

# Myanmar Literature Project

မြန်မာစာပေစီမံကိန်း

Hans-Bernd Zöllner (ed.)

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**Students, Society and Politics in Burma/Myanmar –  
Documents and Essays**

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## **About the Contributors**

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## I INTRODUCTION (Hans-Bernd Zöllner)

This paper supplements working paper 4 of this series which contained some material on Thein Pe's two books on the students' strike of 1936. In this volume, some more material on the role of students in Burmese society is presented. Most of the texts were compiled for two seminars at the Southeast Asian Departments of the Humboldt University Berlin and the Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-University Bonn respectively in that were conducted in the summer term 2007 in addition to Working Paper 4.

The texts (and some pictures) assembled in this volume span the time of the first student strike in 1920 to the events of 2007 that were provoked by the price hikes in August of that year. Because of the material provided in other Working Papers, this documentation concentrates on the post-independence period of Burma and Myanmar.

The first two documents republished here are related to the “mother of all students' strikes” of 1920. The strikers' demands<sup>1</sup> and the speech of strike leader Ko Ba U (Documents 1 and 2) illustrate two sides of the conflict. Whereas the demands refer to special shortcomings of the planned scheme of the new University and at least seem negotiable, the speech is full of an “all-or-none” rhetoric.

Next, some information about the death of student Aung Kyaw after a demonstration on December 1938 is given. Since this student is regarded as the first of many martyrs of the Burmese student movement, it might be interesting to get some information about the events in the course of which he was deadly wounded. – In contrast to the rather sober report of the commission the “We-Students-Song” written and composed after Aung Gyaw's death highlights the students' entitlement to form the vanguard of an independent and new Burma.

The last document from the pre-war era is a protocol of a meeting of the All Burma Students' Union held on October 1<sup>st</sup> 1939, one month after the outbreak of the war in Europe. The report on the students' union meeting is interesting in many ways. It demonstrates that preparations for an armed struggle against the colonial government were discussed and that there were different opinions about the assessment of the political situation. The document is translated from a Burmese newspaper of that time. It can be assumed that more reports like this one are available in the libraries of Myanmar. Therefore, the document reproduced here calls for the search for more

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<sup>1</sup> For the demands expressed in 1936, see working paper 10 : 4, pp. 101-102 (This document has been added since the first edition of the paper in June 2006).

documents which might provide a more detailed insight into the Burmese student movement in the colonial era.

The next four documents come from the first period of Burmese independence between 1948 and 1962. The three speeches of Prime Minister U Nu deserve special interest because Nu was one prominent leader of the 1936 strike and after independence became the University's Chancellor. This role was taken over by General Win as head of the caretaker government between 1958 and 1960. Document 6 reproduces the text of his speech in 1959.

Most of the documents and texts which deal with events after 1962 come from the internet and highlight the events leading to the demolition of the Student's Union Building in July 1962, the demonstrations on the occasion of U Thant's funeral in 1974 and the role of the students in the 1988 uprising as well as the ongoing struggle of the "88 Student Generation" which paved the way for the monks' demonstrations in 2007. The final document of this collection, no. 19, shows that another generation of students is stepping in the shoes of their predecessors.

Another very important document on the topic is provided in working paper 10 of this series, which contains a full English translation of Ba Hein's "Student Revolution" together with the Burmese text of the booklet.

It must be underlined that all these documents exemplify only a part of Burmese students' role in Burmese society and politics. They focus on the "big events" and on the role of students as advocates of a just society and leaders of the people who are willing to sacrifice their life for a righteous cause. Much more material, mostly in Burmese language, can be found in a book of almost 890 pages that was published in 2007 in Chiang Mai. It was compiled by Aung Htun who was arrested February 1998 and sentenced to 17 years for distributing his book in Myanmar.<sup>1</sup>

What is missing, are records showing students' everyday life between the upheavals and a discussion of the questions related to a sociological analysis of students in Burma. To make up for this a little bit, a short bibliographical note on the topic is included.

Finally, chapter IV presents two essays of German students dealing with some aspects of the whole issue. These essays demonstrate that the material collected here is useful to arouse students' interest in the topic as well as the need for further studies and contributions. It would be meritorious if a

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<sup>1</sup> The book is available on the net. See <http://shwenanda.blogspot.com/search/label/Book%20of%20AungTun-Burmese%20Students%20Movement?zx=81145a7f08f22475>

conference or workshop could be organised to analyse and discuss the topic from different perspectives.

Hans-Bernd Zöllner

March 2009 (last update)

## II. DOCUMENTS

### 1. 1920-1947

#### DOCUMENT 1: Demands of the Striking Students, 1920<sup>1</sup>

##### BOYCOTTERS' MEMORIAL

THE following memorial has been submitted by the Rangoon and Judson College boycotters to the Chancellor through the Registrar, "Rangoon University."

Your memorialists are the students of the two above mentioned colleges in Rangoon, and are desirous to lay before Your Honour the several points which arise out of the coming into force of the Rangoon University Act, and on which they feel deeply aggrieved. Your memorialists wish to point out that before the passing of the Act they were neither asked nor allowed to discuss the proposed measure; and they fully hoped that the views of the people of the province expressed so clearly and unanimously, would meet with sympathetic consideration before the final stage was passed; but they have now found that their hopes have not at all been realised.

After mature consideration and full discussion, your memorialists who represent the general body of the students of the two colleges in Rangoon have come to the conclusion that the Act and the Rules framed under it require immediate reconsideration, so as to meet with the objections set out in Annexure "A" hereto.

Whereupon your memorialists pray that after considering the points referred to herein, Your Honor will be pleased to take such steps as may be deemed fit and proper to meet with the objections raised herein.

##### ANNEXURE „A“

I. The University being Residential and Unitary and not Federal will result in hardship on the students in the matter of expenses. It will make higher education prohibitive for some of them whose only sin may be that their parents or guardians are not sufficiently well-to-do to afford the

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<sup>1</sup> Aye Kyaw (1963), *A History of the Students' Movement in Burma 1920-1940*. Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Arts, University of Rangoon, as part requirement for the M.A. degree in History in July 1963. [unpublished], pp. 97-101

luxury of the Rangoon University Education. Whilst admitting certain draw-backs of the Federal System, your memorialists urge that the balance of evil is more on the side of the Residential System, considering the average income of the inhabitants of this Province and the paucity of students for higher education even when the expenses were so low hitherto under the Federal System.

II. Your memorialists do not see the necessity of insisting on proficiency in English and in one other subject in qualifying for the Matriculation as this will particularly affect the Burmese and Indian students who have to learn a foreign language and have not the advantage of being taught in their own vernacular.

III. The adding of the Preliminary Course will only add to the difficulty of your memorialists by needlessly prolonging the period of study and adding to the already heavy expenses. Your memorialists venture to submit that the deficiency in proficiency in English could be guarded against by insisting on better staff in schools, better method of teaching, and stricter promotions if necessary, so as not to allow those who are not fit to be promoted to higher classes.

IV. Your memorialists submit that Oral Examinations are not necessary in the College Department. They believe that in other Universities where they have tried them they have not been found to work satisfactorily. It would be a different thing if test for practical work was required for those who qualify for certain professions.

V. Your memorialists do not see any valid reason why an Ordinary Pass Graduate should be disqualified from trying the Master's Degree. If he is not sound enough for the higher degree he will fail to pass it; but if he is competent to pass the test for the Master's Degree, there is no reason why he should be penalised by prohibition for having taken only the Pass Bachelor's Degree.

VI. The above rules operate still more harshly in view of the rate that Honours students are not allowed to attempt Honours more than once. The failure may be due to sheer misfortune or accident, and the students' future career is arrested.

VII. Your memorialists submit that candidates for the Master's Degrees should be ranked in classes if they succeed in their second or subsequent attempts

VIII. Your memorialists submit that the three years' maximum time limit for the students who have passed their Intermediate examinations to sit for their Honours Degree is too drastic. There may be several valid reasons preventing the student from appearing within the period. He should not be penalised in this way,

IX. Likewise the time limit for the Master's Degree (vide Burma Gazette dated the 4th December,

1920, Clause 13, Section 2 of Chapter VI) should be removed,

X. Your memorialists do not see the necessity of English Composition Paper for the Science Degrees (Ordinary and Hounours), It is in the interests of the province that the knowledge of Science should spread. If the student is not able to understand his books he will fail to pass the test; but a scientist's strong point is science, and not knowledge of English or any particular language.

XI. Your memorialists respectfully submit that the composition of the Council and of the Senate should be reconsidered so that they may represent all classes of people and all shades of opinion; and in connection with it provision should be made for students to elect their own representatives to the Council.

XII. Your memorialists further respectfully submit that in these days of democratic institutions the Vice-Chancellor, the Pro-Vice-Chancellor and the University Professors should be elected by the Senate, subject to the Chancellor's veto, and not appointed by the Chancellor directly.

XIII. Provision should be made for examinations by compartment, as is the case with so many universities all the world over and particularly in England and India.

XIV. Provision should be made for Law students to attend morning sessions.

XV. Provision should be made for private or non-collegiate students to appear for the university examinations.

XVI. Your memorialists submit that they will not rejoin classes unless the various grievances expressed in the memorial are considered and satisfactorily redressed.

BA U,  
On behalf of  
the College student boycotters

**DOCUMENT 2: Speech of the Chairman of the Strike Committee,  
Ko Ba U, on December 20, 1920,  
on the Shwedagon Pagoda<sup>1</sup>**

Mr Chairman, Brother Boycotters and sisters, --- The last day of the respite given to us by the Senate is drawing nigh. The 23<sup>rd</sup> of December will show to the world what stuff we, the students of Burma, are made of. That fateful day will decide whether we shall be the boast of Burma or her curse. Our action has aroused the spirit of nationalism that has been lying asleep in the breast of the people of Burma. This undesirable Rangoon University which has been thrust upon us against our will has hurt our feelings and awakened our soul to a sense of national injustice – nay, it is a crime, indeed, to retard the education progress of the country. It is an injustice which no human being with a spark of patriotism would allow to pass unfought. Our elders have tried their level bets to thwart this; but they have failed. Then we, the College students of Burma, took up the thread of the fight with one strong determination of winning. Have we not felt the injustice too? (Cries of “Yes”). We do and the outcome of that feeling is this boycott movement. Not only we but also our younger brothers, the school-boys, also felt this injustice. They know that the nation is calling upon all her sons and daughters, young and old, to stand together and fight against this great injustice (“Shame”). They promptly responded to the nation’s call.

Our abrupt action, as some would have it, has been more than compensated by the hearty and sincere support of the people of Burma. Now, on what have we been living for the last week or so? It is not upon the bounties of the general public of Rangoon? Does it not then show that they fully sympathise with us? Has not our action been justified? Is not the generous support that we have been getting daily the convincing proofs that the cause we have taken up is right and our action is noble? Is there anybody among you who feels sorry that he has ever come out of the college? (Cries of “None”) I should say not. Let there be who will. Let him go back to college; take the slavish education that he will get there and for ever be a slave. If there be any, mark him well, shun him; he is not a fit companion for any of us; for he is a weak-hearted traitor.

