion. Talking about the military proposal, he said he himself was willing to regain independence, and remarked that without physical power, independence could not be wrestled back. Then, he dared the MPs to stand out if they had physical power.

Nattalin U Maung mocked, "Are you going to arrest me if I stand out?"

Finally, the no-confidence motion was defeated by 69 No votes and 42 Yes votes. The defeat was also due to some MPs who were aiming at the premiership and had cast vote against the motion.

The leader and three MPs of the Europeans group were reluctant to rise from their seats to cast vote.

**The mass outside the building was rather depressed as they heard about the defeat of the motion.**

### **3 1945 - 1948**

#### 3.1 1945-1946: Aung San's concept of "Burmese Democracy"

After the war, the Anti-Fascist Peoples' Freedom League (AFPFL) founded during the war as an alliance of the Burmese Army, the Communists and the Socialists was enlarged in order to represent all political groups and all sectors of the Burmese society. Under the leadership of Aung San, it pressed the British Governor to accelerate the process to independence by including members of the AFPFL in the Executive Council, the de facto government of the province. The governor refused and Aung San formed the Peoples' Volunteers Organisation, a kind of private army loyal to him.

The following text is an analysis of some documents and speeches published in 1945 and 1946.

The Manifesto of the Anti Fascist Peoples' Freedom League (Burma Patriotic Front) – 1946 stated:<sup>1</sup>

- (1) ...
- (2) **A constitution for Independent Burma should be drawn up by the people on the following lines:-**
  - (a) **Genuine personal liberty, different from that given by the Japanese, should be recognised.**
  - (b) **Freedom of thought should be allowed to the fullest extent.**
  - (c) **Freedom of speech, freedom of writing, freedom of expression and freedom of press should be established.**
  - (d) **Freedom of organisation, association *e.g.*, holding meetings and demonstrations should exist. ...**
  - (e) **Freedom of conscience should be established. The State should remain neutral on religious questions. ...**
  - (f) ...
  - (g) **Freedom from illegal arrest and detention should be the right of the people.**
  - (h) **There should be fairness and justice in economic and social dealings.**
  - (i) **No discrimination is to be made with regard to race, religion and sex...**
  - (j) ...
  - (k) ...

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<sup>1</sup> AFPFL, The New Burma in the New World, Yangon 1946, 13-18.

(l) ...

**(m) Equal opportunity should exist for all citizens to receive education, irrespective to race, religion, sex or social status.**

Furthermore, in their Manifesto the AFPFL pointed out the final political objective and aspiration of a completely independent Burma.

**In other words, the right of self determination to be exercised by our people through a Constituent Assembly on true democratic principles.**

The AFPFL underlined that ...

**The method which we call constitutional today will become the only correct, and therefore `most revolutionary` method by which we will win our goals. What is the guarantee for that? The guarantee is the rise of the democratic and progressive forces in the wake of the dying fascism.**

The meaning of democracy and the target of peace for the AFPFL takes a bearing on the “Tehran three Power Declaration” which is published in parts in the AFPFL Manifesto.

**There is no doubt that mankind, as a whole, wants a peace that will endure that will avoid the curse of wars and that will bestow freedom and progress on all nations. “To win the peace” is the battle cry. This urge of the time is reflected in the leadership of the entire civilised world. “We recognise fully the supreme responsibility resting upon us and all the United Nations to make a peace which will command the good will of the overwhelming masses of the people of the world and banish the scourge and terror of war for many generations” (Tehran three Power Declaration)**

In an interview given to the press by the AFPFL on 14<sup>th</sup> May 1945,<sup>1</sup> the organisation pointed out, that they want

**...this constitution more or less on a democratic basis that would be suitable to the people of the country. We can not yet say what will be the main features.**

The term, that it has to be suitable for the people, fits into the policy and the programme of the AFPFL, because the main feature had to be designed by the people.

**In concrete expression, Burma desires to determine her own constitution by means of a Constituent Assembly elected on universal adult suffrage.**

On 16<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> August 1945 most of the Burmese leaders were assembled. Beside the leaders of the AFPFL the representatives of Thakin Party, Sinyetha Party, Burmese Muslim League, Chinese Association and other prominent leaders from all over Burma were present. Again, they underlined the right of self-determination.

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, 39-48.

**...the people of Burma desire to convene a Constituent Assembly to determine their own constitution.**

With the background of the end of the Second World War, they believed as well,

**... the United Nations would remain as united in peace ... [and that]... the free democratic would must, therefore, recognise their right of freedom, in accordance with the repeated declaration of the United Nations.**

The leaders also remembered the long and rocky road of struggle in order to attain their right of self-determination which developed and intensified with the beginning of the Second World War in 1939 and the beginning of the fighting between the Germans and the British. In the last years before the Burmese achieved their freedom the struggle transformed into an armed mass movement. In the eyes of the leaders,

**... it is clear in the course of history that a provisional government should follow an armed insurrection before the convention of a Constituent Assembly, the Anti Fascist fighters and all those who want to take their share in the rehabilitation of their own country should immediately form a provisional government. [...] The provisional government should be a national government sufficiently representative of the democratic section of the public opinion in the country.**

At the first congress of the AFPFL on 20<sup>th</sup> January 1946 the leaders of the AFPFL lay down the structure of the process towards independence and considered the problems for Burmese freedom. In his Presidential Address Aung San pointed out the significance of the individual in an established free Burma and the contribution each man has to take to achieve success in the struggle for independence.<sup>1</sup>

**For years, and for the first time in our history, our nation has lain prostrate under the heels of foreign imperialism. For years, our creative potentialities have been held in leash and gradually atrophied by the scheme of things of imperialism, so that we can not order to ourselves a life we hold most dear, a life far better, richer and more complete, a life in which the free development of each will be the condition of the free development of all. And for one generation after another, our nation rose and rallied again and again so that we might live and develop freely as a nation and individuals. Bit by bit, our movement has grown and advanced amidst shoals of reaction, passions and prejudices. Bit by bit the generation before us had laid the foundation for us to build upon. To-day we, standing on top of there creation, may feel like belittling there efforts. But such is the nature of a freedom struggle and historical progress. The development of history is not a sudden and accidental flash in the pan, but a continuous dynamic process involving several layers of men and woman reacting to such given historical conditions extant in life and society; and it is not always a smooth placid one in its course. This then is how we must conceive of our freedom struggle, that it is a developing process which the entire nation must help to work in the light of its objective possibilities, that it may run several gauntlets before it**

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<sup>1</sup> Aung San, *Burma's Challenge*, 3rd edition, March 1974, Yangon, U Aung Gyi, 55-103.

**comes to its destined goal and that it can not be treated as a question of days month or even years in a number of instances. When we come to see our freedom struggle in such perspective, we also come to know that we cannot, when victory comes, carry away the laurels all to ourselves which must likewise be shared by all peoples and generations concerned together, for they have also contributed their parts in their way and time.**

In Aung San's opinion, Imperialism was the reason for the spread and the success of Fascism throughout the world. Invented in Italy and modified in Germany, a lot of countries adopted Fascism as a political system and as the logical consequence of the increasing strength of capitalism. The conduct of the imperialists at the beginning of the fight against Fascism almost resulted in losing the war. Only when the allies realised that they were in need of the democratic movements in the world to defeat Fascism, there was hope to ban this ideology from the world again.

**In Burma, British imperialism declared our country to be a belligerent without consulting the opinion of the people at all and in that way invited aggression to our country while it took no sufficient care to defend her or let and enable our people to defend. At the same time, British imperialism did not do anything to give our people a cause to fight for, for it made itself clear at the very outset that the war or peace aims enunciated in the Atlantic Charter and any other Charters and statements did not apply to British possessions like India and Burma. That was how they had at first fought the war against Fascism and nearly lost. But then the forces of history proved to be much stronger than the will and wishes of our imperialists. They were forced to ally with the Soviet Union, they were forced to come to the help of China which had to fight alone against Japanese militarism for years, they were compelled to go to their own people more and more, they had to rally all peoples of the world and especially those suffering under the heel of Fascist dictatorship. They had to appeal to world democratic opinion and thus became allies, though unwilling of progressive forces in their own country and the world. Thus they had to face with the help and support of the peoples of the world, doling out bits of power and concessions to the latter in return of their help and support. But what matters here was not these concessions of power on the part of imperialism but the iron logic of the situation which made them go to the peoples and fight and win the war against Fascism and in that way defeated Fascism weakened their own position still further while the progressive movements of the peoples all the world over have been made much stronger than ever, and in many cases, have even won the peace for themselves. This is the perspective that World War II. has opened before us.**

After a discussion about the economical system implemented by the British and the effects for the Burmese society, a passage about legal affairs, the police and the imperial system in general, Aung San addressed the British Governor of Burma, who in his eyes was the Dictator of Burma.

**This is what explains the disagreement between the Governor and ourselves. We are not asking for the impossible. We are only asking that the Governor should**

**form an Executive Council which will be representative of all principal political groups as he himself has said in his speeches and as an Interim Government in our circumstances must always be. We are only asking that this Executive Council, though legally to be solely responsible to the Governor, should be as democratic practice and convention be able to act with collective responsibility to the people. We came down far from our original stand for the formation of a National Government which must consist of all Burmans and which must have all powers. We agree to the reservation of important subjects like Defence, External Affairs and scheduled Areas in the hands of the Governor's nominees both Burman and British. We even do not grudge a very important portfolio like Finance being held by one of his nominees. The only thing we ask of the Governor is that, though legally he has the sole responsibility for administering the country, he should as by convention democratise his rule.**

Aung San underlined that the political manoeuvre of the Governor would fail and that the Burmese people could not keep calm and take their time on the march towards freedom because the programme of national freedom stood firm and the time soon would be ripe for free elections in Burma.

**Very well, then, what is our programme and how do we intend to go about it? You have already known that our objective is the right of our nation to self-determination, and our proposals to the British Government for realising this objective are immediate elections on universal adult suffrage and then convocation of Constituent Assembly. In the meantime we have suggested that there should be a National Government which will be competent to deal with British Government for whatever arrangements that must be deemed necessary to be done for the eventual transfer of power to the hands of our people. But the British Government merely gives us a White Paper with vague promises about the so-called Promised Land of theirs-Dominion Status within an indefinite period of time. [...] It won't be difficult for the British Government to hold elections early if only it is willing to do so.**

If there were free elections in Burma, Aung San was sure that the Burmese would win them. After the elections the British would have to face the will of the Burmese people for independence and the will of forming a free nation with a single government. If the British denied the wish of the Burmese people than the people would know how to pave the way to achieve power and freedom, Aung San said. He continued that the Burmese people would not have to fear any military power if they were able to mobilise a movement towards national freedom. Within this movement all parts of the society would be involved and would work together aiming for national freedom and prosperity.

**This leads me to the task of organising and mobilising our entire people in the country for our common national objective. Of course the first thing before us is national unity. Now we have the AFPFL as the central organisation symbolising this. We must further consolidate its position, systematise it and develop it. We have placed our suggestions for its constitution and further improvement before**

**you. But here I want to discuss what we mean by national unity and what form it should take. By national unity we don't mean only top unit, we mean the unit of the entire people, irrespective of race, religion, sex and sectarian and party interests, in action and not in words for national tasks and objectives. As for the form this unity has to take, there are some views that all parties should merge their identities completely with the national organisation. Those holding such views are genuinely concerned that the existence of parties may undermine the strength of the national movement. But we must face this question as practical one. Parties will exist even after their formal abolition if I understand by 'party', it means an organisation of people holding more or less the same view on questions of the day and representing definite interests whether they are the interests of workers or peasants or others. What is important is not exactly that they exist or do not exist but that they will not engage in partisan activities detrimental to national interests. On all national questions, they should and must come together and work together without any sectarianism in the affair. Their role as parties should be confined to such as persuading the greater bulk of such representative body of the national organisation as this conference to their school of thought. In other words their role should be educative and not partisan. If this is so, the existence of parties will not be a source of weakness of our organisation. In this way we can develop dynamically to a higher and higher form of unity till we have the best we can have. This is our primary task.**

At the second session of the Supreme Council of the AFPFL on the 16<sup>th</sup> May 1946, Aung San mainly criticised the British imperialism in Burma. In the beginning of his address he compared the economical situation before the colonisation of the British in Burma with the current status quo. He emphasized especially the worsening situation in agrarian affairs. First of all, there was the integration of the agrarian economy into the world market making the peasants dependent on the rise and fall of the world market prices and leaving them overburdened with such heavy debts, that they would become slaves to their creditors and would not be able to pay the rents for their purposes. Secondly, Aung San did not understand why the British denied the Burmese people the right to defend their country. Even though it was quite clear to him that the Burmese had not have the opportunity to defend their country by themselves, he criticised the unwillingness of the British to give them the chance to take care of medium size security affairs and set up a small and basic Burmese force led by the Governor of Burma. In his address he shows the will to keep British - Burmese ties alive and cultivate a new friendship of British and Burmese people within the framework of the Commonwealth of Nations.<sup>1</sup>

**We have only asked that though, legally, the Governor's personal rule is there, it should, as by convention, be democratised and should be able to account itself to the people, that all subjects including Defence and External Affairs should be handed over to the charge of his Executive Council and that, if at all there are**

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, 104-165.

**insuperable difficulties, which however we don't see, in the way of handing the subjects of Defence and External Affairs to Burmans, all other subject should be entrusted to Burmans.**

This last passage makes quite clear that for Aung San the main meaning of the term “democracy” was identical to the connotation of “independence”. Although he spoke of democracy with regards to the participation of all groups within the Burmese society, the term itself rather designated the final stage of a development which had already been designed: Albeit the people may organise themselves in different groups supporting one or another opinion, they all have to act in line for national unity and national freedom and put their own interests behind the national affairs at stake. Furthermore, those national affairs could only be handled by the AFPFL that had been built up to provide the framework for the mainstream of popular will and was the one and only mass organisation everybody had to follow on the path towards national independence.

**Basic demands of the our people are [...], firstly, the formation of an interim national government vested with full powers of a responsible democratic government and representing principal political groups in our country. Secondly, we want to have elections on adult franchise. Thirdly, such elected representatives of the national should form a Constituent Assembly free from any foreign control to frame a constitution for a free, independent Burma. These are our basic demands. Can the people of Burma realise these basic demands? I think, we can. But this depends upon the strength of our unity and organisation, on our ability to correctly gauge trends of events about us and prepare ahead, in our constant and sedulous awareness of your strength and our limitation, for any and every possibility, good or bad, that events might unfold to us.**

When Aung San was speaking about the political situation in the world, he never made any difference between the political systems and ideologies existing throughout time. As already seen before, democracy is not perceived mainly as a system of participation and a means to deal with different opinions about one subject, but as the general step on the way of self-determination of colonised countries. In Aung San's opinion democracy represented a stage that has to be taken to reach a higher level of socialism/communism.

**... roughly speaking, [there is now] a division of the world into two main camps, the division in forces of freedom and democracy on the one hand and the forces of anti-freedom, anti-democracy reaction on the other; or rather between forces for the old world and those for a new world, between so to speak, old democracies and new democracies; and not between democracy and communism as it is generally painted to be. For from any point of view, communist or non-communist, there is no immediate prospect of communism being successfully established anywhere in the world. Even in the Soviet Union where the Communist Party is the sole ruling party without any rival, be the admission of the communists by themselves, only the primary stage towards communism is**

**still achieved, and they cannot as yet definitely forecast when full-blown communism can and will be accomplished. To quote the far-framed Chinese communist leader, Mao Tse-tung, to illustrate again, “socialism (not communism as yet, mind you) can be reached only through democracy; this is an undisputed axiom of Marxism. [...] It is therefore clear that the ideological struggle now going on all over the world is not between communism and democracy, but as I have sad, between old and new democracy. This conflict of ideologies is the reflection of the conflict of mutual material interests primarily and results of lack of mutual knowledge and understanding secondarily.**

This quote shows that democracy describes only the level where self-determination of the Burmese people will be achieved, but not the end of the political path Burma has to take. Democracy is just a step to more participation of the people within a socialist, and later on, a communist system. Both ideologies, the old and the new democracy, co-exist in all countries side by side. Therefore it is impossible, in the words of Aung San, to divide the world as a whole into two parts. In all systems there are people holding on to the old democracy of imperialism and colonialism and those pushing forward ideas of the new democracy.

Even if this shows a sense of internationalism, Aung San goes décor with the ideas of nationalism. He understands nationalism as an ideology that makes people love their own country with all its people and encourages them to fight imperialism and tyranny.

**If such principles [...] are principles of nationalism, well and good I certainly think that we should foster them and adopt them. The implications of such principles also mean in my view that every nation in the world must be free not only externally (i.e., free from any foreign rule) but also internally. That is to say that every nation in the world being a conglomeration of races and religions should develop such a nationalism as is compatible with the welfare of one and all, irrespective of race or religion or class or sex. This is my nationalism and I believe that such a nationalism is but a complement of true scientific internationalism.**

In general, national freedom, self-determination and independence are the main demands of Aung San. Political ideologies like democracy and nationalism are just keys to open the doors to such achievements. His main target is to reach socialism/communism as the final stage to achieve in the development of a nation.

### 3.2 A Note on the Elections of April 1947

After the war, the first elections were held in 1947. The people elected to the first Burmese government were supposed to draw a constitution for the newly independent country. This constitutional assembly endorsed the ideas put forward by Aung San and some expert formulated them properly in legal language. Aung San as the head of the AFPFL toured the

country and scored an overwhelming victory. His party won all but eight seats that went to the communists in their strongholds in and around the Bago Yoma area.

Many politicians had resorted to boycott tactics before the elections again like many Karen leaders and Dr. Ba Maw and U Saw. Aung San together with members of his cabinet was assassinated shortly after the elections by gunmen hired by his political rival, U Saw, on July 19.

### **III The Parliamentary Period (January 1948 – October 1958)**

#### Introduction

Burma became independent on January 4, 1948 at 4.20 a.m., a date assigned as auspicious by astrologers. At the same time, the constitution of September 24, 1947 became effective. The constituent assembly elected in April 1947 became the parliament until the first elections under the new constitution. According to section 233, they were to be held within 18 months after independence but due to the civil war that broke out shortly after independence, had to be postponed until 1951. The civil war against the Karen rebels and the communists very much influenced the discourses on democracy in this period and later.

The AFPFL members of parliament dominated the sessions of the legislative that were held twice a year following the rhythm of the parliament under the rules enacted in 1937. Before each session, a meeting of the AFPFL was held. Here, the laws to be passed by the parliament were introduced. The AFPFL remained an alliance of various organisations and factions the backbone of which being the Socialist Party and the Trade Union Congress (TUC) and the All Burma Peasant Organisation (ABPO). Nu as Prime Minister and chairman of the AFPFL thus had to balance a variety of sometimes competing interests of different “parties within the party”.

The following sub-sections contain material from speeches from representatives of the AFPFL, Nu and Ba Swe, from the Communist Party of Burma and Maung Maung who commented on Burma’s development as a journalist and a lawyer. In addition, information about the elections held in this period is given.

#### 1 A Note on the elections of 1951 / 1952

They were conducted in three stages over a period of seven months because of the civil war. Despite the military enforcing security, only 1 ½ million out of 8 million eligible voters cast their ballots. The AFPFL and some parties affiliated to it won over 80 % of the seats many of which were not contested. The gradual conducting of the elections opened the possibility for defeated candidates to try it again in another constituency. The non-AFPFL seats were won by independents and small parties. A compact opposition did not exist.