Now the nation itself has taken up our cause. They, at yesterday’s meeting on the pagoda platform, have resolved to establish a National University of Burma. Funds amounting to something like 6 lakhs were promised on the spot, and more is forthcoming and I may not be far out if I say that a National University will be established in no time.

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<sup>1</sup> Aye Kyaw 1963, pp. 102-107.

This founding of a National University is another way of the success of our movement, for there are two ways. One is when the authorities grant all our demands and the other is which I have also made it known to the authorities that we are not going back to any of the Colleges until and unless our grievances be rectified to our satisfaction. Is not this your sentiment that I am voicing?

Now the question is- -Will the authorities grant us what we want? Has the bureaucracy ever granted what the people Burma want? No, they have not, and they never will. They take us for a pack of hot-headed fools, they take us for lifeless logs without any feeling whatever. Show them what we are - that we are after all human beings with as noble sentiments as any other nation. Without paying any head whatever to our wants they went so far as to threaten us with dismissal from college if we don't go back by the 23<sup>rd</sup> the latest. Ha! Ha! Ha! A fine threat as if we are afraid of losing the sham and empty degrees that the "Rangoon University" can confer upon us. What, are we afraid? Is there any one among you who thinks that his heart fails at the last moment? Remember, brothers, that till now we have stood together with firm courage and stern determination. The whole nation has rallied round us and if we were to fail just at this moment when success is within reach, well, my brothers, an eternal shame will befall us and the people of Burma. No, we must not fail. We have determined to win and win we must. Show to the authorities, to the world, that we are not what they suppose us to be puppets, in their hands. We are self-respecting students ready to sacrifice for ever our lives, if need be, for the sake of our country. They think they can deal with us as they like. Will you allow that? No, I should think not. We have shown to them and to the world at large by our present movement that which has been carried on with a spirit of self-sacrifice and which has been followed by our young brothers from high schools throughout the length and breadth of Burma with an alarming rapidity, that we are not going to stand any nonsense any longer. As self-respecting students of the colleges, we have resorted to this boycott movement which is the only powerful weapon to awaken the authorities to realise the justice of our demands. Yet, up till now but threats come out of them, and in to day's Rangoon Gazette I found that they have entirely ignored our point of saying: "None of the University students have any grievances whatsoever". Do we not know that? Is it not that we are doing for others? Is it for ourselves? Has it not been quite plainly understood among ourselves that we are making sacrifices for the good of generations to come? Yet they quite ignored the very noble action we have adopted. Well brothers, it is left to you to consider "why". They think that we are not capable of possessing such noble qualities as self-sacrifice, determination. Then, it is not up to us to show that we do possess such qualities?

Moreover, if we consider carefully how far our movement has gone, we shall find at once that over

400 students in Bassein have been expelled from their schools. Why have they suffered it? Is it not through their following the noble example of our noble action? If they can suffer so much, why! We ought to be able to suffer more. If we draw back at this juncture, what shall we be? We shall be a curse of the boys who have suffered, the curse of their parents and friends and the seum [*sic!*] of Burma. We shall be scorned and laughed at by all honest and honourable men. We shall become contemptible beings, not fit to associate with any honest men. Our cause will be broken down and we shall be the instrument that will bring the fair name of Burma to dust. Burma and the Burmans will fall, never to rise again.

No, we cannot possibly draw back. Either the authorities yield or we die fighting. I see by your faces that every one is determined to fight to the last. Are we determined? (Cries of “Yes”.) Then stand by one another and win together. Down with the University Act!

Remember, brothers, that never before in the History of Burma has such a movement received such generous support and warm sympathy. Of course we may have to wait a year or so before we succeed. Can we not wait? Have we not determined to wait? (Cries of “Yes”.)

Now as the last word, I would enjoin upon all of you not to yield to the entreaties of your parents why, it is only natural that they possess more. Give them reasons—sound reasons, and I don’t see why they cannot be reason with you. Yes, they can be. Just be firm and bring them round to see things in our light.

Now, brothers, let us unite, body and soul, and stand together till the day when Burma can lift up her head proudly, possessing such sons and daughters as are endowed with self-respect, love of liberty, and self-lessness.

What, brothers, are we downhearted? No. Then keep up your spirits till the final day, i.e.: the 23<sup>rd</sup> instant. (Loud and prolonged cheers.)

### DOCUMENT 3: On the Death of Aung Gyaw, December 1938

Editor's note: The "Secretariat Incident" as it was called by the authorities of that time was investigated by a three-men commission under the chairmanship of Ba U (1887-1963) who became the second President of the Union of Burma. The following quotations and pictures are taken from the report submitted by the committee in 1939.<sup>1</sup>

The facts that caused the events are summarized thus:

Maung Ba Hein and Maung Ba Swe of the University Students' Union ... were arrested in Magwe in connection with the march of the strikers from Yenaungyaung to Rangoon.<sup>2</sup> The students asked for the release of this people... The government did not accede to this demand; whereupon a meeting of all the students of Rangoon was held on the 17th December on the Shwedagon Pagoda platform. It was resolved ... to take some further steps if the government did not comply with the demands ... It was not explained what steps they should take. But on the night of the 19<sup>th</sup> another meeting was held at the University Students' Union Hall, to which representatives of the students from all schools in Rangoon were invited. It was then decided to picket all entrances to the Secretariat on the following day. ...<sup>3</sup>



Picture 1

Picture 1 shows the picketing students on the Secretariat's Northern gate at Sparks Street – today:

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<sup>1</sup> *Report of the Secretariat Incident Inquiry Committee*. Rangoon, Supdt., Govt. Printing and Stationary, Burma. (Quoted as "Report").

<sup>2</sup> For details, see Introduction to Working Paper 3 and Working Paper 11 of this series.

<sup>3</sup> Report 1-2.

Bo Aung Gyaw Street - around 10 o'clock. The police tried to carry the students away one by one but as one was removed, others filled his place. The police asked the premier minister (Paw Ton) what to do. The answer was that one gate should be kept open so that officers could enter and leave the building. The police prepared for blocking Sparks Street, the students, led by Hla Shwe and Thein Aung, decided to lift the boycott of the building and start a procession around the building that was to be concluded by a speech given by student leader Hla Shwe.<sup>1</sup> At the corner of Bigandet, Fraser (today: Anawratha Street) and Sparks Street, a clash between students and the police occurred just in front of the office of Thuriya newspaper.

From here on, the accounts of what happened differ. The students charged the police for their aggressive actions, the police blame the students and bystanders of assaulting the police and throwing bottles and stones. This disagreement is reflected in the report. It consists of two parts, one submitted by the majority (two members; pp. 1-18), another by the minority (one member; pp. 19-41). Both agree that the students' actions were unlawful and the police was partly justified to use force and partly not but differ on the extent of "brutality" employed by the police.

Here is a part of the majority report commenting on another picture that was part of the report:



Picture 2

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<sup>1</sup> Hla Shwe was deputy chairman of the students' union and in charge because the chairman, Ba Hein, was arrested. Hla Shwe was a medical student. He contributed to books to the Nagani Book Club (see Working Paper 3).

The photograph ... shows one girl<sup>1</sup> student lying, another girl student sitting with her hands raised over her head as if to ward off blows, a student (male) lying on his side and a fourth student (girl) running away chased by some European sergeants and Indian police constables in Sparks Street in front of the Hindu temple.

With regard to the death of Aung Kyaw, the following witnesses were quoted in the report:

Witness No. 46:

... I saw Ko Aung Gyaw and Saya Chit<sup>2</sup> standing. Both of them were about one foot away from the western pavement [of Sparks Street]. There I saw an Indian constable striking Ko Aung Gyaw on the back of the head and he fell. Then I saw another Indian policeman striking Ma Sein Tin. I carried her into Sun Press.

Witness No. 44:

As the head of the procession got into Sparks Street I heard a commotion right in front of the head of the procession. Just at that moment I saw Indian police and European sergeants charging the members of the procession. The members of the procession who formed the vanguard were girl students. ... When I got there, I heard the sound of beating from behind me. I turned round to look and just as I looked I received a blow. As I turned round I saw Ko Aung Gyaw fall. Just as he fell I also fell down. I then stood up. As I stood up I received another blow ... As I result thereof I fell down again. As I fell Maung Aung Gyaw also endeavoured get up but he could not. He subsequently staggered towards the western pavement ....

Witness No. 43:

... I saw a European sergeant giving a blow to Maung Aung Gyaw. The blow fell on the temple of his head. When he received the blow he reeled forward. As he reeled forward the same European sergeant gave him another blow. The blow, as far as I remember, fell more or less on the same place. As a result of the blow, the stick snapped into two. One of the broken pieces of the stick flew somewhere near where I was. I picked it up and ran towards Bigandet Street In the evening of that day I went and gave the stick to Ko Thein Maung of the Sun Press.

Witness No. 47 (Thakin Hla Pe<sup>3</sup>):

... I saw a European sergeant on the pavement giving a blow to Maung Aung Gyaw on the head. On receiving the blow he reeled and fell on the pavement. When Maung Aung Gyaw fell I went and helped him. With a handkerchief given to me by some girl student I bandaged his wounds and then I

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<sup>1</sup> The commission estimated that some 2000 boy and some 150-200 girl students participated. Some of the girl students – among them the daughter of Deedok U Ba Choe – were not older than 13 or 14 years.

<sup>2</sup> The term “Saya” indicates that a teacher was participating in the demonstration.

<sup>3</sup> See Working Paper 13.

carried him along with me and subsequently I made him over to a student.<sup>1</sup>

The Commission confirmed that the statements were correct – including the broken baton. The medical doctor who performed the post mortem found that three different blows must have been given. “In his opinion 90 per cent of men receiving such injuries as received by Maung Aung Gyaw will not survive.”<sup>2</sup> – After that it is stated that two other students suffered serious injuries. In total, some 100 casualties occurred, among them 4 policemen and at least 23 non-students. Aung Gyaw died three days later in a hospital.



အာဇာနည် ဗိုလ်အောင်ကျော်

“Martyr Bo Aung Kyaw”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Report 13-14.

<sup>2</sup> Report 15.

<sup>3</sup> Aung Tun, History of the Burmese Student Movement, 1903-1991: 190.

## DOCUMENT 4: Doh Kyaung-thar (We, Students!)

Lyrics: Shwe Nyar Maung

(Translation: Ye Nyunt)

Despite her abundance in rice and precious metals, Burma has been flung away from independence, large numbers of Mons and Bamar remaining ever poor. We, students cannot live up to standards because parents are poor. If we pursue “servant” education, we’d be jobless when we leave school. We lack our ability to fill our stomachs full. It is possible that we’ll get free if we pursue “master” education. Students can strive more.

**Chorus:** The Students’ Union is the true place of victory where students get united, assemble and rally strength. Oh, students! Don’t ignore the Union so that we can grab the “master” education. With unity, we’re certain to win the laurels.

For the cause of the Burmese, students sacrificed their lives in the forefront. Our breasts are our shields. Let our bones be crushed and our skin to torn. We’ll fend ourselves without cowering. We don’t care the billy club.<sup>1</sup> We’re not frightened by the machinegun. Our fellow student Bo Aung Kyaw and martyrs of Yadanabon Shwe Man fell at the front of our strike. If it’s for the race we don’t regard our lives as worthy as a leaf.

Comrades! Let’s be united at this time of urgency. Let’s wait for the time under the flag of the Union. We’ll build the real independence. Let’s rally our minds, fit and unflagging. Let’s grasp the “master” education.

Translator’s Notes:

*servant education:* low education given to the rules, the poor Burmese, under British

*master education:* education pursued by British families and high-class Burmese families

*Yadanabon:* Old name of Mandalay

*Shwe Man:* Golden Mandalay (Shwe means gold).

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<sup>1</sup> A short stick or club, especially a police officer's club.

## **DOCUMENT 5: Meeting of the ABSU<sup>1</sup> October 1939<sup>2</sup>**

### THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE SPECIAL CONFERENCE OF THE ABSU RANGOON, SUNDAY OCTOBER 1st. 1939

(A translation of the report in *The Sun*, daily, dated 3-10-39pp 8 and 13)

The conference was held in the RUSU building on October 1st at 9 a.m.

At the opening speech President Ko Ba Hein said;

This meeting is called because of an emergency situation. Previously we had held students conferences; none was as important as this one, and probably this is the most strikingly vital of all. The whole world is in a turmoil and it is impossible to predict how this would effect Burma. While we are able to hold conferences and discussions, it is a question of death during day-time or night-time in the Eastern and Western Fronts. Look at Poland; innocent children and peasants are dying by the weapons of the enemy. Universities like ours have become targets of (aerial)bombing and are being destroyed. We see in China hopeless destruction, which inspire us that we cannot stay out peacefully. Hence we should consider the world situation and make vital decisions on the world's problem. Having come to this meeting at considerable expense we should consider carefully and make a worthwhile decision.

Before the Revolution (BE 1300 Revolution, the students and workers etc strikes of 1938-39) we have only 60 students unions in schools, but at the Revolution there appeared over 100 unions. We must all understand the discipline of the Students Union thoroughly and be tough. It is in vain to have many unions but with no discipline. It is better to have a smaller number of unions but with a high standard of discipline. Many delegates attended the previous conference, of which some of them came and merely spent their time in town, and then took back the decisions of the conference home. Such delegates are an obstruction to the Union. In the previous Revolution also, due to the action of some undesirable students the prestige of the Union suffered somewhat. It is important that members of the Students Unions thoroughly understand the rules of their association. Whatever decisions are being taken here by the Working Committee, the district Committees should consider

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<sup>1</sup> All Burma Students' Union

<sup>2</sup> Source: Maung Maung (1976), *From Sangha to Laiy. National Movements of Burma 1920-1940*. M.A. Dissertation, Australian National University: 666-671.

and make decisions at your own initiative. Don't just follow decisions of the WC without thinking over them. The most vital matter is to understand the discipline of the Union thoroughly. I am saying in this strain because I am speaking as the President the ABSU for the last time. Ko Hla Shwe have been chosen in my place. I have always had great respect for Ko Hla Shwe.

Then there was a minute's recess of the conference and then resumed with Ko Hla Shwe as President; Ko Tun Shein sung the Dobama Song,

Ko Hla Shwe made a speech in which he mentioned that the students must act daringly and with valour according to the world situation.

### Resolutions

(Resolutions of the Special Conference of the AB on Sunday October 1st, 1939)

1. It is the right of every student to set up a students union and be a member of one. This conference considers anyone insulting this right as suppressing the freedom of students all over Burma, and trying to destroy the strength of the ABSU which is the unifying force of all Burmese students, and moreover is trying to obstruct the activity of freedom of Burma from imperialism. Everyone who insults the right of a student must be considered as the enemy of every student and be vanquished. This conference decides that to this end means suitable for the enemy's strength shall be used. It was proposed by Ko Ba Hein and unanimously approved.

2. Imperialism had cruelly killed innocent people and it had sent back the world to brute age many times. At present also it is driving uncountable millions of people into the battle field like an every day event and therefore this conference condemns imperialism and for the benefit of mankind Burmese students firmly decide to drive it off the face of the earth. It was proposed by Ko Ba San and unanimously approved.

3. While the world is burning with war flames, the situation of every country is changing from hour to hour, the immediate duty of every Burman is to defend the lives and property of every indigenous people. Therefore this conference supports the proposal by the Burmese Newspaper Owners and Editors Association to organise the All Burma Defence Force. In order to defend effectively the interests of the indigenous people of Burma, this conference decided that Thanmani Tats (the Steel Corps) be formed at every branch union, and reorganise and expand the existing ones. It was proposed by Ko Tun Shein and unanimously approved.

4. The historical duty of the present students is to fight and destroy imperialist education. But

as it is like a branch of the main stem of the imperialism, in order to destroy imperialist education imperialism must be uprooted and destroyed. Hence the students will take part as one force in the alliance of forces against imperialism. It was proposed by Ko Ba Hein and unanimously approved.

At the discussion of resolution number two, Ko Ba San explained that imperialism does not mean only the British but also the Germans and Japanese; that in the last World War over 15 million died and crores of money were spent. He said that he did not like to hear any hint of imperialism in their policy, to the extent of disapproving the sentence in the Dobama song that stated that Burmans had once fought and subjugated Siam and India.

Ko Ba Hein said that the resolution number two is proposed to find out the views of the students; that presently as the great war is being waged the views of prominent persons were being expressed and so also the students should express their views.

Arakan Delegate:

We do not like the outbreak of war. Germany occupied Poland by force; the British said they had to go to war in order to destroy Hitler so as to defend the rights of others. As we never liked war we shall not support any one, but if "Independence" is given we will support with men and material. (Applause.)

Shan States:

As the Arakanese comrade had spoken for Arakan I would also like to speak about the views of Shan States students. The British govern according to "divide and rule" policy; for example they had separated Burma from India, and similarly Shan States from Burma. This is their policy. The British are saying that Shans are "dull", "inactive" and "given to pleasures"; at one time the Burmans also labeled Shan States as lands where there are many witches, warlocks, goblins and evil spirits, and thus Shan States had suffered much ill repute. When Shan students tried to form unions our leaders asked us if we wanted to create strife, or if we wanted to join Thakins or the Students Union, and then refused permission. They would not talk about opening associations for unity. The opening of the Yunnan Road had opened the eyes of the people a little. The first enemy of the Shan States is **Siam** (Thailand); it is a stooge of the Japanese. We are very **close** to the enemy; and **we will** follow the decisions of the main Students Union without deviation and will support it with funds and manpower. (Applause)

Kyaikkhami Representative:

Students also like most people do not like imperialism, and therefore urge the students to fight imperialism.

With regard to resolution number three, a member of the WC ABSU Ko Tun Shein said, that there are no effective organisation in Burma; we are not prepared in anything. In the previous conference there was a decision to found the Thanmani Tats; and accordingly they were formed in such towns as Akyab, Bassein, Myingyan, Talley, and Mergui. In Bassein the Thanmani Tat is almost in a disorganised condition. If there are many Thanmani Tats, the students can take part in the struggle for independence as one unit or one force. If the Tats are formed now, no student will object to them. One should note that Hitler took power with the Storm Troops. The Galon Tats the Dama Tats, the Letyone Tats and the Defence Tats of Burma merely exist in name only. Hence Thanmani Tats should be organised .

Pantanaw Delegate:

Every school has U Maung Gyi's Ye Tat, Dama Tat. Are these to be disbanded?

Ko Tun Shein:

Rules are being drawn up presently.

Ba Hein:

Thanmani Tat is a member of the Students Union. When me day the HQrs ABSU gives the order all other groups must disappear. Members of the Thanmani Tats must be students; co-operation with others is a different matter.

Arakan Delegate:

We will be closer to Independence if we set up Thanmani Tats as quickly as possible.

Rangoon Delegate Ko Kyaw Aung:

Students by having training in schools become physically fit and also be in the habit of obeying orders one from the other. Only students possess the insight to see more than is shown. Hence Thanmani Tats should be opened. It is desirable that every youth become a member of the Thanmani Tats.

Executive Ko Hla Maung :

A member of the Thanmani Tat should be well built and strong. Thin, weak people will not go well with the name Thanmani; it would be even more unseemly if they are slovenly. The resolution was passed unanimously.

Proposing the fourth resolution Ko Ba Hein said that the students' historical role is to annihilate imperialism. Burma was granted a slave education after the entry of imperialism. Just as trees cannot be stopped from growing but can be made not to grow straight and strong, so also slave education is given to students to divert them from progress. It is the duty of students to destroy this education. Dr. Ba Maw's Sinyetha Party and the Dobama Asiayone Thakins have formed an alliance to fight imperialism; as students desire unity, it is right that they should also join up with them for the same struggle.

One district delegate:

After the destruction of imperialism who will become the Government? Would not then be quarrels?

Ko Ba Hein:

If our group is stronger we will take power.

One delegate:

Why can Dr. Ba Maw and Thakins who had never been friendly work together?

Ko Ba Hein:

If Dr. Ba Maw is only an individual and alone we should not bother about him. But there are many loyal peasants and workers who have faith in him. It is not joining him but joining with his forces. We are prepared to accept Myo Chit Party, Nga-Bwint-Saing Unity Party or any other party if they are willing to join up for similar unity. We students do not join Dr. Ba Maw, but only being allied for the purpose of fighting imperialism.

Delegate:

Not one of us here trusts Dr. Ba Maw. We cannot by any means be together with him.

Secretary Ko Ba Swe:

It is just having the same policy for the Independence struggle. It is merely the students taking part again in the struggle for Independence, not joining Dr. Ba Maw.

Henzada Ko Ba Saw:

We don't care whether it is Dr. Ba Maw or Thakin. Just keep the forces of students remain the forces of students.

Arakan Delegate:

It is not difficult to fight imperialism. But capita-lists have great forces. We students do not like being bossed over by other politicians. Joining others should mean that we students mobilize our forces and keep ourselves in readiness by ourselves, but watching the work of other political parties and judging the timing, we should decide when to fight, and when called by other forces go and join them.

After this the fourth resolution was unanimously passed. the President gave the concluding speech, and the conference was adjourned with the Dobama song. The new Working Committee (executive) is Ko Ba Hein, Ko Soe Maung, Ko Ba San, Ko Ba Gale, Ko Maung Maung, Ko Thet Pe, Ko Ba Swe, Ko Tun Shein (Thanmani, i.e. Bo Yan Naing), Ko Tun Shein (the other), and Ko Kyaw Myint.

## 2. 1948-1962

### DOCUMENT 6: Nu, “New Responsibilities”, 28<sup>th</sup> February 1951<sup>1</sup>

#### *New Responsibilities*

(Speech delivered at University Convocation on 28th February 1951)

#### UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

Since you form an important element of the citizens of this country, let me stress at this gathering an important point which may be of benefit to our Union. In fact what I am going to stress is but an ordinary matter-of-fact point:

Be religious and try hard to acquire learning.