## 2 1951 – Ba Swe’s Revolutionary Socialist Programme

From the Socialist Party originate the first statements after independence that may be termed “programmatic”. In 1952, a booklet entitled “The Burmese Revolution” was published. It contains two speeches by Ba Swe (“Workers’ Struggle in Burma”,<sup>1</sup> giving an historical overview, and “The Pattern of the Burmese Revolution”<sup>2</sup>) and an Appendix on the “Guide to Socialism in Burma”.

In the second treatise, Ba Swe outlines an “non-dogmatic Marxism” compatible with Buddhism. The programme is based on five “fundamentals”: “1) People’s Democracy; 2) People’s Economy; 3) People’s Education; 4) People’s Health, and 5) People’s Social Security”.

The section on democracy explains why and how a “democratic machinery in administration” is to be established. It aims at getting over and substituting the “bureaucratic machinery” still existing as a consequence of colonial rule.

**Our Constitution says all power shall be “derived from the people”. Today, all administrative heads, from village headman to the President of the Union are representatives of the people duly elected. But the bureaucratic machinery is still standing in the way of the people ... Just as power is derived from the people, administration must be based on the people’s mandate. This alone is correct in principle.**

It follows an outline of the measures already undertaken to bring forward a “democratisation of our administrative machinery”. Due to the civil war, however, the plans could not yet be implemented. Moreover, the intended process should be developed “along with Land Nationalisation”. Thus, it will take time and energy to realise the “cherished democratic ideals”.

As a consequence of this programme, a separate “Ministry for the Democratisation of the Administration” was set up some years later.

## 3 1955 - „Democracy in the Village“ From an Interview with Home Minister Khin Maung Gale

After independence, the government tried to reform the administration and introduce bottom-up democratic structures. From 1952 onwards, a “Ministry of Democratization of Local Administration and Local Bodies” was created. In 1953, a “Democratic Local Government

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<sup>1</sup> Speech given on May 1, 1951.

<sup>2</sup> Speech given at the congress of trade unions, December 18-21, 1951).

Act” was passed. One year later, the first elections took place. One promoter of the concept was Bo Khin Maung Gale, born 1912, who served as Home Minister from 1952 on. In 1955, he was interviewed by “The Guardian”.<sup>1</sup>

**[...] Up to now the man in the street has toiled and sweated while powers and privileges werethe monopoly of a few smooth-talking intellectuals. It’s high time now that the man in the street gets into his own. [...]**

**They [ the democratization measures] are necessary for psychological reasons first of all. We want to create a new mental climate in the country. We want to dispel suspicions and break down age-old prejudices. We want a spirit of participation to run through the entire scheme of the state. We want unity. Yes, because we are a democracy, there will be diversity in our unity because we shall not tolerate regimentation, but we want that unity in diversity.**

**You know the popular Burmese prejudice against ‘government’. We are all taught that government was an enemy, an evil to be avoided as much as possible. We were taught by our elders that there are five enemies to be wary of: government; water [...]; fire; thieves; those who do not love us. As you see, government tops the list, and it is the first enemy of the people. [...]**

**But, consider, can you do without government? [...] I want to answer with an example. You know what we say about wives. To have wife is bad; [...] to have not a wife to do with is also bad. [...] If a was an *arhat*, a totally emancipated holy man, then I wouldn’t want a wife [...] But I am no *arhat* [...] and I need the solace and the comfort of the joys of family life. [...]**

**So with government [...] Government is bad because it means restraint and discipline to some extent. If every man in the community is a good man [...] government may perhaps be dispensed with. But man is not perfect. [...] So we need to have an organised society regulated by law and order [...] So, let us get reconciled to the necessity of government. Let us give and take. Let people get part in government, and then they will not only see that government is a necessity, but that it has it good points as well.**

It follows a question and an answer on the possibility of a stateless society as propagated by communist theory. The idea is dismissed as propaganda by the communists. Finally, the interviewer asks for the meaning of “democratic socialism”.

**In my view, not only democracy and socialism, but Buddhism also are interwoven. Unless there is a moral and spiritual content in a political ideology, there would be mere abstract nothingness. Your exponents of the stateless society are afraid of religion and Buddhism. My socialism and democracy are an essential part of Buddhism, for they are a philosophy and a way of life which naturally emerge in the light of Buddhism.**

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<sup>1</sup> *The Guardian* 3, 4: 7-8 (February 1955)

### 3 A Note on the Elections of 1956

After a “dress rehearsal” with the Rangoon Municipal Elections in April 1956 in which the AFPFL won 33 of 35 seats, the League was confident to win the elections of 1956 as well. The outcome was different. The League won 145 of the 250 seats and affiliated parties some 28 more. The opposition under the umbrella of a “National United Front” won 47 seats and other opposition parties 7. But the actual voting figures revealed the high degree of discontent with the League. The Front alone got 1.139.286 votes, the League 1.743.816. Because of the votes for other parties and independent candidates, the percentage of votes for the AFPFL fell to 48 %.

This loss of popular support had consequences. Nu resigned as Prime Minister in June in order to reorganise the AFPFL and Ba Swe was elected Prime Minister instead.

### 4 January 1958, Nu on his Concept of Democracy at the Third AFPFL All-Burma Congress

The first congress of the League after independence<sup>1</sup> was convened after Nu’s taking over of the premiership from Ba Swe in February 1957 and the split of the AFPFL that became apparent in June 1958 when Nu’s rivals within the AFPFL tabled a no-confidence motion against the Prime Minister.

Nu opened the congress with a lengthy speech<sup>2</sup> on January 29. It is divided into three parts: 1. The goals of the AFPFL;<sup>3</sup> 2. What the AFPFL has done to achieve the goals;<sup>4</sup> 3. What the AFPFL must do in the future.<sup>5</sup> In the last section, Nu talks about democracy after having dealt with the issue of world peace. He refers to part 2 of his explanation informing the AFPFL’s defence of democracy<sup>6</sup> and repeats the slogan “the victory of AFPFL is a victory for Democracy and the defeat of AFPFL is a defeat for Democracy”.<sup>7</sup>

After some satirical remarks on people who doubt the AFPFL’s belief in democracy, he gives a general definition of the term<sup>8</sup> stresses that “true” democracy must be discriminated from

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<sup>1</sup> The first All-Burma Congress of the League was held in January 1946, the second after Aung San’s assassination in December 1947.

<sup>2</sup> The English translation (Nu 1958) covers 58 pages.

<sup>3</sup> Nu 1958, 3-44.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 44-51.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 51-58.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 50-51. Here, Nu refers to the fight against the insurgents in the early 50s.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 55.

<sup>8</sup> Democracy is none other than a system of political organization, under which for the benefit of the people, the people themselves, or representatives of the people chosen by the people themselves in a free and fair election, govern the country.” (ibid, 56)

many other “false” forms<sup>1</sup> and enumerates its five “attributes”<sup>2</sup> that decide if a democracy is true or not: “1) Is there a right of Free Assembly? 2) Is there a right of free speech? 3) Is there a right of free expression? 4) Are the courts free to administer justice according to law? 5) Have the people the right to elect freely, according to the procedure laid down in the Constitution, the Government as they like and approve?”<sup>2</sup>

Nu then elaborates on these five “tests” and tries to prove that under the AFPFL government democracy exists. Every section gives examples on what kind of activities are not permitted by the AFPFL:

**Test 1: However, there is one association that the AFPFL Government has never permitted, namely, the formation or association of political parties by insurgents ... If it is insisted that when insurgents, who have resorted to arms against legally established Governments, are not permitted to form political parties, there can be no democracy, then .... There is no democracy under the AFPFL Government.**

**Test 2: ... there are some speeches that the AFPFL does not permit. (1) If the speech is meant or most likely to cause disturbance of the public peace, (2) if the speech is meant or likely to create enmity and misunderstanding between the various racial groups, or between the various religious groups in the country, or (3) if the speech is defamatory of individual persons, it will not be permitted. If it is insisted ... (as under test 1).**

**Test 3: However, one kind of writing is not permitted by the AFPFL Government. If the article, or essay, or cartoon is (i) meant or likely to disturb the public peace, or (ii) is meant or likely to create enmity and misunderstanding between the various racial groups, or between the various religious groups in the country, or (iii) is defamatory, it is not permitted to be published. Again, if it is insisted ... (as above).**

With regard to test 4 dealing with the rule of law Nu deviates from the pattern followed by then and deals at some length defending the government actions of detaining people under section 5 of the Emergency Provisions Act of 1950.<sup>3</sup> The Act allowed the detention of people for a period of up to seven years. Nu argues that to defend democracy against its enemies, special measures have to be taken in a way others than in a dictatorship. Germany and Spain, he claims, became dictatorships because the democratic governments were too lenient towards the enemies of democracy. He concludes:

**I must say that among the opposition, there are indeed very few who really believe in democracy. Before they gain power, they will take full advantage of democracy. If they should be so fortunate as to gain power, the corpse of democracy will soon after burn in the funeral pire of their power.**

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<sup>1</sup> His terms are “Imitation Democracy”, “Forged Democracy” and Goldcoated Democracy” (ibid.)

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> For the text, see [http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs6/Section\\_5\\_of\\_the\\_Emergency\\_Provisions\\_Act-en.pdf](http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs6/Section_5_of_the_Emergency_Provisions_Act-en.pdf) [October 7, 2010]. This section is still used today by the Burmese authorities to charge dissidents.

Finally, Nu states that the people are free to elect their government. They did so two times before and will do the same in two years time again.

The final section of the speech can be called an admonition. AFPFL members have to behave properly. If the opposition are saying untrue things, it is not proper to create a disturbance but to call a public meeting and exchange arguments.

**This is the way of democracy. To go and create a disturbance when a member of the opposition is speaking is the way of dictatorship. As the President of the AFPFL, I hereby disapprove and condemn such behaviour. As your President, I give this directive to you, comrades, to all the members of the AFPFL: Let me not hear again reports of unseemly behaviour on the part of the members of the AFPFL.**

**Comrades, to make Democracy stand steadfast and lasting, two things above others are needed.**

- (i) Ability to restrain and discipline oneself, and**
- (ii) A spirit of subordination of self, which keeps one always ready to make sacrifice for the good of others.**

**Comrades, the above self-discipline and a spirit of subordination of self are more essential to members of the AFPFL than to others, for as members of the AFPFL, we hold political power. Power is dangerous, especially to its possessors, whom it can corrode and destroy. Therefore, those who are members of the AFPFL must be extremely careful lest they become fascists and dictators.**

Finally, Nu closes his speech by proclaiming “Five Cardinal Rules” that have to be followed:

- 1) “We must practice the moral precepts. ... a member of the AFPFL at least should not drink, should not gamble, should not have illicit sexual relations, should not seek wealth by unjust and illegal means... 2) We must not be conceited. We must not have an exaggerated opinion of ourselves. ... 3) We must not gather strength, in the form of followers and supporters, for ourselves individually. But, we must gather strength for the AFPFL as a whole. ... 4) In our relationship with the public, we must practice the two principles of respectfulness and humility that are by the Lord Buddha as Beatitudes. ... 5) We must not depend on force and arms for our organisation. ...**

#### **IV The Intermediate Period (October 1958 – March 1962): From Caretaker Government to Coup d’Etat**

##### Introduction

This period of less than four years is of special interest for the understanding of how “Burmese Democracy” was conceptualised by Burmese people of different political and societal background.

First, at the beginning of this period, parliamentary democracy experienced some sort of break with the temporary handover of the premiership from the elected premier Nu to the head of the military, Ne Win. The transfer of power as a result of the political crisis after the split of Burma’s leading party, the AFPFL, was legitimised constitutionally by the parliament preceded by an exchange of personal letters between Nu and Ne Win.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, the transfer can be seen also as a “counter-coup” by the military’s staff officers against plans of regional commanders to take over power and thus as an extra-constitutional affair resulting from intra-military tensions that were connected to the political division.<sup>2</sup>

Anyway, the antecedents to the installation of Ne Win’s Caretaker Government are particularly interesting. Material related to the sequel of events resulting in the handover of the premiership can be found in part 1 of this chapter.

Part 2 contains some material on the time of the Caretaker Government that lasted from September 1958 to February 1960 and, thus one year longer than originally proclaimed. The Ne Win government was not able to organise elections, as promised, within a period of a half year. Consequently, Ne Win stepped down, but accepted the premiership again after the constitution was amended by the parliament.

Finally, part 3 of this chapter provides material covering the period between the elections of February 1960 and the coup of March 1962.

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<sup>1</sup> For an account of the whole story see Sein Win 1989.

<sup>2</sup> Callahan 1996, 468-480.

## 1 The antecedents of the transfer of power in October 1958

### 1.1 October 1958: The Tatmadaw. The National Ideology and Our Pledge - First Phase of the Ideological Development“<sup>1</sup>

On 21 October 1958 the National Defense Services have written the document „*The National Ideology and Our Pledge - First Phase of the Ideological Development*“ at the Defence Service Conference [sic!]. Prior to that event the country of Burma was in political turmoil with insurgencies by various communist groups. Then prime minister U Nu ‚invited‘ Army Chief of Staff General Ne Win to take over as a "caretaker government".

The document, written a few days before Ne Win was sworn in as prime minister, outlines how to pacify and rebuild the country. The key words were „Freedom - first, Democracy - second, Socialism - third.“

#### Part 1: To Restore Peace and the Rule of Law

The National Defense Services have a great responsibility to bear. Even though the communist resistance movements have been diminished to a few regional groups, overall country-wide security has not occurred yet. The rebellion has to be fully removed like a tree has to be uprooted instead of hacking off the branches.

Nonetheless the political protagonists must reach for thorough democratic means only - there is no space for violence in a democratic government. An armed uprising would mean disaster for the people.

#### Part 2: To Implant Democracy

**...this democratic Republic is opposed to any form of one-party dictatorship.**

**...maintain a social order on ‚eternal principles of Justice, Liberty and Equality‘ ...**

**All powers legislative, executive and judicial, are derived from the people...**

**...but also safeguards have been provided to prevent abuse of democratic rights by those who would lead the country to anarchy and a one-party dictatorship.**

**...this Union of Burma has declared itself a democratic country.**

**„This is made clear by the fact that sovereignty of the Union resides in the people...“**

**The Union of Burma believes in that democratic way of life which (...) allows the people full freedom to unseat or elect a government if their own choice, guarantees freedom from fear and respects human dignity.**

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<sup>1</sup> Burma. Information and Broadcasting Department 1960 *Is Trust Vindicated? A chronicle of the various accomplishments of the Government Headed by General Ne Win During the Period of Tenure from November, 1958 to February 6, 1960*, 534-541.

**Those enemies of Democracy, the above-ground Communists (...) have a way of pretending to care for Democracy but only in order to destroy democratic institutions and impose their own totalitarian regime. Therefore, Democracy is not safe (...)**

**(...), therefore must be ever alert and watchful lest it fall victim to complacency.**

**(...) democracy will flourish only if people respect the law and submit to the rule of law.**

**Once the democratic way of life is established, then can a socialist economy for the Union be established.**

Several references to the constitution of the Union of Burma are made. This democratic republic is against any form of one-party-dictatorship. All citizens should be guaranteed to have social, economical and political justice; freedom of speech, of faith, of professionalism and of assembly; equality to the law and status. The National Defense Services are sure that the people will revolt against despotism and abuse of power. The judicial, the legislative and executive have to control each other.

The Union of Burma has no space for a modernized monarchy of fascism of any other sinister system, where people are alluded to false hope and are promised peace on earth, only to establish a one-party-dictatorship.

Also, a democratic way of life is described, where the citizens have full freedom to vote or dismiss their government, where the dignity of one person is maintained and is free of fear

### Part 3: To Establish a Socialist Economy

Part 1, the restoring of peace and the rule of law and part 2, the implementation of democracy are prerequisites for the establishing of a socialist economy. It is to be understood that no one must not exploit anybody. The goal is a sufficient solution to the problem of unemployment, the economical development and a fair distribution of national products.

The socialist economy is a ‚planned economy‘. For the development of production means some industry branches and enterprises eventually have to be nationalized, yet private ventures are legal since the constitution ensures private property and entrepreneurship. Other kinds like cooperatives and joint ventures are also to be allowed.

Burma’s economical basis is agriculture but the production means are out of date and production volumes are limited to feed the population. That’s why the modernization of agriculture and the development of local economy with all it’s available resources are paramount.

1.2 March 1959: Sein Win, *The Split Story*

Sein Win was and still is one of the most respected Burmese journalists.<sup>1</sup> Shortly after the resignation of Nu, he wrote an analysis of the events leading to the takeover of government by General Ne Win.<sup>2</sup> The booklet is not about democracy but about the origins of the AFPFL split in 1958 which developed into the takeover of Ne Win. He traces the split back to the emergence of class-consciousness within the Socialists forming the core of the AFPFL. An "educated" group was led by Kyaw Nyein and Ba Swe (leaders of the later "Stable AFPFL"), an "uneducated" one by Thakin Tin and Thakin Kyaw Tun (leaders of the later "Clean AFPFL").<sup>3</sup> Nu who first had been neutral later joined the latter fraction. Thus, the Swe-Nyein and the Nu-Tin factions of the AFPFL emerged.

Here are extracts of Sein Win's summary of his assessment of the change in government:

#### HOW CAME THE CHANGEOVER

**There were rumours at that time that the changeover was affected by what was really a coup d'état and that U Nu's decision was forced on him at the point of the gun. But the real thing was not so dramatic or exciting at all [...] It was the prevailing circumstances of the moment which led U Nu to decide to step down in favour of a third party, but not for the rival faction. [...] His decision was the outcome of a sane and sober thinking. [...]**

**The Changeover was not a *coup d'état* nor had the Army any plans or desire to stage one. The Army was undoubtedly ready and fully prepared to strike back if it was struck. [...]**

**The Tin-U faction planned to subjugate the Army which they thought would stand in their way; and the Army prepared to defend against Nu-Tin action which, if unchecked, would not only cause disintegration of the armed forces, but it would consequently lead to ascension of Communists to power to turn the country into an Eastern Satelite. [...]**

**U Nu wanted to be the cleanest and the purest of all politicians, and he would not bother if his colleagues were just the opposite.**

**U Nu made the gravest mistake in his political career when he decided to take sides in the AFPFL split and assume factional leadership. [...]**

**His decision now to make over the administration to General Ne Win at the most critical junction had not only saved his faction but also the country from a blood bath and unimaginable consequences. [...]**

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<sup>1</sup> In 1988, he played a crucial role in the foundation of the NLD.

<sup>2</sup> Sein Win 1989. The book was first serialised in the newspaper *The Guardian* in January and February 1959.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 14.

**For the first time in the history of Burma, a non-Parliamentarian Prime Minister was elected to lead a Caretaker Government; and this unusual incident was the direct result of the SPLIT in the ruling party – AFPFL – leaders of which after long years of power intoxication, found it necessary to break up the League and divide it into two hostile camps.<sup>1</sup>**

## **2 October 1958 to February 1962**

For the self-image of the Caretaker Government under Ne Win's leadership, popularly known as the Bogyoke (General) Government, the title page and motto of the book "Is Trust Vindicated?" published after the elections of February 1962 is instructive. The title shows the Greek mythical Hercules cleaning the Augean Stable. The story is reprinted on the back side of the book's title. Obviously the stable to be cleaned by the Interim Government was Burma ruled by the politicians and threatened by the insurgents before Nu's resignation.

The appendix of the book contains some speeches of Ne Win, among them two addressing the Parliament on the occasion of his unanimous election on October 31, 1958 and the second on the day of his resignation – and later re-election – on February 13, 1959. The word "democracy" is used only once in a mere formal meaning. Nevertheless, some parts of the speeches might be interesting to assess Ne Win's understanding of the parliamentary system at that time.