First of all I want to explain why on this occasion I put in Religion as one of the two important points.

Lord Buddha hath said in no uncertain terms that human mind relishes evil. When we do a little self-examination we will find that we have greater leanings towards evil than towards good. Evil can be generally classified into three categories: (1) Evil speech, (2) Evil action and (3) Evil thought.

If the people throughout the world are only after evil both in speech, in action and in thought then the world is sure to be doomed. In saving the world from its doom, I find that Religion is a very potent factor.

In Buddhist religious practice there are three stages: Sila, Samadhi and Pinnya. The practice of Sila safeguards one against evil speech and evil action. The practice of Samadhi safeguards one against evil thought. Pinnya enables one to see Universal Truths, and it is therefore capable of extinguishing the three fires which are raging throughout the world; Greed, Anger and Ignorance.

In the same way, other Religions will have their own methods of safeguards against human predilection for evil speech, evil action and evil thought. Therefore, if only these Religions, which safeguard humanity against the three evils, disappear, the world we live in will be an utter chaos

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<sup>1</sup> Nu (1951), *From Peace to Stability*. (Translation of selected speeches by the Hon'ble Thakin Nu, Prime Minister of the Union of Burma, delivered on various occasions from 15<sup>th</sup> August 1949 to 20<sup>th</sup> April 1951. Rangoon, Ministry of Information: 180-188.

like a board without a frame, a ship without a rudder and a country without a Government.

If we go to the root causes of the present disorders in this country, we will find that not less than eighty per cent of them are due to apathy to Religion. Therefore, if only we desire to build up a sound and stable Union in which the present generation and its descendants can live in peace and happiness it is up to us to return to Religion with fervour, along with other measures of rehabilitation.

We are intensely delighted with the revival of religious activities in every part of the country. From here I pray for the success of the “Back to Religion” movement. I am happy to be able to announce that the deliberations of the Committee set up under the patronage of the Venerable Nyaungyan Sayadaw to examine the whole question of religious instruction in schools are proceeding very satisfactorily. Arrangements are also under way to institute a similar committee for religious instruction in the University, and I am glad to say that it will function very soon.

I think I have dealt sufficiently with the first point, and now let me come to the second point.

All of you are perfectly aware of the valuable teachings of Lawkaniti which you learnt while young. We were taught that there is no earthly wealth which can be compared to learning, that knowledge cannot be stolen by thieves, that knowledge is one’s best equipment and that an ignorant person is as unseemly in the midst of the learned as a heron is in the midst of hinth birds. You all know these wise words and I need not dwell at any length on the virtues of learning.

In fact I did not get the full significance of these teachings when I learnt Lawkainiti myself. I learnt it as a matter of course. Now, when I have my share of responsibility in bringing up this three-year old Union, I have a far greater realization of the value of learning.

I had not expected that the work of building up a nation would be so difficult. I had thought that everything could be accomplished by a stroke of the pen when one becomes the wielder of political power. But when one is faced with realities one gets disillusioned. Political power is but an instrument with which one can raise the level of the people commensurate with the condition of one’s country, its wealth and the ability of its people. Without political power nothing in the way of the people’s uplift can be accomplished however good the country’s condition may be, however wealthy it may be and however capable its people may be. Well meaning patriots lacking in political power will not be able to perform anything; they will merely clench their fists and grit their teeth, but once they get this power things become different. They have the opportunity to do many good things for the country commensurate with the condition of the country, its wealth and the courage and ability of its people.

Therefore I wish you to remember that political power is only the instrument for uplifting the people according to the conditions of one's country its wealth and the courage and ability of its people. Mere possession of this instrument will not bring about the upliftment. We must use the instrument if we want to uplift the people.

The reason why I dilate on this point is that many people in our Union have certain misconceptions regarding the term "political power". There are many cynics who say "Now we have got our independence; and we have political power, but where is the Utopia? Are our citizens wealthy? Where, Oh! Where are the fruits of independence? Where are the necessities of life for our people?" As I have explained, things we have dreamt of and promised will not appear automatically as soon as we get political power. In order to get them, we must work for them with that instrument - that is, the political power, and here the importance of education comes in. It is not difficult to formulate plans for the development of (1) physical (2) intellectual, (3) moral and (4) economic strength, but we find it extremely difficult when it comes to their implementation. As befitting the citizens of an independent country our responsibilities also grow manifold and our works are multiplied. But it has been our painful experience that with the increase in our responsibilities, we find less and less of capable men and more and more of Mr. Zeroes. It will not do by mere shouting "New Society!" We must also be capable of building the New Society. Since the work of creating this New Society is the concern of the educated people and not of Mr. Zeroes, my request to you is to try hard to acquire learning to enable you to shoulder this responsibility to the full

There is a- Burmese saying, "While the monks are few, Agga has turned laymen." While we had only a very few educated men as a result of a hundred years of foreign domination, World War II came upon us and played havoc resulting in the dislocation of education. On top of it, some politicians put their fingers in the educational pie with more damaging results.

The Government cannot merely look on with folded arms and in fact it has decided to do utmost: to remedy the educational deficiency while our responsibilities have increased. We have decided to embark on the following measures :—

I. Free tuition will be given in all State Schools and the University with effect from the academic year 1951-52. Stipends will also be given to needy but brilliant students. This is but our first step. With the improvement in the situation in the Union, regulated steps will be taken until we are able to provide free education to all who desire to learn any branch of knowledge.

Some amplification may be necessary. In our country there are State Schools as well as many other

schools There are thousands of young boys and girls who do not attend school because they cannot afford to pay fees. With the improvement in our internal situation the Government will progressively extend free tuition to all students reading in all non-State Schools and provide free educational facilities to all those who at present are denied any schooling. Besides we are making plans for University education at the lowest possible cost by introducing new boarding arrangements.

With the introduction of system of free tuition in the University the number of University students is likely to swell. But since accommodation cannot be immediately expanded and the requisite number of teaching staff cannot be provided at once, it will be difficult in the first one or two years to admit all who seek admission. But it is the intention of the Government to meet the ever growing demand for University education as and when conditions permit.

2. To be able to give instruction in all branches of knowledge (except English) through the medium of Burmese, arrangements are afoot to produce all school and University text books in Burmese.

These two measures relate only to those who attend schools and University. The following are some of the steps taken with regard to those who are still denied school and University education :—

(a) Burma Translation Society is undertaking the translation of books on various subjects and the Union Government distributes them to all villages in the country so that knowledge is made accessible to all classes of people.

(b) Mass Education Council is also busy training educational workers who in turn will impart education to all classes of people. These trainees are now being sent for the districts and it is the intention of the Government further to encourage the activities of the Mass Education Council as much as possible.

The primary aim of setting up this Mass Education Council is to provide educational facilities to those who are denied school and University education such as cultivators, workers, side-car men, masons, etc. This mass of people, if properly educated, will be able to contribute their share in shouldering the new responsibilities of the country.

With these measures, the Government is exerting its utmost to step up educational activities to make up for the set-backs education has suffered due to various reasons. But I need not remind you that Government alone will not be able to carry out the objectives and students too have a big part to play. For this reason I take this opportunity of asking you to work hard and learn diligently to equip yourselves adequately for the tasks that lie ahead.

I know fully well that mere requests do not carry us very far. At present there are renegades among students who are interfering in die legitimate activities of students both in schools and the University. The aim of these renegades is to make the students dance according the tune of political wire-pullers who have axes to grind. I call upon you to keep a close watch on these renegades.

They are quite adept in their methods, being sometimes persuasive and sometimes forceful and threatening. I do not succumb to their wily machinations. I fully realize your eagerness to shoulder the new responsibilities of the Union and I am equally convinced .of your aversion to these renegades and their evil ways. But mere aversion will not do. You must be able to demonstrate your united opposition to these renegades by all available democratic methods. Resolutions must be passed at mass meetings, lectures, discussions and debates must be organized and advantage must be taken through the medium of students' journals and magazines, by means of articles and illustrations. these are some of the methods you can employ against the renegade students. School and University authorities should also take effective steps to put a stop to the activities of these renegades. If we are really keen to usher in a New Era, it will not do by simply wishing to learn and by saying that the country needs educated men and women to shoulder the responsibilities. It is incumbent upon every student to take every possible step to prevent these renegades from setting their feet within the precincts of schools and the University, let alone allowing them to mix with you, just as evil spirits are driven out by recitation of *Pareik* mantras.

Students will not be fighting alone in their campaign against the renegades. They will have the full support of the patriotic press, patriotic cultivators and workers and patriotic masses, who loathe these renegades from the bottom of their hearts because the renegades are stirring up trouble in the country at the bidding of their “distant aunts“ without the least regard for the actual conditions of the country.

Let me tell these renegades from this place, “If you want to take up politics, please do not interfere in the legitimate activities of the students. Leave the schools and University and pursue your political activities freely as politicians.“

Our Union underwent a complete transformation, like a revolutionary change, at 4-20 a.m. on 4th January 1948. Before that time all Executive, Judiciary and Legislative powers in Burma were derived from the British Parliament. During that time, it did not matter whether we were cultivators, workers, government servants, traders, students and so on. It was Up to all of us to try to wrest that political power from the British. However things have now taken a different turn Since 4-20 a.m. on 4th January 1948 sovereign power has come into the hands of the people of the Union. Every one of

us need not take up politics in the sense of the past period as before. As new responsibilities arise along with our new independent status, every one of us has a particular duty to perform. The duty of the students is to try to become educated. So long as the Executive, Judiciary and Legislative powers are in the hands of the people, the students have no other obligation but to pursue their own studies.

It is necessary that students should fully realize the significance of this change from the old order to the new. If the students continue to think, say and act as in past without attempting to appreciate the changed conditions, they will be like the tiger-puller in a puppet show. Once, when a puppet show was on in a village, a bully came up to the stage manager and ordered him to stage the story wherein Miss Me U was bitten by a tiger. The man who was to “pull“ the tiger fell asleep before his turn and meanwhile another village bully came up to the stage manager and bid him stage another play wherein Prince Siddhahta renounced the world. The play was accordingly changed and while the Prince was riding his horse towards the deep forest the “tiger“ man suddenly awoke, pulled out his “tiger“ and at once pounced upon the Prince’s horse without attempting to ascertain what play was on.

My advice to the students is not to lose sight of the trend of events as the tiger puller did. You should ponder deeply over how circumstances have changed and what actions are necessary to suit the changing circumstances.

I have said that new responsibilities come along with the advent of our new status. To shoulder these responsibilities successfully we must have faith in our own strength and our own methods. It will be foolish to rely on others. During the period of British regime, blame could be laid at the door of the British whenever something remained unaccomplished. But now British rulers are no more here and if we fail to do a thing which needs to be done, the blame must be laid on ourselves.

We are now subjected to a crucial test before the whole world. From this test the world will know whether we are fit for independence, or not. If only we are ignoramuses, Mr. Zeroes and destructionists without the slightest ability for constructive work, power-crazy desperados, mercenaries, fugitives and chicken-hearted cowards who quake in their shoes at the threat of Peoples’ Court, then we will fail miserably in this test. To pass this test, therefore, it is up to all patriotic students to work hard and learn diligently to equip themselves adequately for the new tasks arising out of our newly-won status.