### 2.1 October 31, 1958: Ne Win's speech before Parliament

**In my capacity as Prime Minister, duly elected by this Parliament, it behoves me, with your kind permission, sir. Speaker, to outline the policy of the new Government.**

**Before I embark on that, I would first like, with the due permission of the Speaker, to say a few words to the Members of Parliament on the developments that led to my acceptance of the Prime Ministership.**

**Mr. Speaker, Sir, this situation where no feasible alternative offered itself except for me to accept the Prime Ministership is the outcome, as most of you Members of Parliament are well aware, of the various developments that took shape about six months ago. Former Premier U Nu has frequently referred to the situation in 1948-49 when the country was a mere inch away from falling into a deep chasm. The situation, currently, was also so beset with dangers to the Union that it was almost identical to the 1948-49 position.**

**Any analytical study will quite fully indicate that these developments within the period of the last six months may be traced directly to the AFPFL split. The effects of that political split spread throughout the country like a rampaging forest fire. People who used to work together before now viewed each other with deep**

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., 90-92.

**suspicion. Former close comrades and colleagues became deadly enemies. Political splits in some areas became so serious as to lead to occasions for violence and killings.**

**In the political sphere, the political split led to a large increase in the activities of those elements who flout and violate the Constitution of the Union of Burma, in they: attempt to exploit and take advantage of the situation.**

**These insurgents,. during the last 10 years, suffered intolerable damage, both politically and militarily, at the hands of the Government and were in such sad shape that in late 1957 and early 1958 many began to admit that the rebellion was a mistake and were now to "entering the light " in large numbers. During this period when the insurgent forces were breaking apart and large numbers surrendering, there began also to appear upheavals and intrigues within the political organization in power.**

**When the political group in power split asunder in June, 1958, all these rebels who were on the verge of "enter the light" halted their steps forward. The Burma Communist Party had sent a representative to hold negotiations for peace terms as the party as a whole had agreed to do "enter the light". The talks had progressed to the final satisfactory stages when the political group in power split, and then the BCP immediately changed its tune. All steps to "enter the light" were halted and now new demands were brought out to exert pressure on the Government. [...]**

Some remarks follow on why Ne Win doubts the sincerity of a communist group which “entered the light”.

**The effects of the political split did not confine itself to this situation but also dealt a blow to the governmental machinery. The effects were so devastating that most officials ill districts, entrusted with the task to maintain law and order, became so cowed that they feared to apprehend even those who broke the laws under their very eyes.**

**I am assured that the Members of Parliament fully appreciate what the fate of the country would be if the governmental machinery, on losing its strength, fails to maintain law and order. [...]**

Ne Win elaborates on this point and addresses the public servants.

**U Nu has already acquainted the Members of Parliament with the events in the last stages. U Nu called on me to assume the responsibility of leading a government to save the country in time from disaster. In my capacity, I could not avoid assuming this responsibility and I have accepted this responsibility with the due sanction of Parliament in strict accordance with democratic practices; Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have accepted this responsibility, in large measure, to prevent any assault on the Constitution, which all of us revere and respect. I have taken this responsibility solely on my capacity as an individual, a citizen, and as a soldier. That is why I was emboldened to accept this responsibility when Parliament gave me this task.**

**Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish deeply that all Members of Parliament would hold as much belief in the Constitution and in democracy as I do. I wish deeply that all Members of Parliament would defend the Constitution and democracy as I would. I wish deeply that all Members of Parliament would sacrifice their lives to defend the Constitution as - I would do in my capacity as Prime Minister as a citizen, and**

**as a soldier.**

**Mr. Speaker, Sir, besides this aspect of sacrificing one's life to defend the Constitution, I would like to speak just on the issue of peace and law and order, an issue that means life and death to the country. [...]**

He deals at some length on the continuing fight against the insurgents and the connected question of law and order which depends on the now threatened authority of the government. Finally, he deals with holding free and fair elections.

**Mr. Speaker, Sir, the second point that I wish to speak about concerns the holding of a free and fair election. If the insurgency and preponderance of crimes are brought to an end through the means I have outlined, then it will be possible to hold an election that will be free and fair. I will strive my utmost to accomplish this undertaking within six months period.**

**The success of this undertaking depends not wholly on my Government, but also on the leadership to be given by the Members of Parliament and by the political organizations. If all the Members of Parliament and their respective political organizations work jointly to achieve this common aim it will not be long before it would be possible to hold such a free and fair election.**

**I wish to state here, most emphatically, that my Government will not work in the interests of any particular political party during the election. All measures will also be taken to ensure against any partisan activities by Government officials on behalf of any literal party during the election.**

Finally, he deals with economic matters warning “economic insurgents” and promising to bring down high prices. Then he finished his speech:

**Mr. Speaker, Sir, in conclusion, I wish to state that all that have been accounted heretofore are an elaboration of what I have frequently stated, that the attainment of internal peace is dependent on an integrated policy of military and political action, and not merely on military means alone. This is the slogan of my Government.**

## 2.2 Ne Win's speech before Parliament on February 13, 1959

Three and a half month later, Ne Win tendered his resignation. The 1947 constitution allowed a non-parliamentarian to hold a government post for the period of half a year only.<sup>1</sup> He explained why he could not fulfill the task of holding elections within the time span of half a year dividing his speech into five parts. First, he reassured the citizens that they should not be alarmed by the prospect of another change in government because the Tatmadaw would continue to assist the people in terms of economic prosperity, security and reliability of the civil servants. Second, he talked about the preparations of elections. Third, he spoke about the

ongoing power struggle between political organisations. Fourth, he gave the reasons for his resignation and finally, he explicated a way to his re-election through an amendment of the constitution.

The part informing the MPs about the reasons for the resignation reads:

**Mr. Speaker, Sir, in this fourth part of the address I shall explain the reasons of my resignation. I have just recounted in full the prevailing conditions and reasons why it is not possible to hold a free and fair election. This view is based on actual conditions prevailing in the country and not motivated by any inclination, whatsoever, to continue as Prime Minister. I wish to make this quite clear to all the Members of Parliament. I do not harbour any strong urge to serve as a Prime Minister and that is exactly why I have tendered my resignation so that the issue of the election may be deliberated upon freely by Parliament assembled here.**

**Mr. Speaker, Sir, if it should be decided to hold the election in April, and since I have tendered my resignation since this morning, then before the formation of the overspent duty constituted by the election, it would be necessary to form an interim government in the interim period. In view of the present attitude of the political organizations towards the government headed by me, I deem that I ought not to continue in the office of Prime Minister. And that is the second reason why I have tendered my resignation.**

**Mr. Speaker, Sir, when I was elected to serve as Prime Minister in October, 1958, I was accorded the full support of the two major political parties represented in Parliament, the Clean AFPFL and the Stable AFPFL. It was only due to this large majority approval and support that I accepted without demur the task and post to head a Government. But now, there is the Stable AF PFL which accords support to my Government till the election in April and which has announced that it will support my Government if it is found necessary to continue so as to bring about the optimum conditions for the holding of a free and fair election. But, the Clean AFPFL has undergone some changes in outlook. They have made accusations that during the 3-month tenure of my Government the Clean AFPFL has been discriminated against and many members of the organization arrested. In a way, this was an indication of the change in attitude of this political party towards my Government. This change in attitude of the Clean AFPFL, which had originally proposed me as Prime Minister has added another reason for my resignation. That is exactly why I wish to refrain, if it should be feasible, from serving as Prime Minister as from today till an election in April or until an election at a later date.**

After the speech and some discussion and consultations with the President of the Union, the constitution was amended and Ne Win was re-elected Prime Minister and the new cabinet was sworn in on February 27, 1959.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Under this provision, Ne Win had already served as Interior Minister and Deputy Prime Minister in 1948 for half a year.

<sup>2</sup> For details see Myanmar Historical Commission 2007: Myanmar Politics 1958-1962 II, 145-155.

### 2.3 A Note on the elections of 1960<sup>1</sup>

In the “budget session” of Parliament in August 1959, the issue of the date of the election was discussed. The Finance Minister announced that the date would be in January or latest in the first week of February 1960. The main contestants in the elections were the Clean and the Stable AFPFL. Nu’s party won a decisive victory and got more seats than the united AFPFL in 1956.<sup>2</sup> The victory was attributed to the announcement of Nu to make Buddhism the state religion after the election victory.<sup>3</sup> After the election, the losers complained that Nu and his parties had violated the 1947 constitution which prohibited the “abuse” of religion for political purposes.<sup>4</sup>

### 3 February 1960 to March 1962

About this period, not much is known with relation to the issue of democracy. The discussion about the events leading to the coup d’etat of March 1962 concentrates on the question of the degree of federalism granted to the states of the Union.

#### 3.1 April 5, 1960 U Nu, Crusade for Democracy, Speech delivered in the Chamber of Deputies<sup>5</sup>

After being re-elected as Prime Minister in the February 1960 elections, U Nu delivered a speech in the Chamber of Deputies on April 5th, 1960. He presented his party’s opinion regarding the path to follow in order to reach the goal of fully establishing democracy in Burma: the “Crusade for Democracy”.

For U Nu, following this path included reviewing the decisions his party made in the past, because as they did not lead to success, at least some of them had to have been false. Therefore, after some short appreciation of Burma’s way to independence, U Nu did something really extraordinary for a professional politician: He not only stated that General

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, 219-290.

<sup>2</sup> The records on the exact number of seats vary. The Clean AFPFL which was later re-named Pyidaungsu (Union) Party received some 163 from the 250 seats contested, the Stable AFPFL only 40. The rest was won by ethnic parties and independents.

<sup>3</sup> In addition, the picture of Nu was attached to the Clean AFPFL’s ballot boxes and the colour yellow symbolising Buddhism was widely used by the Clean AFPFL (*Myanmar Politics II*, 287).

<sup>4</sup> Article 23 (4) stated: “The abuse of religion for political purposes is forbidden; and any act which is intended or is likely to promote feelings of hatred, enmity or discord between racial or religious communities or sects is contrary to the Constitution and may be punishable by law.”

<sup>5</sup> See: U Nu, *Crusade for Democracy*. Speech delivered in the Chamber of Deputies on April 5th, 1960.

Ne Win had done a good job temporarily replacing him, but he also admitted his own party's failings:

**We achieved much for our people, but failed to achieve much more. [...] Even we who formed the vanguard failed to regulate our own conduct in full accordance with the noble ideals that animated that system.**

**Then the insurrections intervened, and this great disaster combined with the arrogance, greed and power-madness that gripped many of our leaders, big and small, brought us to the brink of ruin and very close to losing the democratic base of our new Constitution.**

**[...] And let me here, Mr. Speaker, pay a tribute to General Ne Win and the government that he led for their great contribution in preserving the idea of democracy in our country and making possible for it to continue to grow and flower on our soil.<sup>1</sup>**

Nevertheless, U Nu was sure, that he and his party had learned from their past failings, which now would give them

**the tremendous opportunity of taking a really long step forward in establishing democracy in our country, and developing it as a way of life for our people.**

**[...] However, nobody should at the same time pretend that because we have had that experience the path is now absolutely clear for us to march on towards our ultimate goal. [...] Constant vigilance and soul-searching is absolutely indispensable if we are to reach our final goal.**

**The path of democracy is the most difficult that man has ever trodden in history, but [...] there is no other path [...] which can lead us to an existence which will ensure our people that freedom from slavery both of body and of mind which alone justifies our existence as human beings.<sup>2</sup>**

So for U Nu establishing democracy was the only way to establish absolute freedom, which is, why

**independence will be meaningless if we cannot now give them [– the Burmese people –] democracy and create conditions for them to live the democratic way of life.**

**[...] We must spread the knowledge of democracy far and wide, nurse it and manure it until it develops into a healthy plant [...]. We must make it take firm root, until it becomes native to our soil.<sup>3</sup>**

In order to reach this goal, U Nu admitted, it had been necessary for them to reform themselves, because they would have to show their people the path to follow:

**We who form the vanguard must through our conduct and way of life show what democracy is and how it works.**

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, 1.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 2.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

**[... And as a second step, it had been necessary] to reform our party organization. [... So by now, the] Pyidaungsu Party is organized on the essentially democratic principle that everyone therein must have his or her roots in the masses, that must rise from the bottom to the top and that all decisions in the party will be taken on the same democratic principle and after thorough discussion and consultation.<sup>1</sup>**

But for U Nu acting democratically not only meant applying democratic procedures inside one's own party. He also stated, that

**if any political party on gaining mass support attempts to impose its will on everyone or to oppress its opponents and suppress all opposing views and opinions, then not only will that party cease to be democratic itself; it will destroy democracy. No matter how strong and popular a party may be for the time being, it must be scrupulously careful not to impose its will on others, and to conduct all its affairs and arrive all its decisions through the democratic process of discussion, consultation and compromise. And it must extend this process to cover not only its own members but also members of the opposition and of other parties, or those who do not belong to any party at all.<sup>2</sup>**

As in U Nu's view acting democratically was equivalent to this process of discussion, consultation and compromise, this meant the

**opposition parties also have a duty to discharge. Political parties which have not yet won the support of the masses must therefore [...] discharge their democratic obligations fully in co-operation with us, [the Pyidaungsu Party,] to achieve our objectives.<sup>3</sup>**

U Nu went on by asserting that it was his party, whose objectives had to be supported by the opposition as well, for it was his Pyidaungsu Party that had won the elections with an overwhelming majority. Determined to act democratically, U Nu promised, that

**we are determined not to repeat the mistakes which we made in the past [... and] we will not use our majority to oppress the minority in any way. [... In addition, he pledged] an entirely new deal for the opposition in parliament.<sup>4</sup>**

This deal included the promise to consult the parliamentary opposition as well as the members of the opposition outside Parliament to the fullest possible extent and to regulate their relations with them in a spirit of compromise. Needless to say, he reminded the opposition to fulfil their democratic duties, too, namely

**to be constructive in their opposition, not to impose just for the sake of imposing [..., because there is] a large area in which you can work hand in hand with us for the general good and welfare of the country.<sup>1</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, 2-3.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 3.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

U Nu then promised to take actions that would make sure there would be no misuse of power by his Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries any more, for he was convinced, that not the misuse of power, but the parties' achievements and the ability of its leaders should help to win democratic elections. To reach his goal, U Nu wanted to install

**a permanent machinery for conducting elections, able to operate independently from the government and free from its influence. [... Moreover, U Nu wanted] to reform the machinery of government so that both the process of making policies and decisions and the end result of this process will be fully democratic.<sup>2</sup>**

This means, he planned to prevent his party's old way of treating political questions by discussing and deciding on them by only one, two or three influential leaders.<sup>3</sup>

But as far as the government machinery is concerned, there was a further point U Nu was determined to change: He was convinced, that the government machinery on the one hand and the government itself on the other hand had to become two separated spheres, linked only by the ministers of government. By following this system, he said, the government machinery would be able to develop its own traditions that would not depend on the support of a special party in duty, and a change of the ruling party would not set the government machinery disable to do its work. In addition, this system would prevent politicians connected to any party from acquiring illegitimate power and influence. Not surprisingly, it seemed even more important to U Nu to make sure that politicians outside the government would not be able to impose any influence on the government machinery.<sup>4</sup> As U Nu said,

**a politician can of course [...] exercise a beneficial influence in the administration of his area and for the welfare of the people. He can, no doubt, exercise much legitimate influence with the local officials, and help them in many ways to discharge their own functions effectively and honestly. [...] But there must be no attempt to usurp the functions of the latter, or to dominate over them in any way.<sup>5</sup>**

U Nu then admitted his party's former failure to act according to these principles and went on by stating that there would have to be a change in the role of the civil service, too, because while a government in a totalitarian one-party state establishes itself on a permanent basis and thus needs a civil service, that is completely loyal to it, the governing party in a parliamentary state may change by the next election and therefore

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, 3-4.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 4-5.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 5.

**there must be a permanent, independent and disciplined civil service which will carry on the essential business of government no matter what party is in power<sup>1</sup> [...], and in harmony with the policies of that party. It is none of its business to attempt to change these policies.<sup>2</sup>**

U Nu now again confessed his party's former mistakes, when he admitted, that his party had failed to recognize this essential necessity during the first term it had been in power. As there had been lots of politicians who had not given up their party membership when being appointed to a civil service post, there had been

**a most serious effect on the morale, efficiency, integrity and discipline of the service. By these acts, we came dangerously close to creating a party civil service of the kind that exists in totalitarian states.<sup>3</sup>**

In order to ensure the independence and discipline of the civil service in the future, U Nu thought it was essential to make full provision of its rights and privileges. He admitted that his party had failed to consider this point adequately in the past, and promised to overcome this shortcoming, too, while not forgetting to remind the civil service's duty

**to make its due contribution to national welfare and development; and at the same time become a true instrument for the promotion of democracy and of democratic ideals, a true servant of the masses whom they must in common with politicians serve and to whose service they must dedicate their entire career.<sup>4</sup>**

After this, U Nu mentioned

**the importance of the rule of law in a democracy [..., because] the first essential condition for making democracy secure in our lives is to base all our activities on the rule of law.<sup>5</sup>**

He asserted that in his opinion there were two kinds of laws related to this question:

- 1. those that guarantee the freedom and equality of the individual against violation by the State; and**
- 2. those that ensure that individual freedom is exercised without affecting the rights and freedom of one's neighbours or the orderly working of society.<sup>6</sup>**

According to U Nu, it was not the absence of such laws, but it was his party's failures in applying them, which caused some of the problems in the country's past. Thus, he wanted to

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 6.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

take any necessary action in order to firmly establish the rule of law in Burma. Going on, U Nu declared:

**For democracy to work in our country, it is necessary not only that such laws exist, but also that every citizen obeys the laws freely and conscientiously and that there is not only no disobedience but also no evasion. It is equally necessary that those in power enforce their authority through the rule of law, and not through fear or at the point of the bayonet. For democracy to work, this sense of the rule of law must be created in the minds of both the ruler and the ruled, and there must be constant effort to develop it and strengthen it until it becomes a part of our very life and thought.**

**[... While] the totalitarian way of securing compliance from citizens is at the point of the gun [..., in] a democracy, their compliance is secured through the rule of law, not by force or through fear.<sup>1</sup>**

After reaffirming that he and his party would do anything necessary to secure the rule of law, U Nu came to talk about economy policy. Here again, he first admitted his party's former mistake to have undemocratically arrived at economic decisions on the initiative of only one, two or three leaders. And here again, too, he promised to

**henceforth base all our decisions and actions in the economic sphere on thorough discussion and consultation with all interests concerned, irrespective of whether they are members of our party or not. We shall endeavour to be guided as completely as possible by the democratic principles of discussion, consultation and compromise.<sup>2</sup>**

U Nu then confessed that members of his party had used the government's economic policies for the benefit of their party or its adherents and followers instead of the benefit of the whole Burmese people. He of course promised to make sure, that this could never happen again and pointed out, that moreover his party had tried to embark

**on a policy of State participation in all spheres of economic activity without adequate awareness of the limitations of a government under a democratic system to participate directly in that field, or of limitations arising out of our own particular conditions.<sup>3</sup>**

Therefore, U Nu now promised to review the State participation in the economic field with strict reference to the above limitations. Anyway, he made clear, that he thought at least some level of State participation in economy to be indispensable for any state, especially in the case

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 8.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

of undeveloped countries like Burma, for he was convinced, this would enlarge the degree of economic prosperity and freedom of the common man up to a level unknown in the past.<sup>1</sup>

Once again, U Nu went on then by comparing totalitarian and democratic States, emphasizing that the limitations in State participation in the economic field arise

**from the fact that for a government to play a dominant part in economic activity and succeed:**

- 1. it must either be a totalitarian State; or**
- 2. if it is a democratic State, it must have an extremely efficient and numerically very strong civil service with a capacity to apply its talents to business operations with the same facility as it does to government administration.<sup>2</sup>**

But Burma, U Nu affirmed, was neither determined to become such a totalitarian State, nor was its civil service strong enough in numbers to dominate the economic field to a comparable extent. He continued by another confession of his party's former mistakes: to start large-scale State participation without one of the two above conditions being fulfilled.<sup>3</sup> Now that his party had understood the conditions of State participation, he assured to withdraw the State from economic activity on the one hand and/or strengthen the civil service on the other hand until their ratio would become small enough for the Burmese state to handle it efficiently.<sup>4</sup>

Next, U Nu proposed some basic economic plan his party had prepared as a foundation for their discussions and consultations with all sectors of opinions on this field, for he sure enough wanted to evolve Burma's future economic plans by the same "democratic process of discussion, consultation and compromise" he proposed for any process of making up decisions in Burma, because he thought this to be the only appropriate system of decision-making for a democratic government.<sup>5</sup>

Then U Nu went on by talking about his party's ideas on national unity which seemed crucial to him. His party's goal was to make Burma become a united state of all ethnic groups living in the country, each single member of them having – and being convinced to have – its duties and its privileges inside this Union: a "unity in diversity", as U Nu called it.<sup>6</sup> This included the willingness to create

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 8-9.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. 9-10.

**separate States for some of those national groups, and promising Statehood for others provided that there is a true desire for Statehood amongst them. The unity we evolved must be a unity that is in harmony with the desire of the minority groups to retain and develop their special culture and background [...] in full freedom [...].<sup>1</sup>**

Accordingly, U Nu promised to create separate States for the Arakanese and the Mon

**after ascertaining in a democratic manner whether the people themselves in these areas desire Statehood [...]. We propose to discuss with the leaders concerned the best procedure for ascertaining the wishes of the people.<sup>2</sup>**

In the past, U Nu admitted, his party had failed to act accordingly, but from now on, he promised, they would

**do so in thorough consultation with the peoples and the representatives of the constituent States, and in the same democratic spirit of discussion, consultation and compromise that I have emphasized for all our dealings in the future.<sup>3</sup>**

U Nu then continued by talking about the question of State Religion. He stated, that they already had

**promised to make Buddhism as the State Religion of Burma. [... But that] the action we shall take to make Buddhism the State Religion will also include measures to protect fully the rights and privileges of the other religions and religious groups in Burma.<sup>4</sup>**

As for the foreign policy, U Nu resumed, his party wanted to continue its

**policy [...] of positive neutrality, non-alignment with any bloc, doing our utmost to promote peace in the world, giving our full support to the aims and objectives of the United Nations [...].<sup>5</sup>**

Once more, U Nu praised General Ne Win, who had temporarily been replacing him, for having done a good job when concluding a treaty with the People's Republic of China on the longstanding border question, and another treaty of friendship and amity.<sup>6</sup>

But interesting enough, in this passage on foreign policy, there is no reference to “democracy”, although this term was mentioned in any other part of U Nu's speech – at least, if we take “National Unity” and “Arakanese and Mon States” as one consistent passage,

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 11.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

because U Nu did not refer to “democracy” when talking about “National Unity”, either, but did so in the following passage on the “Arakanese and Mon States”.<sup>1</sup>

In his conclusion, U Nu said, that while in power for the next four years, his party would

**do our utmost to carry out our principal mandate of establishing democracy in Burma and developing it as a way of life for our people [...].**<sup>2</sup>

Again, he admitted that his party had made mistakes in the past, but he also promised that they had learned from this, and they were not going to repeat these former failings. He gave his word to

**seek a renewal of the mandate by the electorate purely on the basis of this record [of making democracy take firm roots in the Burmese society], and not through any totalitarian method of entrenching our party position through illegal and illegitimate means.**<sup>3</sup>

In order to reach this goal of establishing democracy in Burma, U Nu declared, any politicians would have to co-operate:

**We cannot discharge these responsibilities by ourselves alone. All members of this Parliament must accept and discharge their respective responsibilities.**<sup>4</sup>

And as we already know, for U Nu this not only included the willingness of the party in power to make up all its decisions by using the “democratic process of discussion, consultation and compromise”,<sup>5</sup> but it also comprised the willingness of the opposition – be it inside or outside the parliament – to fulfil its democratic duties by co-operating with the party in power and working “hand in hand with us for the general good and welfare of the country”.<sup>6</sup>

### 3.2 March 1961: Publication of “Wages of Sin” – Play written by Nu

The play, not the only one written by Nu,<sup>7</sup> is about the life and death of a corrupt politician. It seems that it was conceived before the transfer of power to General Ne Win. According to

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid. and Ibid, 9-10, respectively

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 11.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

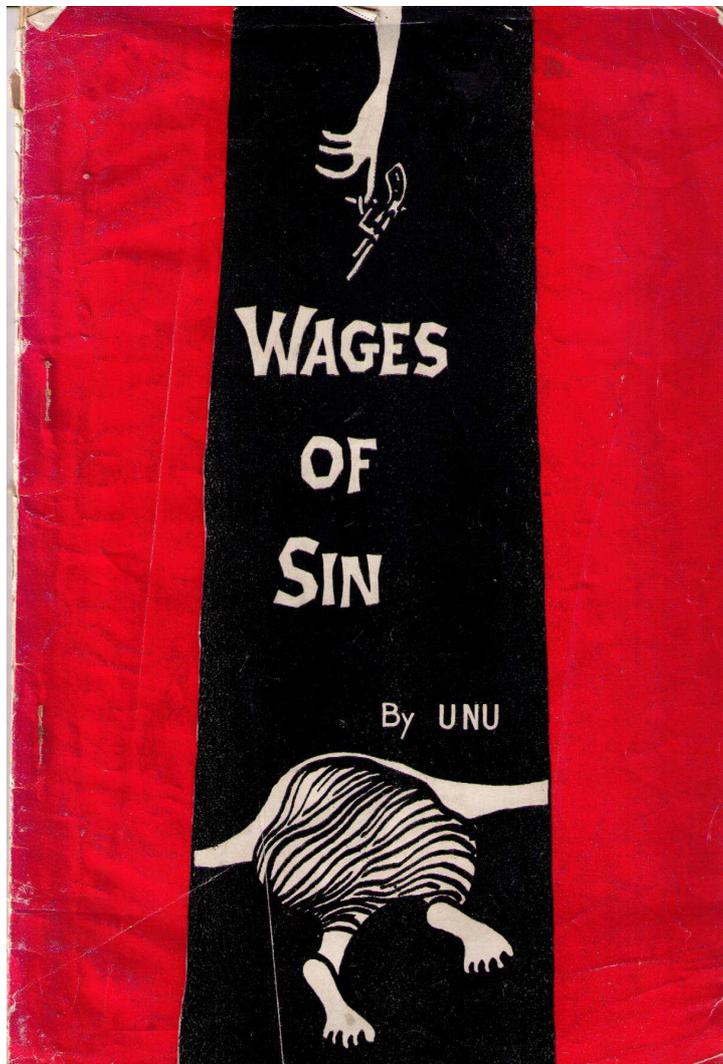
<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 3, 8, 9, 10.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 3-4.

<sup>7</sup> As a young man, Nu intended to become the “George Bernhard Shaw of Burma”. He wrote some plays and in 1950 finished a “political play” on the theme of the Communist insurrection (see Nu 1957 *The People Win Through* With a long biographical introduction by Edward Hunter. New York, Taplinger). The foreword of Thant informs that the play was conceived by members of the AFPFL as a measure to depict “the evils of attempting to wrest political power by force”. (ibid, 49)

In Their Own Voice: „Democracy“ as perceived in Burma/Myanmar

Nu's information, it was written for his wife, Daw Mya Yee. He wanted to write it in 1956, but could not finish because of other obligations. Then, it was planned for publication in 1959 before the elections, was revised once more and came out in 1961 after the victory of Nu's "Clean AFPFL" over Ba Swe's and Kyaw Nyein's "Stable AFPFL". The two forewords make clear that it is about Nu's "clean" concept of democracy.



Cover (reduced in size)

## INTRODUCTION

The author of this play has done me the honour of letting me go through the original manuscript and discussing, not the plot nor the characters, but the thought behind the plot and the delineation of the characters.

“Wages of Sin” is, of course, a political play, just as much as its predecessor, “The People Win Through” was a political play. In both, the central theme is not so much the danger of Communism, which is generally recognised, but the means necessary to avert it.

U Nu came close to quoting the Bible when he gave his concept of democracy: It is not everyone who says Lord Lord that will enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but he that doeth the word of My Father. It is not everyone who says Democracy Democracy that will find it, but he that doeth what Democracy enjoins.

In 1956, the AFPFL stood for Democracy and as opposed to Communism. The elections that year gave less than one-fifth of the total number of seats in Parliament to the Communists, but in terms of the popular vote the Communists polled 1.4 million ballots to the AFPFL's 1.7 million. The danger signal was up, the warning was clear: Democracy was losing ground and could be swamped at the next election.

U Nu was clearly shaken by these results. Democracy had not failed, but those professing it had failed Democracy. In particular those who preached it constantly had failed to practise it. So, having diagnosed the malady, he proceeded to take the cure.

If today U Nu seems obsessed with the ideals of benignity and rectitude on the part of political leaders, we must at least concede there is method in the obsession. In 1960 not a single Communist candidate was returned to Parliament, one known fellow-traveller got in, but only after he had forsworn the National United Front.

It is against this background that I commend U Nu's thesis to public attention. One may agree with it, or not, but I suggest one cannot treat it lightly.

Rangoon,  
March 6, 1961.

**E. M. Law Yone,**  
THE NATION.

### Introduction by Law Yone<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Law Yone (1911-1980) was a journalist close to Nu. He edited the newspaper “The Nation” until its closure by the military in 1963, later joined Nu in his fight against Ne Win in 1968 and translated his memoirs into English.

## FOREWORD

Parliamentary democracy did not just happen by itself. It is the product of human maturity, the result of centuries of human endeavour to transcend the status of animals and to achieve human dignity, during the course of which men and women have fought and opposed oppression of various kinds at the risk of their lives.

For this reason those who value human rights and human dignity must be prepared to defend Parliamentary democracy with their lives and all that they possess.

Inasmuch as the essence of lion can be contained only in the **Theingi** gold vessel, so also can Parliamentary democracy endure only in those countries where the people are law-abiding and especially where those who govern set high moral standards.

Parliamentary democracy cannot endure, and must sooner or later perish, in a country where those entrusted with its governance are :

- (1) addicted to spirituous liquor ;
- (2) given to over-indulgence in such things as the pleasures of women;
- (3) in the habit of gambling ;
- (4) unable to rise above bribery and corruption; and
- (5) guilty of misusing power for the sake of Party.

May all those in power who revere Parliamentary democracy take special note of this warning, and be enabled to uphold the law and the precepts to their utmost capacity.

Maung Nu  
13-1-61

Contents of the play:

Nu wrote this play, as well as the play „The people Win Through“ as a sort of political play that aims to encourage people in the fight against Communist threat. E. M. Law Yone acknowledged it when he wrote about the play, which was published in 1961, saying

**“Wages of Sin” is, of course, a political play, just as much as its predecessor, “The People Win Through” was a political play. In both, the central theme is not so much the danger of Communism, which is generally recognized, but the means to avert it.**

In the core of his play, Nu would like to portrait the threat of Communism and the importance of virtues of those who govern the country. In the story, there is a home minister who does not possess the proper characteristics of a good minister. As said in the play by the minister’s daughter: **My father, though a minister, does not behave like one. He drinks, gambles, womanises and takes bribes** (said by Po Thoung, p. 22). This home minister behaved himself badly in his position which allowed the Communists to gain power and recruits. In the end, even the only son of the home minister fell to the Communist influence and killed his own father. As according to the communist doctrine, the revolutionaries should not be grateful to their parents:

**Some of our revolutionaries have a father-mother complex. They must do away with it. We must not classify people as father, mother, wife, brother and so on. It is wrong in principle. To the revolutionaries there are only two classes of people: the exploiters and the exploited. If the parents happen to be among the exploiters a true revolutionary will not spare them. He will destroy them** (said by San Lin, p. 23).

Regarding to the fight against Communists, Nu put up another character who mentioned the role of the governor in this fight by saying: **I don’t know much about fighting the Communists, but I certainly think leaders should be upright in their conduct if only to retain the respect of their followers** (said by U Tun, p. 8). Another similar path in this respect is written the same page: **That’s exactly why our leaders must walk the straight and narrow path. Immorality on their part is bound to drive people to despair and put power in the hands of Communists** (said by U Mone, p. 8).

Nu summarised all the good characteristics the people in charge of the governance of the country should value and practice in his forward of the play. He urged the people to feel obliged to defend and protect the Parliamentary democracy because the ancestors had fought for it with their lives: **For this reason those who value human rights and human dignity**

**must be prepared to defend Parliamentary democracy with their lives and all that they possess.** Nu additionally pointed to the good virtues by writing:

**Parliamentary democracy cannot endure, and must soon or late perish, in a country where those entrusted to the governance are: 1) addicted to spirituous liquor; 2) given to over-indulgence in such things as the pleasures of women; 3) in the habit of gambling; 4) unable to rise above bribery and corruption; and 5) guilty of misusing power for the sake of the Party.**

His criteria of the person in power show similarity to the good virtues in the Buddhist *silas*, the basic five Buddhist virtues by which every Buddhist should abide. It is of the utmost importance in Burma, or least to Nu, that for **those who govern set high moral standards** according to the good norms in Buddhism to avert Communism.

### 3.3 November 1963: Nu's review on his last years as Prime Minister<sup>1</sup>

The following text is part of a long letter addressed to Ne Win and written by Nu from prison.<sup>2</sup>

**The “democracy” I talk about so often is not merely a pious word said for effect or to make a good impression. Just reflect upon our past history. Throughout the past two thousand years, the forceful seizure of power has caused great human distress.**

**In our own time, the attempt to seize power by forceful means, which began only three months after our independence, and which has beset the country until today, is a very deplorable fact. Only when democracy takes root in the Union can all these deplorable acts of violence be ended, and therefore any threat of forceful seizure of power fills me with consternation; and the more I am filled with consternation, the more zealous I become about a firmly rooted democracy.**

**In the two years of our government, I cannot claim that our efforts resulted in a firmly rooted democracy. I cannot even claim that in these two years our efforts resulted in the laying of the foundation for the institution of democracy. Even in England, the motherland of democracy, it took over a hundred years to build it. This is enough to show how long and difficult is the process of building democracy. How could we have even laid the foundation stone or planted the roots in two years? But I can claim, without conceit, that we did succeed in guiding the nation to a few small ways of achieving these roots and foundations.**

**So I beg you, General Ne Win, not to crush with one blow the little democratic shoots which are just about to sprout from the seeds which we have sown with such difficulty.**

**The process of building democracy requires great patience. But because the benefits derived from it are so many, some countries spend up to two centuries building it up with patience and care. So, because our democracy is still so tender in years, I beg of you not to lose patience and act impetuously toward it.**

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<sup>1</sup> Text online available under: <http://peoplewinthrough.com/> [October 7, 2010].

<sup>2</sup> Nu was released only in 1967.

**In truth, democracy is not entirely free of the Six Faults [a Buddhist classification]. In a democratic country, the people sometimes get carried away and abuse their democracy; and there are times when the unworthy man is elected instead of the worthy man. There are times when what could be decided in two hours takes two years; and there are times when you are forced to stand by with folded arms because the majority does not like a measure which would benefit the public.**

**But these flaws of democracy are inherent not only in the small developing nations such as ours. Even in England, where it is firmly rooted, they are still evident. That is why, the great English leader Mr. Churchill was once led to denounce democracy as a bad system. However, he went on to say that the human race has not yet come up with a better system. So, although there are many discouraging aspects in democracy, in the absence of a better system, we must endeavor to plant its roots in our country.**

**I would, therefore, like you to take the following steps:**

- 1) Call the Parliament, which you had dissolved.**
- 2) Let the country directly elect a Head of State, who will be the Chief Executive. We will change our existing laws to accommodate the new system. According to the Constitution, the Parliament elects the Prime Minister, who is the Chief Executive. On the recommendation of the Prime Minister, the Parliament elects the President, who is the figure Head.**
- 3) However for the duration of five years from the date of effecting such a change, you are to be elected and installed by the Parliament as the Head of State. In that time of 5 years you should be able to put into effect all your plans for the country.**
- 4) When you become the Head of State, you may appoint anyone you like, and form a government. As the Head of State you can stipulate that a member of the Parliament cannot be a Minister, so that if you appoint a member of the Parliament as Minister, he must resign from the Parliament. Or, you may form a government, which purposely includes the military leaders. Or, you may decide to include in your government leaders among the political groups whom you consider men of integrity. As for me, I would like you to include representatives of the political groups. In choosing ministers from the political groups, you could choose them at your discretion, for their individual ability and integrity, ignoring the basis of representation proportionate to the size of their political parties.**
- 5) Immediately upon forming a government, please call a National Assembly with the purpose of promoting national stability and planting the roots of democracy.**
- 6) When you have completed 5 years as Head of State elected by the Parliament, please hold an election for a new Head of State. Hold this election every four years.**
- 7) After you have held office as Head of State for 5 years, as elected by the Parliament, you may stand for re—election for two more times consecutively. With your two years as Chairman of the Revolutionary Council, five years as Head of State elected by the Parliament, and 8 years more as the twice returned [by the people] Head of State, you will have a total of 15 years to carry out your plans for the country. A sufficient amount of time, I would think.**
- 8) After the Parliament has appointed the Head of State and completed other sundry duties, a quarter of its total membership should be made to resign on the basis of drawing lots.**

**In their place, there should be fresh members chosen on the basis of a by—election in which the members who resigned should be allowed to stand for re—election.**

**Among those members who were not effected by the drawing of lots, half have to resign in their third year the basis of another drawing of lots. In their place fresh members have to be elected by a by—election in which the old members can stand again.**

**The remaining members must all resign in their fourth year. In their place fresh members will be elected by a by—election in which the old members can stand again.**

**If, instead of changing the members by dividing them into fours, you prefer to do it in halves, you could do so. By dividing the process into four parts, the number of seats contested is less and, therefore, the elections are easier to supervise, both the government and political organizations being able to devote more attention to keeping them systematic and fair.**

**After these elections have been held and the original batch of members all replaced, a quarter of the new Parliament should be dismissed by drawing lots every two years and by—elections held for fresh members, old members being allowed to take part. If you do not approve of this system, it is possible to devise a new one.**

**There are many flaws in a system whereby the whole country goes to the polls after a general election. The system of dividing the elections into parts is much better for, in this way, both the government and the politicians are able to concentrate their efforts on the election process and it is more liable to be fair.**

## V The “Burmese Way to Socialism” (1962-1988)

The period can roughly be divided into two periods: before and after the implementation of a new constitution on March 2, 1974. The following material just covers the beginning of this long era. For its end, see the excerpt of Dr. Maung Maung’s last speech in the Burmese Parliament in September 1988 in the next chapter.

1 April 1962: Chit Hlaing. “The Burmese Way to Socialism: Policy Declaration of the Revolutionary Council”

Chit Hlaing - a lecturer on Marxism and Soviet communism under the Ministry of Defense - was assigned by Ne Win to draft the policy declaration of the Revolutionary Council on March 6, just a few days after the coup d’état of March 2, 1962. “The Burmese Way to Socialism: Policy Declaration of the Revolutionary Council” was first broadcasted on April 30 and later published.