I urge upon you to try your utmost to become worthy sons and daughters of this University and uphold its highest traditions.

I urge upon you to try your utmost to become worthy sons and daughters of the Union and serve its people by means of the knowledge you learn here.

**DOCUMENT 7: Maung Maung, Student Unions in England and Burma (1952)<sup>1</sup>**

The student unions at colleges are not quite the same as our unions. The unions here are mainly social and educational organizations; they have a few dances a year, few excursions to places of interest, debates and addresses by some prominent men. Cambridge and Oxford unions are regarded as training grounds for politicians, but the unions themselves are by no manner of means political. They stand strictly aloof from politics. A few communist students may get on to committees, but except from talking themselves hoarse at committee or general meeting they achieve little. In the East, of course, the student union plays a tremendous part in national politics. Our national leaders in Burma made their debut in the Rangoon University union, showed their mettle as organizers of university and school strikes. This state of affairs is only to be expected and, to a certain extent, even desirable. Students in our countries are in direct touch with the march of ideas and the movement of world events and forces, while their agrarian population toil in the dark. Students, rightly, take the lead. But once national independence is won it should not be difficult to admit new ideas into the country, not by the back door of college halls but through the front gate. All access to knowledge and political education should be open to the people, and students should retire awhile from politics. Those of them who are fixed on political careers would need to do serious political studies and equip themselves for leadership. The time for them to instigate masses and students into strikes and inspire them into national movements would then be behind them, the new need would be for them to train themselves for the role of mature politicians and statesmen. The world is fast becoming one large family, and though some members may bicker and quarrel, it is to their interest as much as those of others that the family should hold together. The art of living together is not easy to learn, but we must learn it somehow. Our students should bear this in mind; our student unions should therefore be nurseries for world citizens and statesmen, not mere platforms for local misbrands.

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<sup>1</sup> Maung Maung (1962) London Diary. Rangoon, Burma Publishers: 51-52. – Maung Maung was one of Burma's leading lawyers, journalists and historians and the last chairman of the BSPP and president of the Socialist Union of Burma between August 18 and September 19, 1988 (for his biography and further writing see Robert Taylor (2008) Dr. Maung Maung. Gentleman, Scholar, Patriot. Singapore, Institute for Southeast Asian Studies.)

**DOCUMENT 8: Nu, “To Students”. 23<sup>rd</sup> November 1951<sup>1</sup>**

*To Students*

(Address to the National Day Mass Rally on 23rd November 1951.)

In the course of an address to the National Day mass rally at the B.A.A. ground on Friday, the 23rd November 1951, the Prime Minister said that students of to-day are the leaders of to-morrow-leaders not only in the sphere of politics but also in the spheres of public health, education, technical sciences and economic life.

“Freedom connotes power,” - Thakin Nu said, “power commensurate with one’s own strength and one’s own sense of responsibility. All that we desire will not be accomplished with the advent of independence. Newly-won power must be correctly harnessed to accomplish our cherished aims. We are the architects of our own destiny; it will be simply absurd to look for distant aunts to come and do our job. What part will the students play in this big task of forging our own destiny? Students will certainly form the vanguard in carrying out this noble work. In all spheres like - Health, Education, Technical sciences, Economic life and Rehabilitation, students must play a very significant part. . The country expects the leaders in these works to be highly competent and educated men and women like-you students – not ignoramuses nor dunces. The people have pitched high hopes on you and it is up to you to prove that you are fully qualified to merit their fondest expectations. My only appeal to you is to act as students while you are students. I do not want to see students meddling in politics, attending political classes and submitting themselves as pawns on the political chess-boards.

“These-student-jacks-of-all-trades are puffed up with conceit but the days of these empty charlatans are over. The people are thoroughly fed up with these half-baked jacks-of-all-trades whose fashion is to keep their hair unkempt, wear their *longyis* short, carry about bulky volumes on politics, with shan bags on their shoulders, and recite parrot-like high sounding political jargons taught by their revered masters These empty headed pretenders will not cart a hoot to go underground at the

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<sup>1</sup> Nu (1953), *Burma Looks Ahead*. (Translation of selected speeches by the Hon’ble U Nu, Prime Minister of the Union of Burma, delivered on various occasions from 19<sup>th</sup> July 1951 to 4<sup>th</sup> August 1952. Rangoon, Ministry of Information: 21-22.

slightest provocation anti say that they art performing a glorious revolution Such student-jacks-of-all-trades are now very much out of fashion The great masses of people have nothing to do with them. I have been to all parts of the country anti I know perfectly well in which direction the wind blows The people do no longer look upon these student-jacks-of-all-trades seriously. They merely put them in the class of sharpers, jugglers and vendors of cheap medicines whom nobody takes seriously. Therefore, I appeal to you not to descend to these depths of students-jacks-of-all-trades anti keep up your legitimate status of potential leaders who will be called upon one day to bear big burdens.

“I pray that the work of the pure and unadulterated students may succeed as the path you have chosen has been very correct anti proper.”

**DOCUMENT 9: Nu, “Advice to University Students”, 2<sup>nd</sup> November 1953<sup>1</sup>**

*Advice to University Students*

Speech delivered on December 2, 1953 at Annual Convocation of  
University of Rangoon)

YOUNG BROTHERS AND SISTERS,

Today, I do not have much advice and exhortation to give to you. There is only one thing that I would like to urge you to observe. And that is “Be good and true University students.”

The phrase “Good and true University students” needs to be defined. What are the qualities which you need to be good and true University students? There are three great qualities which are necessary, namely:—

- (i) To gain as much knowledge in the various branches of studies, as possible.
- (ii) To safeguard purity of mind, of action and of speech.
- (iii) To entertain as far as possible a desire to serve our Union of Burma in the field one can best serve.

I would like to explain each of these three great qualities briefly.

**(I) TO GAIN AS MUCH KNOWLEDGE IN THE VARIOUS BRANCHES OF STUDIES AS POSSIBLE**

In the Thirty~eight Buddhist Beatitudes, it is written: “Bahu saccan ca, sippan ca, vinayo ca, susikkhito; subhasita ca, yava ca, etam mangalamuttaman.”

The meaning of this is as follows: “To be a man of great experience, to be a man full of wisdom, to be learned in the discipline of the Law, and to have a command of noble speech, these are four noble beatitudes.” In accordance with this, to have knowledge and understanding, to acquire wisdom, are not ordinary qualities. The Buddha Himself has thought it fit to put these qualities

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<sup>1</sup> Nu (1955), *Forward with the People*. (Translation of selected speeches by the Hon’ble U Nu, Prime Minister of the Union of Burma, delivered on various occasions from 19<sup>th</sup> February 1953 to 1<sup>st</sup> June 1954. Rangoon, Ministry of Information: 84-101.

amongst the Thirty-eight Noble Beatitudes.

University students, in human life, one has to act either for one's own advantage, or for the mutual advantage of oneself and another's. It is not possible to avoid either of these alternatives. Therefore, when one is either acting for one's own benefit, or acting for a combined benefit for oneself and another person, there will be no results if one acts without knowledge, wisdom and qualification.

If we look at the example of the Lord Buddha, He was a person who did the utmost for both Himself and for others. He was enabled to do this because the Lord Buddha was endowed with the maximum of knowledge and wisdom.

Students, when you leave this University you will have to work for either your own welfare, or the welfare of your nation, or the welfare of humanity. In this work I would like you to be effective and successful. To be successful in your future work, you will have to have sufficient knowledge and qualification. To equip yourself with such knowledge and qualification, the present is the best time for you. According to the proverb, "Make hay while the sun shines," while there is time you should not be vague and aimless. Now is the time for you to be absorbing the maximum knowledge and qualification.

If you are vague and aimless now, frittering away your energies on distractions, at this time when you should be concentrating on equipping yourself, you will be helpless when you enter the big world after leaving the University, or even while you are at the University when you meet with sharp characters who would exploit your ignorance for their ulterior motives. It is to be feared that you will be like the Six Blind Men in the fable who had their own ideas of an elephant. without any relation to truth, and who were severally convinced that an elephant was like a snake, or a spear, or a fan, or a wall, or a tree, or a rope.

In this world, to be like, those Six Blind Men is to suffer evil of the worst ill-omened kind. Some think that it is ill-omened to hear the shriek of a night-bird, or to have a putrid smell, or to meet with a corpse. They try to avoid these things, and are frightened on meeting those things. But these are not graceless ill-omens really. What is a really graceless ill-omen is to be without knowledge, to be without wisdom. Therefore, if University students wish to avoid gracelessness, or have to be frightened of anything, they should avoid or be frightened of a lack of knowledge and wisdom.

Now, in seeking for knowledge and wisdom, what should one try to acquire? Today there is no time to answer this question fully. In brief, one should try to acquire a knowledge of those arts and sciences which will help to increase the Five Strengths, namely, Physical, Intellectual, Material, Moral, and Social Strengths. But, I would like to enlarge on political knowledge and political

wisdom, since that is very important. A human being, whether he is a politician, or a labourer, or a business-man, in fact, any human being, cannot escape the results of political action. Directly or indirectly, the present, lot and the future fate of all human beings can be considerably influenced by political action. Therefore, a human being, whether he is going to be a politician or businessman, or a labourer, or anything else must try to acquire knowledge of political principles and political issues, as far as lies within his means.

Before I speak on the political principles and underlying issues, I would like to remind my listeners to note particularly the difference between gathering knowledge of political principles and active participation in politics. The difference between these two is great, as well as very clear. To try to understand political issues means to find, and learn and note what policies and programmes various political parties are pursuing, and what they are actually doing. It does not mean joining a political party and taking up politics. Participation in politics means either to start a party oneself or to join an existing party and carrying out political activities. Thus, the acquisition of knowledge in political issues does not mean joining a political party and indulging in political activities. You should note that what is meant is a study of political issues. and policies.

There are many things concerning politics which should be studied by University students. But, for the present, the political knowledge which should concern University students is knowledge of the political issues involved in the existence of two great power-blocs which we find in the world today. The leaders of these two great power-blocs or power alignments are England and America on the one side, and Soviet Russia on the other side.

University students of your age are full of adventurous spirits. They are full of hatred for oppression and repression. And once they are embarked on an undertaking, they will not think of consequences. They have courage and dauntlessness. And, because of these qualities you will be flattered with just the things that would appeal to you most, by those people who are experienced in exploiting these innocent qualities and who deceive, you and seduce you in all sorts of ways.

When you meet face to face with such seduction, you will be in a difficult position if you do not have a true knowledge of the political issues Concerned with these people. The situation you get into will be tragic even to the destruction of our Union of Burma. If you do not have a true knowledge of their political issues, what will happen is that you will become “political blind men”. After reading one or two books provided by them, or after visiting their countries once or twice on their invitation, these political blind men will entirely forget the admirable heritage of their ancestors, will entirely ignore the good points and the praiseworthy characteristics of their fathers

and will entirely forget their own good points, and will only learn to admire and to imitate what other people have done, and will think that only what other people are doing is worth praise and adulation.