The principals of socialism described in the declaration are: The avoidance of both “deviation towards right or left” (Art. 3), the applicability to “the concrete realities and also the natural conditions peculiar to Burma”(Art. 2) and the progression of theories “in accordance with the times, conditions, environment and the ever changing circumstances” (Art. 4). Related to economy, the socialist policy aims at nationalizing “agriculture and industrial production, distribution, transportation, communications, external trade etc.” (Art. 10) “with the sole aim of giving maximum satisfaction to material, spiritual and cultural needs of the whole nation” (Art. 8).

According to the pamphlet, the socialist democratic state has to avoid the weaknesses of the parliamentary democracy:

**Parliamentary democracy called “The People’s Rule” came into existence in history with British, American and French Revolutions against feudalism. It happens to be the best in comparison with all its preceding systems.**

**But in some countries the parliament has been so abused as to have become only the means by which the opportunists and propertied people deceive the simple masses.**

**In the Union of Burma also, parliamentary democracy has been tried and tested in furtherance of the aims of socialist development. But Burma’s “parliamentary democracy” has not only failed to serve our socialist development but also, due to its very defects, weaknesses and loopholes, its abuses and the absence of a mature public opinion, lost sight of and deviated from the socialist aims, until at last indications of its heading imperceptibly towards just the reverse have become apparent.**

**The nation's socialist aims cannot be achieved with any assurance by means of the form of parliamentary democracy that we have so far experienced.**

**The Revolutionary Council therefore firmly believes that it must develop, in conformity with existing conditions and environment and ever changing circumstances, only such a form of democracy as will promote and safeguard the socialist development. (Art. 14)**

The formation of mass and class organizations in order to facilitate a reorientation of views which in turn conditions the socialist economy is yet another aspect mentioned in the declaration:

**When political organizational work is carried out socialist democratic education and democratic training will be given to the people to ensure their conscious participation. (The Revolutionary Council believes and hopes that there will come about democratic competitions which will promote socialist development within the framework of socialism.) (Art. 20)**

Chit Hlaing's "A Short Note on My Involvement In the Burma Socialist Programme Party" provides anecdotes and background information of the process of creation of the "Burmese Way to Socialism". The following extract treats a two-day meeting of the Revolutionary Council starting on April 24 where the draft of the policy declaration was discussed:

**On the second day, there arose a disagreement between Brig Aung Gyi and Brig Tin Pe over a point in the economic policy. [...] Brig Aung Gyi and Brig Tin Pe didn't have any personal problems between them. They have been very close colleagues since the independence struggle. The present disagreement was over a matter of principle. [...] Regarding the point of argument with Brig Tin Pe, Brig Aung Gyi proposed, 'Well, in this problem, I think we should decide it by vote'. A few minutes of silence fell on the meeting. The Chairman tackled this problem. The General said, 'You fellows, this is not a problem for you to argue about. It is something we have to tackle in the future as the situation arises.' Then he looked toward Brig Tin Pe and said in English, 'Hey, Ko Tin Pe, why can't you agree with that point?' (sic). Then Brig Tin Pe promptly replied, 'General, there's nothing I cannot agree. What I meant is on a matter of principle. I agree with what you have just said' With the problem solved, the Council unanimously agreed with the policy declaration of the Revolutionary Council.**

2 January 1963: The System of Correlation of Man and his Environment

The formation of the Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) was publicly declared in July 1962. On January 17, 1963 "The system of Correlation of Man and His Environment" - the philosophy of the BSPP - was first read over the radio. "The Correlation" by Chit Hlaing contains both Buddhist and Marxist rhetoric. The use of Buddhist terms and concepts (e.g. Okasaloka, Sattaloka and Sankharaloka) is combined with the concept of materialism.

According to the philosophy, man is both egoistic and altruistic and aspires to "the fulfillment

of both his material and spiritual needs”(p7). Furthermore, “wholesome morality is possible only when the stomach is full” (p.31).

The socialist democracy or socialist way of democratic life is characterized as “middle way” (p. 29) between, first, the interest of the individual and that of society:

**Man has a tendency to go astray. Aware as we are of such human frailties we must make our way of life a living reality, i.e. a socialist way of democratic life that can constantly check and control this evil tendency to lapse. Only then can every one have the right of using his own creative labour and initiative.[...]**

**Socialist democracy is a way of harmonizing the interests of each individual and that of the society.**

**In other words, it is a way of practice which by means of a dialectical method unites the will and desire of each individual and that of the society.**

Second, socialist democracy is characterized as „middle way“ between political left and capitalism:

**With their dogmatic views of vulgar materialism some so-called “leftists” appear to pay scant heed to mind and mental factors. [...]**

**The meaning of man is nullified. Man’s mind and mental factors are devalued. They also take little account of sincerity, amity and fellow-feeling, morality and social ethics in human relations. These noble virtues have become a mere commonplace in all their mental, verbal, and bodily actions.**

**All these have the effect of restricting man’s progress. [...]**

**Their relationships with the masses of working people who have come under their sway is nearly despotic. They restrict working masses in all their activities. They even look upon the working masses as robots.**

**The vulgar materialism of the so-called “leftists” is thus heading towards the reverse of the socialist aim. [...]**

**The outlook of the capitalist class too is somewhat tantamount to vulgar materialism. The capitalists are flushed with pride of wealth, and they have come to reckon that by means of money and materials men can be made into mere pawns in their exploiting hands. They pay little regard to man’s mental faculties, moral principles, will and feeling. They look upon human labour as a commodity of the market, and when they think of men they do so in terms of mere merchandise. The worst stage that this sort of capitalism will land in is fascism. This much for the capitalist vulgar materialism.**

**The revolutionary ideas of socialist democracy which we have accepted run counter to the egoistic ideas and actions of the capitalists.**

**Similarly we must reject the left-and-right-deviative ideas and actions of many so-called “leftists” who have blundered.” (34f)**

## **VI 1988, up to September 18**

### Introduction

A special chapter is dedicated for this particular year because it is widely regarded as the most important turning point in modern Burmese history. Until this year, only a few specialists on Southeast Asia, diplomats and business people held some detailed knowledge about the country. There was almost no tourism because foreigners were just granted eight-day-visas. Most people around the world didn't even know that the country existed. It had successfully kept a very low profile during the 26 year long period of the “Burmese Way to Socialism” implemented by General Ne Win, the Burmese army and a group of civilians.

The demonstrations against the one-party-rule of the Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) starting in March and increasing in June and August changed the situation inside the country as well as the public opinion worldwide dramatically. From now on, Burma was regarded as a battlefield between an extreme evil political regime, represented by the Burmese generals that took over power on September 18 and the good opposition represented by Aung San Suu Kyi and her brave followers of the country's “Democracy Movement”.

Only since 1988, “democracy” has become a catchword to denote Burmese politics. This is due to the slogans chanted by the protesters led by students. „We want full democracy; that's what we want”<sup>1</sup> or simply „De-mo-cra-cy“. It was quite clear that the people wanted change but the rapid dynamics of the events prevented a thorough elaboration of what kind of change was envisaged behind the slogans. Such elaborations took place later (see chapter VII). Therefore, there is not much material available for this chapter. But even the few texts presented here may provide at least a rough idea about the concepts of the parties involved in the conflict.

#### 1 July 23, 1988: Ne Win, Speech at the Extraordinary Party Congress of the BSPP

This speech delivered at an extraordinary congress of the Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) convened because of the public unrest starting in March 1988 is of interest for some reasons. To everybody's surprise, Ne Win announced his resignation from the post as party chairman and as a party member and proposed the holding of a referendum on the question whether to establish a multi-party system in Burma or not. This may shed some light both on Ne Win's and the congress' understanding of a „socialist Burmese democracy“. The

resignation in combination with the refusal of the BSPP-members to accept Ne Win's proposal to hold a referendum paved the way for an increase of the demonstrations. The claims and demands by various sides on the question of how to fill the vacuum left by Ne Win's resignation were finally terminated by SLORC's takeover of power on September 18, 1988. Furthermore, the speech can be compared to Ne Win's resignation speech at the Burmese parliament in 1959 (see above, pp. 51-52).

The speech can be divided into three parts. First, Ne Win recommended a referendum on the said question due to the obvious discontent of the people and announced his resignation. Second, he commented on the actual situation stressing the necessity of maintaining law and order. In this short section, he uttered the most frequently quoted sentence of the whole speech that the army would not hesitate to kill if necessary. Finally, he dealt at some length with an incident that had happened 26 years back in July 1962, the destruction of the building of the students' union. According to Ne Win, he had not ordered the blowing up as Aung Gyi, his former subordinate and present critic alluded in one of his open letters to Ne Win but he had just taken responsibility for what had happened as the supreme commander of the Tatmadaw and the chairman of the Revolutionary Council.

One main motif connecting the parts of the speech is the accentuation of „duty“ and “responsibility” performed by the speaker and his “confidants” who wanted to resign together with him.<sup>2</sup> Ne Win justifies his actions both past and present as being appropriate answers to the respective challenges. He partly takes responsibility for the causes of the protests, stresses the necessity of quelling unrest and defends past deeds against unjustified criticism. Ne Win, it seems, wants to leave the political scene as a man with a quiet conscience unstained by bad *kamma*. He and his comrades had tried their best. Now, others may strive for the same under the conditions of a new age.

In this context, two quotations illustrate how Ne Win looked at the way lying ahead of the party, a new, maybe „democratic“ future of Burma.

With regard to the political system of the country he had “supervised” for 26 years, the Chairman recommended the following procedure.

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<sup>1</sup> BBC News (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/7012158.stm> [October 7, 2010]).

<sup>2</sup> U San Yu (President of Burma), U Aye Ko (the party's General Secretary), U Sein Lwin (the party's Deputy General Secretary who was elected as Ne Win's successor later), U Tun Tin (Member of the party's Central Executive Committee and Deputy Prime Minister) and U Kyaw Win.

**If the majority wants a multi-party system, the present Constitution's provision under Chapter II, paragraph 11<sup>1</sup> for the sole political party leading the State will have to be substituted with wording in accordance with a multi-party system. [...]**

**[Then], elections must be held at the earliest for a new parliament. Parties formed by bonafide citizens, organizations and individuals will have to register themselves with the elections supervisory body. [...It] should coordinate with the organizations taking part to set the last date for the registration and decide whether independents should be allowed to compete. [...The] Hluttaw<sup>2</sup> elected thus, can write the new Constitution and other necessary laws [...]. I request the organization currently taking responsibility to assert control as much as possible to keep the country from disarray till the organizations formed by the Hluttaw can take over.**

And as for his own role in the events and the consequences drawn by him, Ne Win stated:

**As I consider that I am not totally free from responsibility even if indirectly for the sad events that took place in March and June and because I am advancing in age, I would like to request Party members to allow me to relinquish the duty of Party Chairman and as a Party Member. In order to do so, Paragraph 14 subpara (c)<sup>1</sup> of the Party rules will have to be amended. I request you to do so. If you do not want to amend the rule, I request this Party Congress to treat it as a special exemption.**

2 August 26, 1988: Suu Kyi, Speech on the Shwedagon Pagoda

The mass meeting of August 26, 1988 was the first appearance of Suu Kyi in front of a large crowd. Some 500.000 people attended the meeting that was organised by students. Here is a short summary of the speech that had an enormous impact on the listeners and contributed heavily to her role as leader of the forces that called for a resignation of the government and the establishment of an interim government:

- a) The aim of the rally is to inform the whole world that the people of Burma want multi-party democracy. Therefore, unity and discipline are necessary. The students and their willingness to sacrifice their lives made this opportunity possible. (Minute of silence for the sharing of the students' merit.)
- b) Aung San Suu Kyi explains her part in the movement. Referring to her father, Aung San, she expressed the wish to stay away from Burmese "power politics". But as her father's daughter she couldn't remain indifferent in the present crisis, in this "second struggle for national independence".

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<sup>1</sup> The paragraph reads: „The State shall adopt a single-party system. The Burma Socialist Programme Party is the sole political party and it shall lead the State“.

<sup>2</sup> Burmese name for "parliament".

- c) Aung San wanted Burma to be a democratic country. To achieve that goal, unity and discipline are necessary.
- d) The armed forces, created by her father, should be united with the people. They should behave in a way that the people can trust them. Furthermore, the people should forget what has happened and sustain their sympathy for the military. Everybody should go forward united using peaceful means.
- e) The students are able and should be united, too, and transgress the boundaries created by the establishment of different organisations. The gulf between the young and the old generation has to be bridged.

Here is a quotation from the part of her speech stressing the demand for a democratic system.<sup>2</sup>

This great struggle has arisen from the intense and deep desire of the people for a fully democratic parliamentary system of government. I would like to read to you something my father said about democracy:

We must make democracy the popular creed. We must try to build up a free Burma in accordance with such a creed. If we should fail to do this, our people are bound to suffer. If democracy should fail the world cannot stand back and just look on, and therefore Burma would one day, like Japan and Germany, be despised. Democracy is the only ideology which is consistent with freedom. It is also an ideology that promotes and strengthens peace. It is therefore the only ideology we should aim for.

That is what my father said. It is the reason why I am participating in this struggle for freedom and democracy in the footsteps and traditions of my father. To achieve democracy the people should be united. That is very clear. It is a very plain fact. If there is no unity of purpose we shall be unable to achieve anything at all. If the people are disunited, no ideology or form of government can bring much benefit to the country. This must be firmly fixed in the minds of the people. If there is no discipline, no system can succeed. Therefore our people should always be united and disciplined.

3 September 10, 1988, Statement of Suu Kyi

On September 10, Suu Kyi issued the following statement:

**The achievement of multi-party democracy is just one of our demands. The demand for forming an interim government is not yet met. In addition, there**

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<sup>1</sup> The paragraph reads: „Resignation from the Party. -- A candidate member wishing to resign his or her membership may do so by application to the Central Organising Committee. But once full-fledged membership has been attained no Party member shall have the right to resign from the Party.”

<sup>2</sup> Suu Kyi 1991: *Freedom from Fear and Other Writings*, London: Viking, 200.

**remains for them to hold a just and fair election. We cannot accept the election to be sponsored by an interim government which is formed by BSPP members and the present government. We only want the formation of an interim government which will be acceptable to the entire public.<sup>1</sup>**

4 September 11, 1988: Dr. Maung Maung, Speech in Parliament

This extra session of the Pyitthu Hluttaw (Parliament) was convened to decide about the holding of multi party elections. The Members of Parliament, all of them from the BSPP, voted in favour of such an election without holding a referendum before as suggested by Ne Win. BSPP Chairman and President of the Union gave a speech which should be the last address of this party's chairman to the parliament under the constitution of 1974. With regard to democracy, Maung Maung said:

**There are those who are going round saying glibly that the government is no more and they are the government. At the village or ward, the township or divisions and state or the central levels, those who profess to be the government or set up parallel governments, pose a grave danger to the country and to themselves as well. The people are tired of these acts that undermine their security and the integrity and unity of the country all under cover of the name democracy. They are looking to the government to put an end to all this and to provide them with peace and security. To those who transgress the law and commit crime and violence against the people I give this last warning. Flee, while there is yet time!**

**Responsible parties that understand and dedicate themselves to true principles of democracy should now leave the street, call off the demonstrations and strikes, and prepare themselves for the coming contest. They should join in restoring peace and in positive and creative work. They should organize their parties, formulate their programmes, and submit them to the people's scrutiny. They should try by democratic means to win the trust and support of the people, expressed by means of the secret ballot. It is not for them to judge themselves; people will judge them and pronounce their judgment at the polls. [...]**

**May I now address myself to the people? Please use your vote, your secret ballot - the most powerful weapon you can wield in a democracy - with discretion, with wisdom. You had this weapon in the many elections we had under the 1974 Constitution. You'll continue to possess the weapon in the future too. When in the elections to come, candidates from different parties or belonging to no party approach you wearing honeyed smiles and saying sweet words examine them politely and firmly to find out who they are, what they stand for. Every man has a past. Discover it. Young people these days may not know much about older politicians. They should go and ask their elders who do. After very careful investigation and scrutiny, make your choice with wisdom. Choose those who promise to be good and true representatives of the people. Even then, they may not remain good and true for always. If they stumble, help them, check them. If they prove to be incorrigible, reject them at the next elections. Always, there must be**

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<sup>1</sup> *Working People Daily* September 11, 1988 (Text online available under: <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs3/BPS88-09.pdf> [October 7, 2010]).

renewal. The weakness of our people is that they feel this *arnade*. Overcome this weakness and fuse the vote with ruthless honesty. [...]

Friends, members of the Assembly, the Hluttaw has now resolved to hold multiparty elections within three months involving a reduction of its remaining term. We have also made the necessary provisions to implement the resolutions. The Election Commission, appointed by the Hluttaw, is composed of senior citizens of eminence, and they will be in charge of conducting the elections in all fairness and freedom. They will be working full time with the status of ministers of the cabinet and a condition, which they made before accepting the trust was that they should be independent. That condition agreed entirely with our own wishes and expectations.

In no democratic country that I know of have all members of the government offered to stand down at the elections. Maybe one or two will do so, but surely not all, voluntarily. We are all standing down not from fear, but out of a genuine desire to assure fair play in the elections, to serve the people by establishing a tradition of peaceful change and respect for the constitution, and to make way for the younger generations. We have had our opportunity to serve. We are not growing any younger. We shall go in gratitude.

You have come to take part in the deliberations of this Pyithu Hluttaw which will pass with honour and grace into history. You have shown a rare sense of duty and loyalty. Future historians, doing their research objectively and making their calm and fair appraisal and analysis, will learn about this Hluttaw and your work in it with respect and admiration And so shall they remember.

5 September 12, 1988: Suu Kyi, In the Eye of the Revolution<sup>1</sup>

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## In the Eye of the Revolution

*Excerpts from this essay appeared in The Independent on 12 September 1988 under the title 'Belief in Burma's Future'. Published here in full for the first time, it was written in the crucial period between the outbreak of spontaneous demonstrations throughout Burma on 8 August and the imposition of direct military rule on 18 September.*

There are moments of tragedy, horror, anger and sheer disbelief. Surpassing all is the conviction that a movement which has risen so spontaneously from the people's irresistible desire for the full enjoyment of human rights must surely prevail. For twenty-six years the talents of the people of Burma have been suppressed by a regime which allowed no freedom of thought or initiative of any kind. Yet the last few weeks have revealed that the people can

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<sup>1</sup> Suu Kyi 1991: 209-213.

respond to a situation which requires quick thinking as well as decisive action. Since the wheels of government have stopped turning and the police can no longer guarantee security, local vigilante groups chiefly composed of Buddhist monks and students have sprung up throughout the country. Myriad unions and groups, all resolved upon democracy, have established links to enable them to work together with a unity of purpose amazing in a nation where freedom of association, albeit illegal, has only become possible within the last month. With the breakdown of government administration, difficulties in transport and communications have led to high prices and scarcity of foodstuffs. In this matter as well as in matters of medical supplies the people are

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taking matters into their own hands to organize relief. The latest manifestation of the growing discipline and solidarity of the people is the way in which the mass demonstrations of today (8 September), comprising perhaps a million or more participants, were successfully concluded without mishap.

A paragraph on the government's attempts to create anarchy in order to discredit the people's "movement for democracy" is omitted.

It might be asked who indeed are 'the people' working for democracy. They are the vast majority of the Burmese public who have suffered civil, political and economic privations under the rule of the Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP). It could be said that the party by its wanton oppression and lack of sensible economic policies has become the unwitting instrument for unification. It is almost beyond doubt that the only remaining adherents of the BSPP are those who fear that not only their positions but perhaps their safety is at stake. This illustrates yet again the large gap between the BSPP leadership and the people. For while it is undeniable that there are those who might wish to take full revenge on the regime, the majority of the people are more likely to pursue a line of justice tempered by mercy.

The following paragraphs deal with questions asked to Suu Kyi regarding the circumstances of her involvement in the movement. - The essay closes with the following two paragraphs:

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A third question that is often put to me is whether I believe that the people's movement for democracy will succeed. The answer is an unequivocal YES. Contrary to the predictions of those who are totally out of touch with the mood of Burma today, I believe that not only will the people achieve democracy but that once it is achieved they will be able to make it work for the greater good of the nation.

the greater good of the nation.

At this point I cannot resist mentioning the inspiring role played by students in this national movement. I have found the great majority of them not only brave and resourceful but also broad-minded and receptive to new ideas. Their organization and dedication have been amazing and moving. It is most heartening to think that these are the young people who will in the course of time come to shoulder the responsibilities of our country. I cannot help but feel that the future of Burma is assured.

6 September 18, 1988: SLORC Order No. 1/88 of the State Law and Order Restoration Council

**1) In order to effect a timely halt to the deteriorating conditions on all sides all over the country and for the sake of the interests of the people, the Defence Forces have assumed all power in the state with effect from today so as to carry out the following tasks immediately:**

**a. to restore law, order, peace and tranquillity;**

**b. to provide security and to facilitate transport and communications;**

**c. for this organization to do the utmost to ease the people's food, clothing, and shelter needs, and to render as much help as possible to the cooperatives and the private concerns;**

**d. to stage democratic multiparty general elections after fulfilling all the above-stated responsibilities.**

**2) The present Elections Commission for Holding Democratic Multiparty Elections will continue to exist for the successful holding of multiparty general elections.**

**3) In order to be ready for the multiparty general elections, all parties and organizations which will accept and practice genuine democracy can make preparations and form parties beginning now.**

**4) All presently active organizations, individuals, monks, and all the people are requested to render their assistance.**

**Signed: General Saw Maung, Chairman of the SLORC.**

## VII September 18, 1988 until Today

### Introduction

As mentioned in the introduction to chapter V, the term “democracy” had been dominating the news about Burma since the demonstrations and the political conflict that strongly shapes the public discourse about the country’s future has been generally perceived as a struggle between democracy and dictatorship. This appealing but simplistic alternative did not leave much room for a rational discourse and has just recently been questioned as one indication of the “intellectual crisis in comparative politics”.<sup>1</sup>

The aim of this publication is not to discuss “democracy in Burma/Myanmar” but just to present some documents that may be useful in such a discussion. Therefore, the question whether or to what extent 1988 qualifies to become the most important landmark in the country’s post-colonial history will not be discussed here. One effect of “democracy” turning out to be such a keyword is the inflation of texts containing this term. By the way, the same applies to many other countries not just in Southeast Asian after “Democracy” (with a capital D) seemed to have won the cold war against Communism decisively heralding the “End of History” (Fukuyama).

### 1 SLORC / SPDC

#### 1.1 July 27, 1990: State LORC Declaration No. 1/90<sup>2</sup>

- 1. Myanmar Naing-Ngan became an independent and sovereign nation on 4th January, 1948.**
- 2. The situation in the whole of the country deteriorated because of the disturbances during 1988. The Tatmadaw took over State Power in order to correct the deteriorating situation in time and in the interests of the people. The Tatmadaw abolished all the Organs of State Power including the Pyithu Hluttaw, formed the State Law and Order Restoration Council [SLORC], declared that it would carry out the four main tasks and undertook the responsibility of all the affairs of the State.**
- 3. The [SLORC] issued laws, notifications, declarations and orders which have the force of law, required for effectively ensuring prevalence of law and order, the rule of law and peace and tranquility throughout the country.**
- 4. In order to ease the food, clothing and shelter problems of the people and to enable private, co-operative and joint venture businesses to be undertaken, the**

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<sup>1</sup> McCarthy 2006, 8-40.

<sup>2</sup> Source: *Working People's Daily*, 29 July, 1990.

**[SLORC] has repealed the restrictive laws and has issued necessary laws, orders, directives and orders which have the force of law. Moreover, it is carrying out measures which should be undertaken with a view to serving the long-term interests of the State.**

**5. The [SLORC] is carrying out measures which should be undertaken in order to ensure safe and smooth transportation and communications and to improve the same.**

**6. The [SLORC] (Tatmadaw) is not an organization that observes any constitution; it is an organization that is governing the nation by Martial Law. It is common knowledge that the [SLORC] is governing the nation as a military government and that it is a government that has been accepted as such by the United Nations and the respective nations of the world.**

**7. As regards international relations, the [SLORC] has declared that it will pursue an independent and active foreign policy and has friendly relations with the respective nations of the world. With a view to promoting better diplomatic relations with the respective nations the Government has not closed down any embassy in Myanmar Naing-Ngan but has allowed them to continue to operate; neither has it withdrawn Myanmar embassies from foreign countries, but has continued to keep them open and maintains normal relations with the respective nations. Furthermore, the Government has even opened an embassy in a country in which there was no Myanmar embassy previously.**

**8. Myanmar Naing-Ngan being a member of the United Nations, the Myanmar Embassy to the United Nations strictly pursues the foreign policy of Myanmar Naing-Ngan in international matters and in performing its duties concerning the United Nations, Myanmar Naing-Ngan abides by the principles of peaceful co-existence in its relations with other nations. Moreover, Myanmar Naing-Ngan defends and safeguards its independence and deals with other nations' interference in its internal affairs in accordance with the provisions of the United Nations Charter.**

**9. In order to avoid disruption and severance of relations between Myanmar Naing-Ngan and other nations, the Government magnanimously has time and again told some diplomats who have violated their diplomatic code of conduct not to interfere in its internal affairs without mentioning their names and the nations to which they belong. Furthermore, it has informed the matters to the embassies concerned through diplomatic channels. As it has been able to avoid matters that may cause disruption of relations between nations and governments by doing so, there has not arisen any problem. Misunderstandings due to the activities of some diplomats have been cleared with magnanimity, through diplomatic channels.**

**10. The [SLORC] (Tatmadaw) has been persistently carrying out the three main tasks--that of preventing disintegration of the Union, preventing disintegration of national solidarity and that of ensuring perpetuity of the sovereignty of the State from the time it has assumed the duties and responsibilities of the State. Everybody is aware that on the other hand it has launched major offensives and crushed all sorts of armed insurgents, sacrificing the lives, blood and sweat of many members of the Tatmadaw. Since the Tatmadaw is not a political organization, it did not hold negotiations with the insurgents by political means. However, it welcomes all those who have renounced the programme of armed struggle and returned to the legal fold and a body formed by it is carrying out resettlement work for them. Since the [SLORC] is not a political government, it**

has no reason at all to negotiate by political means with any armed insurgent organization.

11. In order to enable the Multi-Party Democracy General Election to be held, the [SLORC] enacted the Multi-Party Democracy General Election Commission and formed the Multi-Party Democracy General Election Commission. It also enacted the Political Parties Registration law to enable political parties wishing to stand for the election to get themselves registered. Moreover, in order to hold a free and fair multi-party democracy general election, it enacted the Pyithu Hluttaw Election Law.

12. Section 3 of the Pyithu Hluttaw Election Law provides that--"The Hluttaw shall be constituted with the representatives elected from the constituencies in accordance with this law." The [SLORC] will take measures for summoning the Hluttaw in accordance with this provision. The Information Committee has, from time to time explained that the Multi-Party Democracy General Election Commission, the parties which won seats in the election and the elected representatives should carry out measures which should be carried out in accordance with the law and rules.

13. Today, after the Multi-Party Democracy General Election has been held, matters relating to summoning the Hluttaw and transfer of power are being discussed in bulletins and pamphlets published; guidelines in respect thereof are being given and incitements and instigations are being undertaken by foreign broadcasting stations and illegal pamphlets and leaflets are being distributed.

14. The matter of summoning the Hluttaw has been explained earlier. The Chairman of the [SLORC] has explained matters relating to transfer of power in the addresses he has made from time to time in his meeting with the Command Commanders, Commanders of Light Infantry Divisions and Chairmen of the State/ Division Law and Order Restoration Councils. The Secretary-1 of the [SLORC] explicitly dealt with this matter at the 100th Press Conference held on 13th July, 1990.

15. There will be no necessity to clarify the fact that a political party cannot automatically get the three aspects of State Power--the legislative power, the executive power and the judicial power--just because a Pyithu Hluttaw has come into being and that they can only be obtained on the basis of a constitution. The Constitution of 1947 was accepted and approved by the Constituent Assembly on 24th September, 1947. However, it can clearly be seen from the legal aspect that that constitution came into force only on 4th January 1948 when Myanmar Naing-Ngan was declared an independent and sovereign State. There are two types of constitutions for a nation--one drawn up before the nation becomes independent and the other drawn up after the nation has become independent. The tradition followed by the respective nations which have attained independence is that they held constituent assemblies and drew up the constitutions only after they have acquired sovereign power. However, in Myanmar Naing-Ngan independence was declared only after the Constituent Assembly had drawn up the constitution. It is clear that this was due to the fact that the leaders of the nation in those days wanted to obtain independence from the British by peaceful means as early as possible.

16. The Constitution of 1974 was drawn up after the nation's independence had been gained and no one can deny the fact that it was a constitution promulgated through a national referendum.

17. It is necessary to note particularly the difference in that the Constitution of 1947 was drawn up before the independence of the nation was attained and that the Constitution of 1974 was drawn up after the independence of the nation had been attained.

18. It can be seen from the statements issued that the desire of the majority of the political parties which contested in the Multi-Party Democracy General Election is to draw up a new constitution. It will be seen that when the Constitution of 1947 was drawn up, matters concerning the national races were discussed only with the Shan, Kachin and Chin nationals at the Panglong Conference and that they were not discussed with the Mon and Rakhine nationals. Today, in Myanmar Naing-Ngan there are many national races who have awakened politically and it is obvious that it is especially necessary to draw up a firm constitution after soliciting their wishes and views.

19. As the [SLORC] is a military government, it exercises Martial Law. As such it exercises the following three aspects of State Power in governing Myanmar Naing-Ngan:

(a) Legislative power: Only the [SLORC] has the right to exercise it.

(b) Executive power: The [SLORC] has the right to exercise it. However, it has delegated this power to the Government, State/Division, Township Zone, Township and Ward/Village-tract Law and Order Restoration Councils at different levels and has caused administrative work to be carried out through collective leadership. This is a form of giving training to the service personnel so that they will be able to perform, by keeping themselves free from party politics their departmental work under the government that will come into being according to the constitution.

(c) Judicial power: The [SLORC] has the right to exercise it. However, the Government has formed courts at various levels to adjudicate on ordinary criminal and civil cases so that they will have practical training when a constitution comes into being.

20. Consequently under the present circumstances, the representatives elected by the people are those who have the responsibility to draw up the constitution of the future democratic State.

21. It is hereby declared that the [SLORC] will in no way accept the drawing up of a temporary constitution for forming a government to take over State Power and that it will take effective action if it is done so, and that in the interim period before a government is formed in accordance with a new firm constitution drawn up according to the desires and aspirations of the people, the [SLORC] (Tatmadaw) will defend and safeguard--

(a) the three main causes--such as the non-disintegration of the Union, non-disintegration of national solidarity and ensuring perpetuity of the sovereignty;

(b) of the four main tasks mentioned in the [SLORC] Declaration No 1/88 such as the prevalence of law and order, the rule of law, regional peace and tranquillity, ensuring safe and smooth transportation and communication, easing the food, clothing and shelter problems of the people and holding Multi-Party Democracy General Election, the first three main tasks (with the exception of the task of holding the multi-party democracy general election) and

**(c) the task of bringing about the development of the national races of Myanmar Naing-Ngan.**

**By order,**

**Sd. Khin Nyunt**

**Secretary-1**

**The State Law and Order Restoration Council**

1.2 August 30, 2003 The seven-step “roadmap” to disciplined democracy announced by Gen. Khin Nyunt

- (1) Reconvening of the National Convention that has been adjourned since 1996.**
- (2) After the successful holding of the National Convention, step by step implementation of the process necessary for the emergence of a genuine and disciplined democratic system.**
- (3) Drafting of a new constitution in accordance with basic principles and detailed basic principles laid down by the National Convention.**
- (4) Adoption of the constitution through national referendum.**
- (5) Holding of free and fair elections for Pyithu Hluttaws (Legislative bodies) according to the new constitution.**
- (6) Convening of Hluttaws attended by Hluttaw members in accordance with the new constitution.**
- (7) Building a modern, developed and democratic nation by the state leaders elected by the Hluttaw; and the government and other central organs formed by the Hluttaw.**

## **2 Suu Kyi**

2.1 After September 18, 1988 to July 19, 1989

As a result of SLORC’s announcement in point four of Order 1/88 to prepare for multi-party elections, the National League for Democracy (NLD) was founded on September 27, 1988. Former generals Aung Gyi (born 1919) and Tin Oo (born 1927) were elected Chairman and Vice-Chairman and Suu Kyi took up the post of General Secretary. The preparations of elections that had begun under the last BSPP government under Dr. Maung Maung continued.

2.1.1 December 3, 1988 Speech on the occasion of the National Day<sup>1</sup>

We have all entered this struggle for democracy because we believe that we can win. For example, a person enters a race or buys a lottery ticket because he believes it's possible to win. So also if someone were to ask me whether I believe we can win in our fight for democracy, I should reply honestly, 'Yes, we can', and because I believe we can, I have chosen to take part. I should like the students and young people to continue their work while keeping in mind that we can win. We still have great struggles ahead of us; we still have work yet to do, and not merely for months. We are going to have to work and struggle for years. Even if there are elections and the forces of democracy win,

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the movement is not yet finished with its work; we still have to continue. Today the students and young people are around twenty years old. Life expectancy in Burma is about sixty, and maybe under democracy and improved living conditions it will become seventy. That means that the youth of today will have possibly fifty years of struggle ahead of them. Democracy is something one must nourish all one's life, if it is to remain alive and strong. Like the health of a person: even if his parents have raised him to healthy adulthood, if he fails to take care of himself, his health will deteriorate. If each of you keeps in mind all your life that you have a responsibility for the welfare of your country, then we shall have no reason to worry that our country's health will deteriorate. We want to work hand in hand with everyone working for democracy. I don't mean working together half-heartedly – we want to work together heart and soul.

This is National Day. I should like everyone to decide, beginning today, that you will work for the nation's interest, meaning your fellow countrymen, for the stability of the Union and the good of all the people. When working for the national interest, we must not have loyalties to particular people or to short-term objectives. Don't keep these personal loyalties. I should like us to continue our journey with genuine sympathy and a clear mind. I always tell people to have high aspirations – have the highest aspirations.

2.2 From July 19, 1989 to May 1990

Suu Kyi was put under house arrest on July 20, 1989, one day after Martyrs' Day remembering the death of her father together with members of his cabinet. Her and her party's preparations for the participation in the days' ceremonies were called a threat to public security by the authorities.

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<sup>1</sup> Suu Kyi 1991, 218-219.

The essay, from which the following passages are taken, was published after her first house arrest but was written before during the time of her travels in Myanmar in preparation of the upcoming elections.<sup>1</sup>

### 2.2.1 In Quest of Democracy

#### In Quest of Democracy

*This essay and the two which follow were written by the author for a project she was unable to complete before she was placed under house arrest on 20 July 1989. The project was intended to result in a volume of essays on democracy and human rights which she had been hoping to dedicate to her father as Essays in Honour of Bogyoke Aung San.*

#### I

Opponents of the movement for democracy in Burma have sought to undermine it by on the one hand casting aspersions on the competence of the people to judge what was best for the nation and on the other condemning the basic tenets of democracy as un-Burmese. There is nothing new in Third World governments seeking to justify and perpetuate authoritarian rule by denouncing liberal democratic principles as alien. By implication they claim for themselves the official and sole right to decide what does or does not conform to indigenous cultural norms. Such conventional propaganda aimed at consolidating the powers of the establishment has been studied, analysed and disproved by political scientists, jurists and sociologists. But in Burma, distanced by several decades of isolationism from political and intellectual developments in the outside world, the people have had to draw on their own resources to explode the twin myths of their unfitness for political responsibility and the unsuitability of democracy for their society. As soon as the movement for democracy spread out across Burma there was a surge of intense interest in the meaning

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of the word 'democracy', in its history and its practical implications. More than a quarter-century of narrow authoritarianism under which they had been fed a pabulum of shallow, negative dogma had not blunted the perceptiveness or political alertness of the Burmese. On the contrary, perhaps not all that surprisingly, their appetite for discussion and debate, for uncensored information and objective analysis, seemed to have been sharpened. Not only was there an eagerness to study and to absorb standard theories on modern politics and political institutions, there was

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<sup>1</sup> Suu Kyi 1991, 168-179.

also widespread and intelligent speculation on the nature of democracy as a social system of which they had had little experience but which appealed to their common-sense notions of what was due to a civilized society. There was a spontaneous interpretative response to such basic ideas as representative government, human rights and the rule of law. The privileges and freedoms which would be guaranteed by democratic institutions were contemplated with understandable enthusiasm. But the duties of those who would bear responsibility for the maintenance of a stable democracy also provoked much thoughtful consideration. It was natural that a people who have suffered much from the consequences of bad government should be preoccupied with theories of good government.

Members of the Buddhist *sangha* in their customary role as mentors have led the way in articulating popular expectations by drawing on classical learning to illuminate timeless values. But the conscious effort to make traditional knowledge relevant to contemporary needs was not confined to any particular circle – it went right through Burmese society from urban intellectuals and small shopkeepers to doughty village grandmothers.

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The Buddhist view of world history tells that when society fell from its original state of purity into moral and social chaos a king was elected to restore peace and justice. The ruler was known by three titles: *Mahasammata*, ‘because he is named ruler by the unanimous consent of the people’; *Khattiya*; ‘because he has dominion over agricultural land’; and *Raja*, ‘because he wins the people to affection through observance of the *dhamma* (virtue, justice, the

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law)’. The agreement by which their first monarch undertakes to rule righteously in return for a portion of the rice crop represents the Buddhist version of government by social contract. The *Mahasammata* follows the general pattern of Indic kingship in South-east Asia. This has been criticized as antithetical to the idea of the modern state because it promotes a personalized form of monarchy lacking the continuity inherent in the western abstraction of the king as possessed of both a body politic and a body natural. However, because the *Mahasammata* was chosen by popular consent and required to govern in accordance with just laws, the concept of government elective and *sub lege* is not alien to traditional Burmese thought.

The Buddhist view of kingship does not invest the ruler with the divine right to govern the realm as he pleases. He is expected to observe the Ten Duties of Kings, the Seven Safeguards against Decline, the Four Assistances to the People, and to be guided by numerous other codes of conduct such as the Twelve Practices of Rulers, the Six Attributes of Leaders, the Eight Virtues of Kings and the Four Ways to Overcome Peril. There is logic to a tradition which includes the king among the five enemies or perils and which subscribes to many sets of moral instructions for the edification of those in positions of authority. The people of Burma have had much experience of despotic rule and possess a great awareness of the unhappy gap that can exist between the theory and practice of government.

The Ten Duties of Kings are widely known and generally accepted as a yardstick which could be applied just as well to modern government as to the first monarch of the world. The duties are: liberality, morality, self-sacrifice, integrity, kindness, austerity, non-anger, non-violence, forbearance and non-opposition (to the will of the people).

The first duty of liberality (*dana*) which demands that a ruler should contribute generously towards the welfare of the people makes the tacit assumption that a government should have the competence to provide adequately for its citizens. In the context of modern politics, one of the prime duties of a responsible administration would be to ensure the economic security of the state.

It follows an interpretation of the next eight virtues, namely morality (*sila*), generosity or self-sacrifice (*paricagga*), integrity (*ajjava*), kindness (*maddava*), austerity (*tapa*), non-anger (*akkodha*), non-violence (*avihamsa*) and forbearance (*khanti*).