I feel very anxious that there might be an increasing number of ill-omened “political creatures“ in our Union of Burma. That is why I am taking this opportunity to give some political knowledge to you to prevent the increase of these evil political creatures as well as to make the ones already existing repent themselves quickly in our Union of Burma and especially in the University where the future leaders of the country are to be produced.

The political knowledge I am going to speak on today is not something that has to be acquired with difficulty. It can easily be obtained. If you do not already have this knowledge, it is only because you have not paid attention to it previously. The political knowledge that you have got to know is this :—The leaders of the two great power blocs, namely, England, America and Soviet Russia,

- (i) Are not working for the interests and benefit of anybody else.
- (ii) They are purely working for their own interests.
- (iii) As they are building up strength for global control, they are making rival claims, and shouting each other down, for the defense of Democracy, respect for human dignity, liberation from imperialism and the building of a heaven on earth.
- (iv) But, whatever ideologies they have, whatever policies they outline, whatever resolutions they pass, whatever slogans they shout, in actual practice, whenever there is a conflict with their interest, they are not ashamed to discard their policies, to shelve their resolutions and to change their slogans as easily and quickly as a woman of no character changing her loves.
- (v) Since these great powers are not acting for the interests of anybody else, but their own, do not let yourselves be their stooges. Don't be stupid, crazy fools, who are victims of their deception and their confidence tricks. Don't be their hounds running after their prey, to the tune of their hunting horn. Do not be like the man who ignored his mother but flattered his distant aunt.
- (vi) But, although these great powers cannot bring us beneficial advantages, they can injure and damage us. Therefore, we must not insult them. We have to get on as best as we can with them. Where there is a question of mutual interest, or where there can be real mutual advantage, we should act in concert with them sincerely and cleanly. Nevertheless, never trust them completely to the extent of leaving our all in their hands.

This is what is meant by politics. And in politics this is the sort of thing that is done, whoever is acting. Only the fools, the knaves, the hunting hounds, the “distant aunt flatterers“ slave for others, quite oblivious of their own interests.

This is the political knowledge that you need. If you remember these six points you will never get into trouble.

Let us put to the test whether the political knowledge I have outlined for you is true or not. There is not a single point in what I am going to say that can be controversial. I will present to you the real facts of the case as regards these great powers.

### **The United States of America**

Let us look at the United States of America first. It is a country which has been shouting loudest the slogans of freedom, equality and respect for human dignity. With these slogans the Americans fought for their independence and gained it from English Imperialism. With these slogans also, the Americans in 1898 encouraged the Filipinos to rebel against Imperialist Spain. In the Spanish American War of that year, Spain was defeated and America annexed the Philippines and took it over as a colonial possession from the hands of Spain. If you look at recent history also, you will find that the Americans, on the one hand, are most vociferous about democratic-rights, about freedom and about respect for human dignity. On the other hand, we find that in Africa the United States is supporting the colonial Imperial systems which are most loathsome to the Africans. In Spain also the Americans support the Fascist-Franco regime. In Indo-China they are helping and encouraging the French colonial rulers who are not acceptable any more to all the Indo-Chinese. If you look at China also, you will find that the extreme reactionary Chang Kai-shek group, which had been ousted from China because the Chinese masses could not stomach them any more, have to be picked on by the Americans to give them support and assistance.

### **England**

If you look at England also their outcries and their slogans are again for Democracy, respect for human dignity and the salvation of civilization. That is one side of the picture. The other side of the picture is provided by Malaya, Kenya, British Guiana, Malta, Tanganyika and the Gold Coast. They have not let go of these colonial possessions tip to now. In Kenya, the natives who wanted back their own lands have been subjected to bombs and machine-gunning.

### Soviet

Soviet Russia is a country *which*, talks most, writes most, and passes most resolutions about ending colonialism, building a new life and starting a new heaven on earth. But let us see what the actual practice has been. For a clear view of the situation I will divide Russian Soviet history from 1917 to the present into seven stages. These seven eras are—

1. First stage	...	...	1917-23
2. Second stage	...	...	1923-27
3. Third stage	...	...	1927-35
4. Fourth stage	...	...	1935-38
5. Fifth stage	...	...	1938-41
6. Sixth stage	...	...	1941-46
7. Seventh stage	...	...	1946 to the present day.

Of these seven stages, in the first and the second for ten years from 1917 to 1927, because of external and internal Wars the Russian communists could not show any effective results.

At the beginning of the third stage (1927-35); as a testament of the policy of World Revolution which had been the cry formerly, the Communist International passed the resolution to strive until World Revolution is realized and achieved. But this resolution was an empty boast, making a great deal of noise with no shot, just like a festival gun. It was a resolution which was passed merely to provide a pleasant thrift to the Communists all over the world and the subject peoples in the colonies.

About that time in our country the Saya San Rebellion was in process. The imperialists were raining bullets ort the Revolutionaries. The Nationalists, led by U Ottama, U Wizara and U Chit Hlaing, were making demonstrations in all towns and villages, and were being run down by police horses, beaten by police sticks, imprisoned and subjected to repressive measures by the Imperialists. At that time, the great Communist International which was supposed to have been organized for the realization of World Revolution did nothing for and extended no help to our revolutionists and our nationalists Leave alone direct help, we did not get even verbal encouragement or moral support on their part by any expression of admiration or approval for these Burmese heroes who were rising against the Imperialists.

To get our freedom up to the final stage did we not have to struggle for it by depending on our own sacrifices, our own courage and our own heroes such as U Ottama, our U Wizara, our Saya San, our Bo Aung Gyaw and our Bogyoke Aung San.

Not to speak of extending material or financial help or advice or moral support to the Burmese to drive out the British Imperialists, the Soviets in this third stage of their history were anxious not to conflict with the English, In April 1933 when some British engineers sabotaged the Soviet Five-Year Plan, they were merely sentenced after trial in the People's Court and just sent back to England, as the Soviets wanted to avoid a clash with Britain.

Through the whole of this third stage, although on the one hand there was a resolution for the successful realization of World Revolution, on the other hand, we find the Soviets avoiding any conflict with Capitalist government. In this third stage, there was a very curious measure of the Soviets. This was in connection with the Social Democrats. The Soviets believe in Dictatorship. The Social Democrats believe in Democracy. In the words of Stalin, the Social Democrats were Number One enemy of Communism. Therefore, when there was a movement in Germany to create a Leftist Front of German Communists and German Social Democrats to fight against Hitler, the Stalinites strongly criticized it as a deviationist movement. The Front was destroyed. The result was the Nazis came into power and the German Communist Party which was next to the Russian Communist Party in strength, was utterly crushed by Hitler. Then, the Hitler menace grew day by day and came to threaten Soviet Russia. It was only then that the Soviets changed their policy, as an admission of the mistakes they had made.

By that time, Soviet Russia had got into her fourth stage of her history. And when they did change their policy, it went far beyond the programme of the German Front which they had criticized as deviationist. In Germany, only the Social Democrats were to be in the Leftist Front together with the German Communists. When the Nazi danger to Soviet Russia became apparent, the Communist International passed a resolution in 1935 instructing all Communist parties in the world to take part in a very broad front of all anti-Fascists. In this fourth stage of Soviet history, we find a great change in Soviet policies and programmes, due to external dangers. In September 1936, Hitler made his speech at Nuremberg, strongly attacking Communism. He only did not make it explicit that he would attack Russia. After that speech, on November 25, Germany and Japan made a treaty directed against Russia. By December 5, the Soviet structure which had been in existence for 20 years since the Soviet came unto power, was swept away and a Constitution having many features of Democracy was adopted in Russia under the name of the Stalin Constitution. Outstanding Features of this new Constitution were.

(a) Even those classes which formerly had been excluded were given the right of voting at

elections;

- (b) There was no differentiation between peasants, workers and middle classes as regards the right to vote;
- (c) In the preparation of the electoral rolls, voters were listed not according to occupation but according to place of residence;
- (d) In actual voting, the ballot system was introduced.

Another outstanding feature was the provision in the Constitution that the people have the right to enjoy freedom of speech, of writing, of organization and assembly and other rights belonging to the people.

The reason for this change of front was not far to seek; it was just to get the assistance of England, America and France if Russia was attacked by Germany, Italy and Japan.

After this fourth stage, we come to the fifth stage, lasting from 1939 to 1941. We find that in this stage, the Communists had again changed their policy. The attempts to bring about pacts of collective security between Britain, France and! Russia, directed against Hitler, failed. Immediately after such failure, Soviet Russia made a turnabout, and swinging back from one extreme to another, concluded a non-aggressive pact with Hitler. World War II broke out soon after that. At the beginning, Soviet Russia was neutral. While she was neutral, all the wars were termed merely Imperialists' Wars, but as soon as war broke out between Germany and Russia, all the wars became overnight the Peoples' Wars, according to Soviet propaganda.

The sixth stage lasted from 1941 to 1946. Soviet-Russia had yet another change in the direction of her policy. The principles and methods of Communism were pushed to the background, and there was great encouragement of patriotism and nationalism, which cannot be reconciled with Communism. The fight against Hitler was carried on, not on the basis of Communist slogans and convictions, but on patriotic and nationalist slogans and sentiments. This happened not only in Russia, but also in the German occupied territories, where the Communist parties were instructed to stimulate and stir up nationalist sentiments. The Communist International, which had been formed to work for world revolution, was also publicly abolished in 1943.

That was not all. Then, Soviet Russia which had been most vocal about the freedom from imperialist occupation, during the war became an imperialist power itself by occupying the small states of Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania. She was also guilty of aggression against Finland, when she annexed a part of Finland's territory.

From 1947 to the present time, Russia is in her seventh stage of her history since the Soviets came into power. In this stage, the defeated countries, Germany, Italy and Japan, lost their position as first class powers. Britain the United States and France were also exhausted due to the war. The Russian leaders saw that it was a good opportunity for Soviet Russia. Thus, the Communist International, which had been abolished in the previous stage, was now revived again under a new name, that Cominform.

Weil, University Students, I have now presented to your consideration some of the evidence, in the form of material facts, concerned with the Great Powers, and after studying this evidence carefully, it is for you to judge whether the six points of political knowledge that I have given above are not true or not, in the light of this evidence.

Therefore, do not let yourselves be misled by thinking that what this great power or that great power says is true. These great powers say one thing and do another without compunction. Do not stand and gape in idle admiration of the antics and statements of these great powers. Carry on with your own tasks~ The task that is facing University students who are future leaders of the country, is none other than to equip themselves with knowledge and proper qualifications as much as possible, so that they will be able to shoulder well their responsibilities in serving the country after they leave the University. Since that is so, my younger brothers and sisters at the University should not be diverted from their immediate tasks to other things which are mere distractions. I earnestly urge them to absorb and assimilate as much knowledge and intellectual training as possible.

But there is a certain class of University students, which insists on taking part in politics, whatever I or anyone else might say. These students are vocal, glib, and can shout the loudest. These students from the very start have not come to the University to acquire knowledge, but have come with the single aim of working at politics. They do not care about failing in examinations, and have no compunction in breaking rules and regulations. They are not frightened by the prospect of being expelled.

These students are a great source of disturbance to those students who want to get on with the task of getting through the University and acquiring knowledge and training, so as to be able to serve the Union of Burma and assume responsibilities quickly. Therefore I hereby earnestly request the political students who feel they must take up politics, not to disturb the serious genuine students, but

to leave the University and take up whatever form of politics they wish to, outside the University, and in the true political arena.

A country, whether it is communist, or Socialist, or Capitalist in structure, is in great need of trained and educated people who would be able to serve it in all fields of endeavor, if that country is to be fully endowed with the Five kinds of Strength. This cannot be denied by anybody. That is why we are doing our best to produce trained and educated people. Therefore, if the political students are sincere in desiring to establish a new order and a golden age as they maintain, it is up to them to leave alone those students who are really capable of realizing a golden age and a new life for the country. I again seriously, deferentially and earnestly appeal to the political students to leave the University quietly, and to plunge into the outside world of politics. . . .

But, to tell you the truth, these bad students, who are vicious to the extent of preventing good students from carrying on with their studies quietly, are incurable. Appeals to their good sense or decency will not be effective. And yet to turn away quietly from them because one does not wish or dare to argue or deal with them, would be shirking responsibility.

It is an inherent right for students to be able to pursue their studies quietly. To enjoy this right to the fullest measure, it is not sufficient to depend on external aid. The students themselves should exert their utmost to protect their inherent rights. You must demonstrate clearly your will for peaceful studies, so that those vicious students cannot have a footing in the University. Every student must have the courage to rise up and demonstrate his will spontaneously and clearly for the maintenance of the right to peaceful studies.

From the point of view of the Government, there is no desire to intervene in the internal affairs of the University. To do so is not right. Therefore, it is up to the students themselves first to settle the matter. It is only when the students themselves are not able to control the Situation by themselves, that the University authorities should step in. And it is only when the situation gets beyond the control of the University authorities that the Government has to step in and help to maintain or restore a desirable state of things.

The fact that the Government is at present helping to control the situation in the University does not mean that the Government is interfering in the internal affairs of the University. It is merely assisting the University authorities to deal with the uncontrollable portion which has got out of hand. This participation in controlling a situation in the University is not meant to be permanent.

It would not be a right thing to have continual Government participation in controlling situations in the University. Sooner or later the Government will return the responsibility of handling situations

in the University entirely into the hands of University authorities. Therefore, in order that external aid need not be depended on in University affairs, and in order that University matters can be fully handled by University people, I urge you students not to shirk your responsibility, not to be timid, not to follow the line of least resistance, but to protect your own rights to the utmost of your capacity.

(2) TO SAFEGUARD PURITY OF MIND, OF ACTION AND OF SPEECH

Whether a person is a good man or not has to be judged on the basis of his speech, his actions and his mental attitudes. According to Buddhism, beings have their continual round in the thirty-one planes of existence, simply because of their speech, their actions and their mental attitudes. A being reaches or returns to the plane of the Brahmas, or the plane of the Upper Spirits, or the plane of human existence, or the plane of the infernal regions, as a consequence of these three things, namely, speech, action and mental state. The attainment of a higher plane, or the descent to a lower plane of existence, is due to three things only. If speech, action and mental attitude are evil, there is descent to lower planes and the reverse holds true.

Therefore, it is not sufficient merely to acquire knowledge on the part of University students. It is also vitally necessary to be virtuous in speech, act and mind. Even if it is not possible to entertain a positively virtuous mind, to be positively virtuous in speech, and to be positively virtuous in action, at least one should try one's utmost to refrain from evil speech, evil actions and evil mental attitudes.

It is now necessary to consider and put to the test whether there is such safeguarding of purity or virtuousness of speech, action and mind. This consideration is necessary because there have come to be instances of uncontrolled venting of disgraceful cries in the University, which would have brought shame even to those with the slightest vestiges of self-respect. There have been incidents, never heard of before, in which abuse of the worst kind has been indulged in, right in front of the houses of very senior teachers of the University, and for three or four days in succession.

In addition, during the Students' Union election, there have been very dirty tricks, the sort that only very low-down politicians would care to indulge in, such as buying votes, corrupting voters with treats and feminine seduction and using violence to wreck the election. These are entirely novel and undesirable developments.

These things show that, although the University has an increased student population of over seven

thousand students, in quality and calibre there has been a great fall. This deterioration has caused to all the citizens of our Union, who have been expecting great things from University students, enormous regret.

A teacher is included amongst the Five Depositories of Infinite Gratitude. Thus, those students who dared to go and shout abuse for three or four days in succession in front of a teacher's house, would not shrink from any evil, any viciousness on this earth.

Moreover, we had great hopes that dirtiness in politics, which does exist to some extent at present, would disappear when the University students of today come into the field of politics in the next generation. The realities of the situation shatter our hopes. There is a saying, "Do not learn to steal gold, even before you master the trade of a goldsmith." If these students are so deep now in all the dirty tricks even before they have become full-blown politicians, I dare not imagine to what depths they will sink when they become actual politicians. According to the saying, "When an iguana should grow to the size of a crocodile, the whole river will be at its mercy, "if these students are so vicious and dirty even as embryo-politicians, the whole of Union of Burma will be at their mercy and will come to ruin, when they become full-fledged politicians. Therefore, University students who are to be the future leaders of our country, should, for the sake of the Union, forsake vicious and ignoble speech, vicious and harmful actions, and vicious and evil mental attitudes. I earnestly appeal to them to safeguard the purity of their speech, their actions and their minds.

- (3) TO ENTERTAIN AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE NOBLE SENTIMENTS FOR SERVING THE UNION OF BURMA 'TO THE UTMOST OF ONE'S CAPACITY AND IN THE WAY ONE CAN BEST SERVE

The progress and prosperity of a country depends more on the qualities of its citizens than on other things. A study of world history will support fully these statements of mine. Amongst the instances supporting these views the most glaring are the instances of the English people and the Dutch people. Britain and the Netherlands are fairly small in size, and are not blessed with too many natural resources. England has coal and iron only. In the Netherlands, because of insufficient space, land had to be reclaimed from the sea by means of dykes. The Netherlands are without natural resources. Their economy has had to be built up by the production of flowers, tulips, vegetables and dairy products. But because of their heroic national qualities, up to World War II the British had the largest empire and the Dutch the third largest empire in the world.

We do not want to be Imperialists or to build empires. But we do want to raise our Union of Burma from the status of a backward small nation to that of a first class nation, fully endowed with the desirable five kinds of strength or resources, on a level with other countries. I believe that you also have the same desire. And the realization of our desire, our aim, rests on your shoulders. If all of us are not content to take things easy, if we are not idle, if we are not shiftless and undisciplined, if we are not corrupt, and if all of us are united and well organized in our endeavour, our great aim will remain well within reach, even if we have to get there gradually~ But we have to be determined, as determined as the boatman, who, confident that the city of Pagan will be there, poled his boat upstream at the rate of a yard a day; till at last he reached Pagan. Our great objective will be there waiting for us to achieve it. And one day it must come to our hands if we have the qualities I have cited. Therefore, University students must put forth their utmost endeavour to foster a spirit of service to their own country, in each respective field where they best can serve.

If you University students make yourselves possessors of the three essential qualities that I have spoken on, and thus become good and true University students, it will be to your own advantage, as well as to the benefit of all your countrymen.

All our countrymen have undergone a period of great hardship, as serfs of Imperialism, with deprivation piled upon deprivation. On top of this, suffering has been added on by the various camps of insurgents, and hardship has been made more severe. Therefore, our countrymen, our masses do not want any more disturbance and agitation, or lawless action, whether they are caused by students, or workers, or peasants, civil servants, or politicians, or anyone else. Our people hate and loathe these disturbances and disorderly movements. The thing that the people of our country desire, hope for, and pray for, is none other than a New Life existence for them, a New Life in which they will have a full measure of the five kinds of strength, namely, physical strength, intellectual strength, material strength and social strength.

As you know very well, this New Life cannot be conjured up in a minute, like rabbits out of a magician's hat. Without obstruction, without sabotage, and with a full complement of manpower, material resources, and financial capacity, it would even then take at least twenty five to thirty years to achieve the New Life for our countrymen. Therefore, while on the one side there are those who are building this New Life, University students on their part should try to be good and true students with the aim that one day they will be participating in the building of this noble structure of New Life, each according to his own talents. You should be helping to prevent unnecessary delay and undesirable obstruction in the building of this New Life for the country. If you in the University,

instead of helping in this noble task, should be creating trouble from one small corner, and making a nuisance of yourselves, the Government will not fall, you will not be taking over the government; but the only result will be that the achievement of the New Life will be delayed. Our countrymen, who have put their hopes on the New Life, will be grieved that this delay should have been caused. Speaking for us, I want to assure you that we will not exploit, for our own benefit or for the benefit of any foreigners, University students, or workers and peasants. We will not exploit for anybody's benefit, civil servants or any group or section of our people. I want you to be sure of this.

We are determined not only not to exploit others, but also not to allow ourselves to be exploited by others, be era. They are building a new world of their own in a democratic way and they are marching towards the goal of common prosperity. In other words, our Union is building a new pattern of culture.

In this glorious work of rebuilding, cultivators workers, government servants, police personnel, armed forces, technicians, teachers and traders all play their part. The lives of these men and women are filled with ups and downs, rain and sunshine, tears and laughter. Here you have an inexhaustible field from which you can draw endless material. If only our writers can utilise these materials adroitly, our literature will certainly undergo a change for the better. I also believe that the country will progress because the people will become more enlightened. I, therefore, appeal to you all — novelists as well as exponents of other forms of art — to bear these facts in mind, for the sake of the Union.

**DOCUMENT 10: TEXT OF ADDRESS BY PRIME MINISTER GENERAL  
NE WIN AT ANNUAL UNIVERSITY CONVOCATION  
ON DECEMBER 2, 1958<sup>1</sup>**

New Graduates of the University and Guests,

I never dreamt that one day I would have the privilege to give a Convocation address as the Chancellor of the University of Rangoon, But for some years, I have been wanting to speak on certain matters concerning the students of our country, Now that I am fortunate enough to have the opportunity, I will not only give advice to those who, because of their ability, have just did their farewell to the carefree life of students And have been admitted to their several degrees, but also speak on important matters concerning all students.

Before I begin, however, I want to assure you all that like an elder brother advising his younger brothers and sisters, I speak with the purest of motives, and I have no other aim than to set the student on the path of truth.

The first matter that I want to speak on is the indiscipline which prevails among students in general and University students in particular, because I firmly believe that the success or failure of the present generation of students in their later life beyond their school and university walls, depends on the extent of the discipline or the indiscipline that now exists in schools and colleges.

From my own personal knowledge, I can say that present-day students have no respect for their teachers nor for their parents, and they have no consideration and no regard for each other. By this lack of respect for those to whom respect is always due, and also by this lack of consideration and regard for each other, students are destroying their own golden future, Everyday, to our distress, in the newspapers we read of the behaviour of students, such as a student stabbing his own headmaster, students of one institution fighting with students of another institution and attempting to set fire to that institution, and of students stabbing each other. All these incident are evil omens for the future.