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The tenth duty of kings, non-opposition to the will of the people (*avirodha*), tends to be singled out as a Buddhist endorse-

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ment of democracy, supported by well-known stories from the *Jakatas*. Pawridasa, a monarch who acquired an unfortunate taste for human flesh, was forced to leave his kingdom because he would not heed the people's demand that he should abandon his cannibalistic habits. A very different kind of ruler was the Buddha's penultimate incarnation on earth, the pious King Vessantara. But he too was sent into exile when in the course of his strivings for the perfection of liberality he gave away the white elephant of the state without the consent of the people. The real duty of non-opposition is a reminder that the legitimacy of government is founded on the consent of the people, who may withdraw their mandate at any time if they lose confidence in the ability of the ruler to serve their best interests.

By invoking the Ten Duties of Kings the Burmese are not so much indulging in wishful thinking as drawing on time-honoured values to reinforce the validity of the political reforms they consider necessary. It is a strong argument for democracy that governments regulated by principles of accountability, respect for public opinion and the supremacy of just laws are more likely than an all-powerful ruler or ruling class, uninhibited by the need to honour the will of the people, to observe the traditional duties of Buddhist kingship. Traditional values serve both to justify and to decipher popular expectations of democratic government.

## II

The people of Burma view democracy not merely as a form of government but as an integrated social and ideological system based on respect for the individual. When asked why they feel so strong a need for democracy, the least political will answer: 'We just want to be able to go about our own business freely and peacefully, not doing anybody any harm, just earning a decent living without anxiety and fear.' In other words they want the basic human rights which would guarantee a tranquil, dignified existence free from want and fear. 'Democracy songs' articulated such

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longings: 'I am not among the rice-eating robots . . . Everyone but everyone should be entitled to human rights.' 'We are not savage beasts of the jungle, we are all men with reason, it's high time to stop the rule of armed intimidation: if every movement of dissent were settled by the gun, Burma would only be emptied of people.'

It was predictable that as soon as the issue of human rights became an integral part of the movement for democracy the official media should start ridiculing and condemning the whole concept of human rights, dubbing it a western artefact alien to traditional values. It was also ironic – Buddhism, the foundation of traditional Burmese culture, places the greatest value on man, who alone of all beings can achieve the supreme state of Buddhahood. Each man has in him the potential to realize the truth through his own will and endeavour and to help others to realize it. Human life therefore is infinitely precious. 'Easier is it for a needle dropped from the abode of Brahma to meet a needle stuck in the earth than to be born as a human being.'

But despotic governments do not recognize the precious human component of the state, seeing its citizens only as a faceless, mindless – and helpless – mass to be manipulated at will. It is as

Next comes an elaboration on the nature of the authoritarian government and a comparison of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Buddha's teachings. – The essay concludes thus:

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democracy.

In a revolutionary movement there is always the danger that political exigencies might obscure, or even nullify, essential spiritual aims. A firm insistence on the inviolability and primacy of such aims is not mere idealism but a necessary safeguard against an Animal Farm syndrome where the new order after its first flush of enthusiastic reforms takes on the murky colours of the very system it has replaced. The people of Burma want not just a change of government but a change in political values. The unhappy legacies of authoritarianism can be removed only if the concept of absolute power as the basis of government is replaced by the concept of confidence as the mainspring of political authority: the confidence of the people in their right and ability to decide the destiny of their nation, the mutual confidence in the principles of justice, liberty and human rights. Of the four Buddhist virtues conducive to the happiness of laymen, *saddha*, confidence in moral, spiritual and intellectual values, is the first. To instil such confidence, not by an appeal to the passions but through intellectual conviction, into a society which has long been wracked by distrust and uncertainty is the essence of the Burmese revolution for democracy. It is a revolution which moves for changes endorsed by universal norms of ethics.

In their quest for democracy the people of Burma explore not only the political theories and practices of the world outside their country but also the spiritual and intellectual values that have given shape to their own environment.

There is an instinctive understanding that the cultural, social and political development of a nation is a dynamic process which has to be given purpose and direction by drawing on tradition as well as by experiment, innovation and a willingness to evaluate both old and new ideas objectively. This is not to claim that all those who desire democracy in Burma are guided by an awareness of the need to balance a dispassionate, sensitive assessment of the past with an intelligent appreciation of the present. But threading through the movement is a rich vein of the liberal, integrated spirit which meets intellectual challenges with wisdom and cour-

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age. There is also a capacity for the sustained mental strife and physical endurance necessary to withstand the forces of negativism, bigotry and hate. Most encouraging of all, the main impetus for struggle is not an appetite for power, revenge and destruction but a genuine respect for freedom, peace and justice.

The quest for democracy in Burma is the struggle of a people to live whole, meaningful lives as free and equal members of the world community. It is part of the unceasing human endeavour to prove that the spirit of man can transcend the flaws of his own nature.

### 2.2.2 The elections of May 27, 1990

On May 27, 1990 “fair and free” elections were held in Myanmar. Suu Kyi, still under house arrest, was barred by the election law from standing for election, but her party, the NLD won 82% of the contested seats:

Party	Votes	% of votes	Seats
National League for Democracy	7,943,622	58.7%	392
Shan Nationalities League for Democracy	222,821	1.7%	23
Arakan League for Democracy	160,783	1.2%	11
National Unity Party	2,805,559	21.2%	10
Mon National Democratic Front	138,572	1%	5
National Democratic Party for Human Rights	128,129	1%	4
Chin National League for Democracy	51,187	0.4%	3
Kachin State National Congress for Democracy	13,994	0.1%	3
Party for National Democracy	72,672	0.5%	3

In Their Own Voice: „Democracy“ as perceived in Burma/Myanmar

Union Poah National Organisation	35,389	0.3%	3
Democratic Organisation for Kayan National Unity	16,553	0.1%	2
Kayah State Nationalities League for Democracy	11,664	0.1%	2
Naga Hills Regional Progressive Party	10,612	0.1%	2
Ta-ang (Palaung) National League for Democracy	16,553	0.1%	2
Zomi National Congress	18,638	0.1%	2
Minor parties and independents	1,606,858	12.1%	12
<b>Total</b>	<b>13,253,606</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>492</b>

- Turnout: 72.6% (15,112,524 out of 20,818,313 eligible voters)
- Invalid votes: 1,858,918 (12.3%)

A look at the parties' names shows that out of the 15 parties that won seats all but four used the term "democracy" as part of their name. SLORC did not allow the elected parliament to convene and started to question the integrity of elected MPs as well as their parties. In the following political crisis, some elected representatives met secretly in Mandalay in October 1990 and agreed to try and call an Assembly. Following a security clampdown, a dozen elected representatives fled to insurgent controlled territory and subsequently established the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma ("NCGUB") on 18 December 1990 at Manerplaw in Karen State on the Thai-Burmese border. The NCGUB, headed by Suu Kyi's cousin Sein Win, later went into exile. The NLD, however, maintained its legal presence in Rangoon and in the interests of its own survival disassociated itself from the NCGUB and those NLD elected representatives who had founded the exile government.

### 2.3 From May 1990 to 1995

One response of the outside world to the political crisis was the attempt to strengthen the position of Suu Kyi by awarding her prizes. In December 1991, she was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. Due to her house arrest, during the next years she could address her supporters only via the international media.

2.3.1 December 1990 Excerpt from the essay “Freedom of Fear” to commemorate the European Parliament's awarding of the 1990 Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought to Suu Kyi<sup>1</sup>

**Public dissatisfaction with economic hardships has been seen as the chief cause of the movement for democracy in Burma, sparked off by the student demonstrations 1988. It is true that years of incoherent policies, inept official measures, burgeoning inflation and falling real income had turned the country into an economic shambles. But it was more than the difficulties of eking out a barely acceptable standard of living that had eroded the patience of a traditionally good-natured, quiescent people - it was also the humiliation of a way of life disfigured by corruption and fear.**

**The students were protesting not just against the death of their comrades but against the denial of their right to life by a totalitarian regime which deprived the present of meaningfulness and held out no hope for the future. And because the students' protests articulated the frustrations of the people at large, the demonstrations quickly grew into a nationwide movement. Some of its keenest supporters were businessmen who had developed the skills and the contacts necessary not only to survive but to prosper within the system. But their affluence offered them no genuine sense of security or fulfilment, and they could not but see that if they and their fellow citizens, regardless of economic status, were to achieve a worthwhile existence, an accountable administration was at least a necessary if not a sufficient condition. The people of Burma had wearied of a precarious state of passive apprehension where they were 'as water in the cupped hands' of the powers that be.**

**Emerald cool we may be  
As water in the cupped hands  
But oh that we might be  
As splinters of glass  
In cupped hands.**

**Glass splinters, the smallest with its sharp, glinting power to defend itself against hands that try to crush, could be seen as a vivid symbol of the spark of courage that is an essential attribute of those who would free themselves from the grip of oppression. Bogyoke Aung San regarded himself as a revolutionary and searched tirelessly for answers to the problems that beset Burma during her times of trial. He exhorted the people to develop courage: 'Don't just depend on the courage and intrepidity of others. Each and every one of you must make sacrifices to become a hero possessed of courage and intrepidity. Then only shall we all be able to enjoy true freedom.'**

**The effort necessary to remain uncorrupted in an environment where fear is an integral part of everyday existence is not immediately apparent to those fortunate enough to live in states governed by the rule of law. Just laws do not merely prevent corruption by meting out impartial punishment to offenders. They also help to create a society in which people can fulfil the basic requirements necessary for the preservation of human dignity without recourse to corrupt practices.**

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<sup>1</sup> The essay was published in July 1991 at the time of the award ceremony in Strasbourg in various newspapers and magazines. It is republished in Suu Kyi 1991: 180-185 (the excerpt: 181-183).

**Where there are no such laws, the burden of upholding the principles of justice and common decency falls on the ordinary people. It is the cumulative effect on their sustained effort and steady endurance which will change a nation where reason and conscience are warped by fear into one where legal rules exist to promote man's desire for harmony and justice while restraining the less desirable destructive traits in his nature.**

**In an age when immense technological advances have created lethal weapons which could be, and are, used by the powerful and the unprincipled to dominate the weak and the helpless, there is a compelling need for a closer relationship between politics and ethics at both the national and international levels. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations proclaims that 'every individual and every organ of society' should strive to promote the basic rights and freedoms to which all human beings regardless of race, nationality or religion are entitled. But as long as there are governments whose authority is founded on coercion rather than on the mandate of the people, and interest groups which place short-term profits above long-term peace and prosperity, concerted international action to protect and promote human rights will remain at best a partially realized struggle. There will continue to be arenas of struggle where victims of oppression have to draw on their own inner resources to defend their inalienable rights as members of the human family.**

**The quintessential revolution is that of the spirit, born of an intellectual conviction of the need for change in those mental attitudes and values which shape the course of a nation's development. A revolution which aims merely at changing official policies and institutions with a view to an improvement in material conditions has little chance of genuine success.**

**Without a revolution of the spirit, the forces which produced the iniquities of the old order would continue to be operative, posing a constant threat to the process of reform and regeneration. It is not enough merely to call for freedom, democracy and human rights. There has to be a united determination to persevere in the struggle, to make sacrifices in the name of enduring truths, to resist the corrupting influences of desire, ill will, ignorance and fear.**

#### 2.4 1995 - 2000

The house arrest was lifted in July 1995. Suu Kyi as well as the party's two chairpersons, Tin Oo and Kyi Maung were allowed to address the people twice a week outside Suu Kyi's house on University Avenue. In the end of 1996, the meetings were stopped by the authorities allegedly because of inconveniences caused to public traffic. Here is an excerpt of her first address in which she answered to questions handed in by the public.

2.4.1 September 23, 1995: From a Speech given at University Avenue 54<sup>1</sup>

Here is a question from a monk: ‘The Burmese people have been living from hand to mouth. Is it possible for Burma to become a modern state, or the capital Rangoon to become a city of high standard of living?’ (applauses)

A: It depends what we mean by ‘modernization’ and ‘high living standard.’ We think that as long as the people are poor, their country cannot be a modern country with high standard of living. For some people building modern hotels and buying modern cars might mean ‘modernization.’ (applauses) In our understanding, a modern nation has to have a living standard that can meet international norms. Living standard means *the living standard* of the common people - the standard of food, shelter, clothing, health and education of the commons. Not that of a group of people. (applauses) To us, if a capital has high living standard, that means that the people who live in that city must have regular and adequate supplies of electricity (applauses) as well as water. The city must have an efficient public transport. There should be enough buses that run regularly and punctually. We .... (Telephone! from the audience) .... Yes ... telephone ... very modern now .... the people should have enough phone lines. Communication has to be efficient too. To us a city is a modern city only when the above criteria are met. The same goes for the whole nation. Only when our people’s basic needs for food, shelter clothing, and for health care, education and public transport are met, we can call our nation a modern nation, in our opinion (applauses).

Q: The next question is from U Sit Mone...I don’t think it’s his real name.<sup>2</sup> (laughter) U Sit Mone has written to us to explain the concept of democracy by the father of our nation, Aung San.

A: Since this question relates a bit to the first question, I am going to pick an excerpt from a speech my dad delivered at the preliminary meeting of the AFPFL on May 19, 1947.<sup>3</sup> He said “A genuine democratic system is not just a government of the people, by the people and for the people theoretically. A democratic government has to be able to provide equal opportunities for the people economically.” This relates to what I said earlier; equality of rights or equal opportunities for all in economic sector. If only a handful of people enjoy economic opportunities, the system cannot be democratic. Every citizen must be entitled to equal rights in economy, education and health. I hope everyone understands that democracy does not mean making everyone equal. There are the rich and the poor in democratic societies. Yet their rights are equal. If we can enjoy rights only when we are related to such and such people, we cannot call it democratic. There are thousands of tomes on democracy. Discourse on democracy will be endless. So let me be brief here. In daddy’s opinion, democracy is a government of the people, by the people and for the people. In addition a democratic government has to be capable of providing equal rights and equal economic opportunities for all citizens. We take two questions each from anyone. We will not answer more than two questions from each person in order to give everyone the same opportunity.

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<sup>1</sup> Translation: Ko Ko Thett. The Burmese text is from the appendix of: Kenji Ino 2001 *Thoughts and Behavior of Aung San Suu Kyi*. Kitachushu, Kenkyu Forum of Asian Women.

<sup>2</sup> Sit Mone literally means ‘someone who hates war or armed forces.’ [translator’s note].

<sup>3</sup> The Anti-fascist People’s Freedom League, AFPFL, was a post-war coalition of anti-colonial forces led by Aung San.

2.4.2 May 1998: Statement on the 8th anniversary of the election victory (Interview, together with Aung Shwe and Tin Oo)<sup>1</sup>

**26 May, 1998 by U Aung Shwe (Chairman), Daw Aung San Suu Kyi (General Secretary), and U Tin U (Deputy Chairman)**

**U AUNG SHWE:** The NLD participated in the democratic general elections held in May 1990. We won 82 per cent of the seats. That's a great majority. Without the confidence of the people, we could not get so many votes. It's quite a lot. We are very thankful to the voters for voting for the NLD.

At that time, we issued a manifesto, as you know, for this election. The political objective is to have democracy in our country. As for the economy, we want an open market economy. And for the cultural side, we want freedom of religion, freedom of education, freedom of speech and all these democratic principles. I think because of those things and because the people believe that we can do it, they voted for us.

We entered the election according to the election rules, the election law published by the authorities, and in that law there is one section, Section 3, which says that categorically that the parliament must inform the winning MPs that they have won the elections, but nothing has happened so far. It is very regrettable. It is a very sad state of affairs. And I think the people are very dissatisfied with that.

**DAW AUNG SAN SUU KYI:** It is now 8 years since the elections of 1990 in which the people of Burma decided, by voting for the NLD, that they wanted a democratic system. It is 8 years since the elections have been ignored by the authorities, but we still stand by the promises that we made to our people then.

We want to work for democracy not because democracy is some kind of magic word, or some kind of magic state, but because we believe this is the only way we can resolve the social, economic and political problems of our country. [...N]obody can deny we are in an economic mess. Prices are increasing all the time, the incomes of the people are not keeping pace with inflation, there are more and more poor people in the countryside. There are some very, very rich people and that in itself is bad because that means there is a greater gap between the very rich and the great majority of the people, who are poor.

We also have social problems, the greatest which is our lack of proper education. The universities have been closed since December 1996 and there is a backlog of students waiting to get into university. The health care system is in a shambles. There are so many things wrong with the country.

This is why we want to get to democracy as quickly as possible, to resolve all these problems. We believe that with a government that is accountable to the people and has the confidence not only of our country but of the international community we will be able to resolve both our economic and social problems, not to speak of the political problems which of course will be automatically resolved once we achieve our democratic goal.

Now Burma is suffering from lack of investment. The NLD stands for sanctions against investment in Burma at the moment, because we do not believe that

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<sup>1</sup>Text online available under: <http://geociti.es/CapitolHill/lobby/3190/assk/nld27.html> [October, 7, 2010].

investment now helps the people in any way. If there is an accountable government that will spend the revenues earned in a responsible way and decide on an investment policy that is beneficial to the public at large, certainly then we shall encourage investment and we will be able to get over quite a lot of the present problems. (Then) we will be able to open the universities. Why are the universities closed now? This is because the government is nervous that if they reopen the universities there will be unrest among the students. Then we have to ask another question, Why do they think there will be unrest among the students? Unrest only comes when there is discontent. If we can create a situation in which the students as well as the public at large can be satisfied, then there is no need to fear unrest. So, we want to work for the reopening of the universities, for the establishment of an economic system that is fair and will lead to sustained economic development, and we want to work for a system in which the great majority of our people who live in the rural areas will be able to achieve progress and prosperity. Our farmers are suffering at the moment from a lack of an equitable agricultural policy. We have to look to all this. Democracy for us is a means to an end, it's a way of creating peace and prosperity for our country. We are absolutely confident that once we are able to achieve our political goal we will be able to achieve the economic and social goals that are common to all of us in Burma.

I do not believe that anyone in Burma wishes our country to be poor, I do not think it (the regime) wishes our people to be uneducated or semi-educated. As soon as we come to some kind of settlement with the authorities we are absolutely confident that the National League for Democracy will be in the position to call for the kind of proper investment that will lead to the prosperity of our people. The National League for Democracy will have the courage to reopen the universities and make sure that the education of our young people is not jeopardized in any way by political problems. We are confident that we'll be able to create a health care system that will truly take care of our people, not just of the rich and the privileged.

**U AUNG SHWE:** Political dialogue has been consistently requested, but so far we have not been successful yet. But if it goes on like this forever, I think the people suffer because there are now political problems, economic problems and cultural problems. All these problems cannot be solved without meeting each other and talking to each other. We are very sorry that nothing has come about yet.

**DAW AUNG SAN SUU KYI:** We are committed to dialogue, we think this is the only way to resolve the problems of our country. There are those (members of the government) who think that accepting dialogue is an admission of defeat. We do not think this is so. We think that to accept dialogue would be to display strength by the government, to show that they have strength and courage to do what is in the best for the country.

We want dialogue because we want to find a solution that is best for everybody, that is to say particularly for the people of Burma and also for the government, and those who are in the opposition at the moment. We do not want revenge, we do not think there is anything particularly honourable or admirable about seeking revenge, we want to find a peaceful settlement [...] we remain committed to dialogue. It may be difficult to get there, but we're determined to get that. And we're absolutely confident that we shall get that.

**U TIN U: [...W]e will never seek for any form of revenge to anybody, and we will never seek for any retaliatory action [...] searching for revenge is showing something like cowardice.**

**Dialogue is the only way that can solve all the problems in our country. Therefore we very much desire to have a dialogue with our democratic forces led by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, and the ethnic races, as well as the present military regime.**

**U TIN U: There is no rule of law and there is no independence of the judiciary system here. Regarding human rights, there is no change. Even though the SLORC government has changed its name, there is no change, it is like putting the new foot in the old boot [...] after they change their name there are quite a lot of clear cases where they have started doing another kind of harassment of human rights.**

**And now, those people under imprisonment in the Insein jail have been dispersed, (some) remain in Insein jail, but the rest have been taken away and transferred to other far away prisons such as Myitkyina, Myingyan and other places. The leaders of our youth have been transferred to the very far away prison such as Kalaymyo, which is, how shall we say, torturous, too far away to have any sort of link with their family. The family cannot manage to meet even though they are allowed a fortnight interview. The legal system in Burma has become a casualty of the present regime.**

#### 2.4.3 May 27, 1999: Address on the Occasion of the 9th Anniversary of the General Election<sup>1</sup>

**National League for Democracy No: (97/B), West Shwegondine Road, Bahan Township, Bahan**

**Address by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, General Secretary of the National League for Democracy, on the occasion of the 9th anniversary of the general elections.**

**I thank all the members of the National League for Democracy that are present here to day. We value your presence. Our struggle for democracy has continued for 10 years now (1988 to 1999). It is nearly eleven years since our NLD was formed. Today, nine years after the general elections, I will talk about how elections, democracy and political parties are related.**

**There has to be political parties in a democratic system so that people can exercise their right to make a choice to elect a government. Amongst the millions of people in a country one cannot just announce that he or she will be a candidate in an election. It doesn't work that way. There has to be a system in which political parties operate otherwise for all practical purposes, democracy will not work. Therefore, it was necessary for us to form a political party. Political parties have to formulate policies which have to be revealed to the people. The people can examine the political platform of the parties and make their choice as to which party they will support and as an expression of that support they cast their votes at elections. They cast their votes for the candidates of the party of their choice. We must bear this point in mind. In every election, candidates of political parties contest. Independent individuals who don't belong to any political are allowed by law to also contest. If they are successful, they can rightly claim that they have been elected on their own merit. But this is not the position with candidates of political parties who are returned at the polls. It must be remembered that their success**

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<sup>1</sup> Text online available under: <http://geociti.es/CapitolHill/lobby/3190/assk/asskmsg15.html> [October 7, 2010].

was due to the political platform of the party. In the 1990 general elections there were independent candidate with independent beliefs and goals who dared to contest in their own right. However, I dare to make the statement that the 392 NLD candidates who contested the election did so in the name of our party.

I speak with a clear conscience, as I was not a candidate in the elections. At the time our party decided to contest the elections, our Deputy Chairman U Tin Oo and I had been placed under arrest. We were not involved in this decision. But because of our faith in our party and the members, we accepted the decision 100%. Because we were not personally involved in the decision making our consent was not just 90%.

This is the democratic system. We accepted the majority decision to participate in the elections. I was under house arrest at the time. I accepted the decision that I should contest in the elections. I made the necessary application. But you all know that the authorities rejected it. I did not refrain from casting my vote because I was refused permission to contest. I knew that my one vote must be cast in support of my party and our friends. I was aware that when my candidacy was rejected, the party decided that our votes should go to the Democracy Party candidate in my constituency, so I cast my vote accordingly. This is the democratic way. These practices and rules must be observed. Those NLD candidates who were successful in the elections have a duty to the people and to the party and so do the party and all other political parties. Participation in the elections is an avowal of one's belief in the democratic system. This is how I see it. If personal gain was the motivation, the people will lose faith. Politically, there can be no respect for such a person. This is how every political party and every individual that participated in the elections should view the situation and work towards the establishment of the Hluttaw.

Why should anyone participate in elections if he/she does not believe that a Hluttaw must be established? We have the right to ask the question. From the commencement of participation it was with the belief that a Pyithu Hluttaw would be established. If this was not so, why did anyone participate. We can now ask if the individuals who contested did so out of a desire to be recognized as members of parliament? Were they looking for person gain? Every individual, every party that believes in the creation of a Pyithu Hluttaw has the responsibility to do everything in his power to make it happen. The electorate also has a responsibility. Why did they go and cast their votes? They were endorsing the view that a Pyithu Hluttaw would be the outcome. Therefore the responsibility is on everyone of us, participants in the elections, the voters, those who were unable to vote -- all must do their utmost, be it one brick or one grain of sand, everyone and everything counts in this effort to create a Hluttaw. But most of all, my belief is that the National League for Democracy has the highest responsibility.

This is clear because the National League for Democracy has the support of the majority of people and for this reason, the responsibility is highest. We are doing our utmost to fulfil that responsibility. This is why last year we asked the authorities to convene a Pyithu Hluttaw. Eight years had passed and no Hluttaw had been established even though it was for the purpose of creating a Pyithu Hluttaw that the elections were held. More than reasonable time had elapsed when the democratic decision was made to ask for the convening of a Pyithu Hluttaw.

In addition to the NLD elected representatives that attended the NLD Congress in 1998, invitations were issued to all elected representatives including those former

**NLD members. This was because we believe that elected representatives remain representatives even though they have resigned from the NLD and the purpose of the meeting being for the purpose of discussing and deciding the matter of convening parliament. The consensus was that the authorities be notified that before a certain fixed date parliament should be convened. The Central Executive Committee of the NLD in consultation with the MPs that attended the congress deliberated on the matter and felt that it was not appropriate to make a hurried decision about a date of such an important event at a three-day Congress . We asked for time to give the matter of fixing the date our serious consideration and that was how a final decision was made. This was a decision that was taken in a strictly democratic fashion. Every person who believes in democracy should follow the democratic procedure in making decisions. As I have said earlier, it does not matter whether one participated in the decision making process, the decision of the majority has to be accepted. It does not mean that the minority group will be bullied. This is a practical means to get the work done. When elections are held, it is the majority that wins. He/she who gets the most votes in a constituency, becomes the Hluttaw representative for that constituency. Because one did not vote for that person, one cannot deny him the right to be your representative. This works both ways. The Hluttaw representative cannot favour those who voted for him and discriminate against those who did not vote for him. This is not how democracy works. Responsibility to faithfully perform the will of the majority of the people is what democracy is about. Fidelity is most important. It is not just the people in this country, but the whole world knows how the National League for Democracy is being so brutally suppressed.**

**There are some who claim that no other political party in the world has been subjected to the persecutions that the NLD has suffered. Despite this, we continue to work honestly and faithfully for the people and for those who believe in democracy. It is very important for our members to be extra loyal. If we are disloyal at times of difficulties we become faithless persons. According to democratic principles, everyone has the right to have their own beliefs, to think independently and to have freedom of expression. But if one acts disloyally in exercising those rights, one is a renegade, a traitor.**

**At a time when our comrades, brothers and sisters are battling so hard, disloyalty should not be contemplated. This is a time to be united and show our solidarity. At a time when great loyalty is needed, don't make excuses for disloyalty. The people know. We also know. Loyalty means to remain loyal. If there are matters that you want to discuss in a spirit of good will, there are proper democratic procedures that can be pursued. We have always welcomed such approaches. Our members who want to make any proposition or proposals can do so without any difficulty. Letters can be easily handed to any one of our Central Executive. Very few political parties have this sort of easy communication with their leaders. This is not just in our country. It is a fact around the world. I ask this question - In how many political parties can an ordinary member walk into the head office and personally hand over a letter of request or advice to the Central Executive Committee? This is possible in our party. So this is your opportunity but please do not misappropriate it.**

**To enjoy the privileges of democracy you must fulfil the obligations that go with it. The first obligation is loyalty to the cause. Please be loyal. The second obligation is loyalty to the multiparty general elections of 1990. This means loyalty to the party that you represented and contested for. If you were an NLD representative, you**

**must observe the rules and policies of the party and remain loyal to those principles. The third obligation is to be loyal to one's self. This includes the first and second loyalties. If you believe in democracy, and you believe in the elections all you need to do is to stick to our original policies and continue in the struggle.**

**If we have that loyalty, and will stand firm in our political convictions the struggle for democracy will soon be won. I have said this over and over again. I have never wavered in the belief that we will be victorious. The time it will take cannot be predicted. A lot depends on our ability to withstand the onslaught, the people's courage, and the world situation.**

**Politics is difficult to predict. Why? Because it is so inextricably intertwined with social affairs, economics, religion, education etc. Political change will not happen by itself. Sometimes it is triggered by the economy. Sometimes it could be the result of religion. Education is another factor where student movements bring about political change. We cannot say with any precision what sort of situation will bring about the change. But greater loyalty will produce strength and this will bring us closer to victory.**

**I close this occasion of the 9th anniversary of the general elections with a renewed oath of loyalty and declare that we will all work with courage, persistence, perseverance and press on to gain victory as soon as possible.**

**Rangoon 27 May, 1999**

**Aung San Suu Kyi**

## 2.5 May 2002 – May 2003

After a series of talks between the UN envoy Razali, government's representatives and Suu Kyi, the latter is released from house arrest once again. She starts a series of tours through the country, opening NLD offices, addressing people and having a look at development projects of the government. After an attack on her convoy on May 30, 2003, the house arrest is re-imposed.

### 2.5.1 March 2003, All We Want is Our Freedom<sup>1</sup>

**Travelling across Burma, I ask people why they want democracy. Very often the answer is, "We just want to be free." They do not have to elaborate. I understand what they mean. They want to be able to live their lives without the oppressive sense that their destiny is not theirs to shape. They do not want their daily existence to be ruled by the orders and whims of those whose authority is based on might of arms-**

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<sup>1</sup> Published in Parade Magazine (U.S. national syndicate) March 9. The text is available on the internet under: <http://geociti.es/CapitolHill/lobby/3190/assk/asskmsg32.html> [October 7, 2010].

**When I ask young people what they mean by freedom, they say that they want to be able to speak their minds. They want to be able to voice their discontent with an education system that does not challenge their intellect. They want to be able to discuss, criticize, argue; to be able to gather in the thousands or even hundreds of thousands to sing, to shout, to cheer. Burma's young people want to play out the vitality of their youth in its full spectrum of hope and wonder--its uncertainties, its arrogance, its fancies, its brilliance, its rebelliousness, its harshness, its tenderness.**

**What do the women of Burma want? They tell me that they want to be free from the tyranny of rising prices that make a household an exhausting business. They want to be free from anxiety that their husbands might be penalized for independent thinking--or that their children might not be given a chance in life. Many -- too many --long to be free from having to sell their bodies to support their families.**

**The farmers and peasants I meet want to sow and plant as they wish, to be able to market their products at will, unhampered by the coercion to sell it to the state at cruelly low prices. They struggle daily with the land. They do not want unreasonable decrees and incomprehensible authority to add to their burden. And what about those of us in the National League of Democracy? Why are we working so hard to free our country? Is it not that we see democracy through a haze of optimism. We know that democracy is a jewel that must be polished constantly to maintain its luster. To prevent it from being damaged or stolen, democracy must be guarded and unremitting vigilance.**

**We are working so hard for freedom because only in a free Burma will we be able to build a nation that respects and cherishes human dignity.**

**As I travel through my country, people often ask me how it feels to have been imprisoned in my home --first for six years, then for 19 months. How could I stand the separation from family and friends? It is ironic, I say, that in an authoritarian state it is only the prisoner of conscience who is genuinely free. Yes, we have given up our right to a normal life. But we have stayed true to that most precious part of our humanity – our conscience.**

**Here is what I want most for my people: I want the security of genuine freedom and the freedom of genuine security. I would like to see the crippling fetters of fear removed, that the people of Burma may be able to hold their heads high as free human beings. I would like to see them striving in unity and joy to build a safer, happier society of us all.**

**I would especially like to see our younger people stride confidently into the future, their richness of spirit soaring to meet all challenges. I would like to be able to say: "This is a nation worthy of all those who loved it and lived and died for it--that we might be proud of our heritage." These are not dreams. These constitute the reality towards which we have been working for years, firm in our faith that the will of the people will ultimately triumph.**

### 3 NLD

#### 3.1 April 29, 2009: NLD “Shwegondaing Declaration”

On April 28 and 29, the NLD for the first time in 10 years held a general meeting of party members from all over the country including some 90 candidates who had won a seat in the 1990 elections. The 150 delegates met at the party’s headquarters in Yangon’s Shwegondaing Rd. Besides discussing party organisation, the conference concentrated on the party’s stance towards the general elections scheduled for 2010 as the next step of the junta’s roadmap towards a “disciplined democracy”.

At the end of the meeting, the “Shwegondaing Declaration” was passed and published.<sup>1</sup>

**National League for Democracy**

**97/B West Shwegondaing Street**

**Bahan Township, Rangoon**

**April 29, 2009**

**Shwegondaing Declaration**

**We the members of the National League for Democracy (NLD) including the Central Executive Committee, representatives of State and Division organizational committees, the Members of Parliament—elect still standing with the NLD, Representatives of the Central Women’s Affairs Committee, representatives of the Youth Affairs Implementation Committee gathered on the 28th and 29th of April 2009 in the meeting hall of the Head Quarter of the NLD on West Shwegondaing Street and held discussions on the political and organizational situations and the analytical report regarding the Constitution with the aim to resolve all the political impasse in striving to build up the Union of Burma as the democratic state in accordance with the inspiration of all the people**

**This Shwegondaing Declaration is issued to inform the people as the agreement of the majority was obtained through these discussions for the plan to create a fair climate for the evolvement of a dialogue which is the best means for resolving the above impasse.**

**The NLD believes that the current political problems facing the country such as the immediate and unconditional release of all the political prisoners including U Tin Oo, Daw**

**Aung San Suu Kyi; review of the Constitution; establishment of a genuine Union based on the principle of equality for all the ethnic nationalities; recognition in some ways of the result of the 1990 general election; are the main issues to be resolved immediately for the benefit of the country and the people.**

**The stands of the League are:-**

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<sup>1</sup> BurmaNet News, April 29, 2009 (<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs07/NLDStatement2009-04-29%28SD%29.pdf>) [October 7, 2010]. – *Italics* in the following texts are used instead of **bold** fonts in the original copied.

*(a) Unconditional Release of All the Political Prisoners including U Tin Oo and Daw Aung San Su Kyi*

*(b) Review of the Draft Constitution (2008)*

A State Constitution based on the democratic principles is required to establish a democratic state. The not yet in force Constitution (2008) of the State Peace and Development Council contains provisions which are not accord with democratic principles. Therefore the emergence of the Constitution which is acceptable to all the people including the ethnic nationalities is urgently required.

*(c) Organization*

In this Union of Burma where all the ethnic nationalities live together, a unity based on the principles of equal opportunity and mutual good will must be established. Genuine democracy can flourish only on such a fertile ground. Furthermore, all the political parties must have the freedom to organize. Therefore, the offices of the State/ Divisional and Township Organization Committees which were closed and sealed since May 31, 2003, said to be a temporary measure, should be reopened immediately together with those of the parties of ethnic nationalities.

*(c) Recognition of the result of the Multi Party Democracy General Election (1990)*

At the present, recognition in some way of the People's Parliament, which is the outcome of the 1990 election, is urgently needed in accordance with the Section 3 of the People's Parliament Election law. Only then the democratic traditions can be maintained. Otherwise the State Peace and Development would seem to be breaching their own laws and regulations enacted by themselves.

*(d) Political Dialogue*

The NLD has been constantly striving for finding solution through political dialogue since 1988. Daw Aung San Su Kyi, the General Secretary of the NLD has candidly stated the fact that she can work with flexible approach according to the political necessity as follows:-

“We have repeatedly stated that the NLD would negotiate flexibly to get beneficial outcomes for the people of Burma. Nevertheless such dialogues should not aim for the good of the NLD nor should they aim for the benefit of the authorities. Only the interest of the people of Burma should be targeted.”

Therefore, the NLD request again with pure intention that the dialogues that can resolve all the problems be carried out without fail. The agenda of the dialogue envisaged by the League is as follows:-

(1) Unconditional dialogue participated by the decision markers should be commenced immediately based on the principles of mutual respects and national reconciliation.

(2) During the dialogues the issues of provision of equal opportunities for the ethnic nationalities; the unconditional release of all political prisoners including U Tin Oo and Daw Aung San Su Kyi; review of the Constitution (2008); recognition in some way of the People's Parliament with is the result of 1990 election; issues of the elections of the future; development of the living condition of the people etc shall be considered.

**(3) To arrange to recognize the result of the 1990 elections by approving the result of the dialogues at the People’s Parliament which is to be formed according to the People’s Parliament Election Law.**

**(4) All the stake holders to follow unitedly the political course for the future delineated by the agreements of the dialogue as adopted by the People’s Parliament.**

*(e) Attitude towards the Possible Future Elections*

**The NLD firmly believes that enduring political stability and the development of the country could be achieved only by resolving the fundamental problems mentioned above.**

**The people shall be informed what will be its stand if the State Peace and Development Council unilaterally hold upcoming election at their own arrangement, without considering to resolve through dialogue.**

**The League accepts that elections are the landmarks to be passed in the journey to democracy. The NLD will not abandon the struggle for democracy. The League will stand by the people in all circumstances.**

**Therefore if the State Peace and Development Council unilaterally hold possible upcoming election with their own plan and if:-**

**(1) All the political prisoners including the leaders of the NLD were unconditionally released,**

**(2) The provisions of the (2008) Constitution which are not in accord with the democratic principles were amended,**

**(3) All inclusive free and fair general election were held under international supervision,**

**The National League for Democracy, through this Shwegondaing Declaration, states that, anticipating for the realization of the benefit of the whole people, it intends to participate in the elections only after gravely considering as a special case and after studying the coming Party Registration Act and the Laws relating to the Elections.**

**As per the resolution made at the meeting of the Central Executive Committee Held on 29-4-09**

**C.E.C**

**N.L.D**

**Rangoon**

### 3.2 March 30, 2010: Special Statement No 4/03/10

With the following short statement the NLD decided against participating in the elections scheduled for 2010. Together with nine other political party, the NLD was still registered with the Election Commission since the 1990 elections. These parties had to apply for re-registration in view of the upcoming elections. If they failed to do so, they were not any more regarded as a legal political party by the government.

**Official Seal**  
**National League for Democracy**  
**97B West Shwegondaing Road**  
**Bahan Township, Rangoon**

**March 30, 2010**

**Special Statement No 4/03/ 10**  
**(Unofficial Translation)**

**It is to announce that the Central Committee meeting of the National League for Democracy Party, held on March 29, 2010, made the following decisions.**

**“Decisions”**

**(1) According to discussion by members of the Central Committee, the electoral laws issued by**

**the State Peace and Development Council are unjust and therefore the Committee decided not to re-register the party unanimously without objection.**

**(2) The Committee also decided to call (on the SPDC) to release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and all political prisoners as soon as possible and unconditionally.**

**According to the decision made by the Central Executive Committee Meeting on March 29,**

**2010**

**Central Executive Committee**

**Rangoon National League for Democracy**

## Bibliography

### 1 A Note on the primary sources:

For the sources of the quotations see the footnotes. – Most of the material used is part of the private library of one the editors, Hans-Bernd Zöllner. Copies can be ordered.

The proceedings of the Legislative Council from 1897 to 1936 and of both Houses – House of Representatives and Senate – from 1937 to 1941 are available on Microfiche at the British Library and the University of Göttingen (Germany), Department of Indology.

About Nu and the parliamentary period much more sources in English is available. Here is a selection of his speeches:

1951: *From Peace to Stability*. Translation of selected speeches delivered on various occasions between 15<sup>th</sup> August 1949 and 20<sup>th</sup> April 1951. Rangoon, The Ministry of Information.

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