With regard to students in schools, I would like to say this. During my school days, when a student was punished by his teacher either by caning or imposition of extra work, he had no resentment against his teacher and with lowered head and meek demeanour, he accepted the punishment ; when

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<sup>1</sup> *Is Trust Vindicated?* (1960), 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. Rangoon, Director of Information, Government of the Union of Burma: p. 555-557.

he reached home after school his parents frowned at him in displeasure and further scolded him by saying that the teacher had been too kind and the punishment too light ; for in those days, the authority of the teacher was accepted without question not only by the students but also by the parents.

Nowadays, in contrast, we find students wanting to go on strike just because they have to stand on their benches for their misbehaviour. They also find students shouting at and arguing with their teacher just because he has raised his voice to scold them for their misbehaviour. Many parents do not seem to know that they have a duty to discipline their sons, and some parents will even feel hurt and insulted when their sons are scolded by their teacher for their misconduct.

In colleges, the position is even worse; for example it is quite common for a student to gather up his books in anger and strut out of the lecture room with noisy footsteps, merely because his lecturer has shouted to him to stop making fun of him.

To make fun of one's own teacher in the middle of his lecture is bad enough, and to walk out in protest for being justly scolded is worse, but what makes the whole matter so tragic and so heart-breaking is the fact that the student considers himself to be a bold and daring person and the other students consider him to be a mighty man of valour.

I will admit at once that in all countries of the world, as an aftermath of the war, students and young people have become immoral, unruly and undisciplined. But I will never accept the argument that merely because that youth of other countries are undisciplined, it will not be just and fair to our own youth to single them out and scold them for their indiscipline.

Moreover if any one of you will be foolish enough to accept this false argument and will choose to watch with folded arms the present state of affairs, making no attempt to check the rising tide of indiscipline, the futures of our nation is indeed bleak As all students will realize when they look round their classrooms, schools and colleges all over the country are short of accommodation, short of books and classroom- equipment, and short of teachers. The Government has done its best to overcome these shortages, but it must be remembered that the student numbers in our country have increased many times over during recent years, and as a result, the ratio of teachers to students has become very low and schools have to introduce a system of double shifts.

As the teachers have to do double duty and are overworked and have no leisure, they can no longer give undivided and individual attention to the students. Taking advantage of this, the students have found fit to break the rules of good conduct and discipline. The public regrets this state of affairs

but many people think that the indiscipline will merely lead to students failing in their examinations.

But I want to warn you all that the effect will not be as simple as that, for indiscipline is not a mere sort which will pass after some painful hours, but a cancer that is beginning to eat into the golden body of Burma's future.

I dare not imagine that Burma that would be built in the future, by men who in their youth have spent their time in such behaviour as daring to argue against their teachers, stabbing each other, showing disrespect to their parents, neglecting their studies, staying away from their classes or walking out of their classroom at will, attempting to burn down the school building on the slightest excuse.

As Prime Minister, I cannot allow this state of affairs to continue and during the tenure of once of my Government, a firm foundation of discipline will certainly be laid. Only then will the future of students and the future of our country glow with hope.

The second matter that I want to speak on is the question of students and politics.

When a country is under alien rule as a slave, then every person belonging to that country has both the privilege and the duty to work for liberty, freedom, and independence of his country.

Therefore, during the period of our national slavery under colonial rule, Burmese students fought in the front-rank of our patriotic fighters for freedom, The circumstances were such that they had to fight in the front-rank, and they were trusted and relied upon by the whole nation. And their actions proved that they were worthy of the nation's trust.

But once national freedom has been won, the sole and single duty of students is to study, to learn, to gather knowledge, in short, to acquire an education.

However, I must point out that you will be very wrong if you think that mere passing of examination is more important than the actual acquisition of knowledge. As you are aware, because of the intervening period of colonial rule, our country is behind time, and therefore to make up, you must endeavor to produce great scientists, great technicians, great engineers, great physicians, That is the students' task in our country, Unless our schools and universities produce them, where can we get our great scholars, scientists, and technicians ? And if we do not have our own, great scholars, scientists and technicians, how can we take our place among the independent nations of the world? Speaking for myself, I want to hide my head in shame that during eleven

years since our Independence, we have had to rely entirely on foreign technicians and experts.

How I long to see great scientists and great technicians among our students!

How the parents and the whole nation long to see the same! Therefore, I exhort all students to cease to be mere part-time students and part-time politicians, and to become' full-time students with one avowed aim of acquiring knowledge.

If they refuse to follow this advice, they are failing in their duty to their own country.

Only when a person has acquired enough knowledge on which he can base judgment as to what is right and what is wrong, will he be free from the danger of being cheated - and misled by others. So all students must endeavor to acquire as much knowledge as possible. If they do not endeavour to acquire knowledge, they are certain to believe what unscrupulous persons say and they are sure to be cheated and fooled.

I will also request politicians, not to be wolves in sheep's clothing, and not to pretend to be students and spoil the educational careers of real students As Prime Minister and Chancellor, I say that I will take strict and drastic action against those politicians who are found interfering with the education of our youth.

I will also warn all students to exercise their utmost care not to be caught in the snare set by politicians and not to sacrifice themselves merely for the profit and advantage of politicians.

The third matter on which I like to speak concerns you all who have just earned your degrees and have left the student world.

However much we say in praise of our University, we have to admit that it has not yet reached the standard set by the best universities of the world. In fact, its standards have fallen quite a bit. So you must not be conceited over the fact that you have left the University with your degree. Remember that in any time, the knowledge and learning you have acquired at the University are merely the fundamentals and rudiments with which you must begin your long journey of life.

Knowledge is without limit and boundary and you must continue to gather knowledge by practice and experience in the wide world. If you think that just because you have obtained your degrees, you have learnt all you have to learn in life, you are tragically mistaken.

Therefore, I will exhort all of you, new graduates, not to be conceited, not to be content with what you have learnt, but to continue to study and learn although no longer within the walls of your

University realizing with humility that you still have to endeavour much to perfect your knowledge, so as to reach the high standards attained by graduates of the greatest universities of the world.

Lastly, I will advise you about your work in your chosen profession or about your choice of a profession. As you know, the majority of our people live in villages and small towns and they do not have the opportunity like yourselves to come to a great city and to acquire knowledge at a university.

You must sympathise with them in this their misfortune, and the best way to show your sympathy is to choose some work or profession which will not keep you sheltered in control in the city, and which will instead take you to remote villages, where you can mix with the simple and unlettered people, and you can help to widen their horizon of knowledge. My experience in the past has been to find that most graduates or educated people did not want to work outside the city of Rangoon: with its many amenities. I consider that they were selfish and very wrong in their attitude. I hope that the new graduates before me do not have that mistaken attitude.

In your chosen professions, if you can forget your self-interest entirely, and work for the good of your nation, how wonderful it will be! However, we are not all saints, and even though you have to work for your own self-interest, see that you also work for the good of your nation. Do not work only for your own interest, at the cost of the interest of your country, Even if you cannot sacrifice your self-interest, at least see that you do not sacrifice the interest of your country.

With this final advice given in affection and regard, I wish you joy and success.

**DOCUMENT 11: TEXT OF ADDRESS BY PRIME MINISTER GENERAL NE WIN AT ANNUAL UNIVERSITY CONVOCATION ON DECEMBER 18, 1959<sup>1</sup>**

TEACHERS AND STUDENTS OF TUE UNIVERSITY AND GUESTS,

Since the Convocation last year, I have observed a distinct improvement in the discipline of the students and in their respect for their teachers. I have been very glad that we now have a prospect of raising a new generation of worthy Sons and daughters of Burma. I praise the students and hope that they will not rest on their laurels but try harder for further improvements.

However, there was a dark spot on the white background of good student discipline concerning the trouble over the question of staying on in the hostels during the October holidays. I was extremely sad about it and my relief was great when the question was settled peacefully between the teachers and the students. I should like to praise the Rector for his sympathetic understanding combined with firmness of principle.

In the same way, I should like to praise the students for showing that they also can behave in a common sense and reasonable way and that they have not lost their capacity for respect and affection for their teachers.

Looking at this example, we see that dose co-operation and discussion between the teachers and the students can resolve any problem provided there is no outside interference.

Now that the students are improving their ways, perhaps. It is not out of place to say a few words about the teachers. If the University is to be looked up to by the mass of the people, the teachers must also live up to the very high moral and intellectual standards expected of them.

They must fulfill their duties and must treat them not merely as work, but as a vocation. They must lay down a deeper intellectual foundation for the progress of the University.

The next point I want to make is about “Government“ help to the University. Although we ardently desire to give the best to the University and make it stand on its own with the world’s best Universities, our achievement has fallen short of our desire. We have not been able to make concrete improvements. This is partly due to lack of skill and resources; and partly due to the fact

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<sup>1</sup> *Is Trust Vindicated?* (1960), 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. Rangoon, Director of Information, Government of the Union of Burma: p. 560.

that we are so hard pressed for time.

Here I am indeed very sorry that our administration, in spite of its keen desire, has not been able to do more and I must apologise to you. But I should like to urge the teachers of the University to have the intellectual and moral courage to give advice on: the improvement of our educational System to whatever government that will follow.

Finally, I should like to give this message to the graduates who are now on the threshold of the problems of life. The education and training for which you are today receiving your degrees is only the beginning, the equipment which will help you to solve your problems of adult life a little better.

It is not the end, and in the same way that a sword can be kept sharp with continual use, you must not slacken your studies and must forever be ready to face up to the problems of the world.

In order to develop our country, we must not only increase the output of our existing industries, but must also create new industries. These new industries will not only benefit the country, but will also create jobs for the future graduates of the University.

Therefore, those of you who are leaving the world of students today cannot be satisfied with doing the traditional work in traditional ways, but must strive to innovate by introducing new ideas and new ways of promoting economic development. Only then will you be fulfilling your share of the duty of helping our country and our people.

### 3. 1962 - 1988

#### **DOCUMENT 12: Seventh July Student Massacre<sup>1</sup>**

Seventh July is the historic day on the Burmese history on which day in 1962, unarmed university students sacrificed their lives against the Military Government. Students were massacred and Student's Union Building was dynamited down together with the students inside. Since that day students became the RESISTENCE SYMBOL and used to spearhead the successive uprisings against the illegal Military Rulers.

Burma army Chief of Staff General Ne Win and cohorts threaten the U Nu's elected democratic government to hand over power and formed a Caretaker government from 1958 to 1960 for eighteen months. General Ne Win and cohorts had a good taste of power after 18 months of the Caretaker Government, and they regarded U Nu as a weak leader and was not strong enough to govern the country. They openly told the Pyidaungsu Governments that the army had to fight vigorously and they are not happy to even protect and give security service to those corrupt political leaders.

General Ne Win took over the power second time in March of 1962. Military coups were quite popular in those days of early sixties in Asia, Africa and in Latin America. Now it is out of fashion and most of them reverted back to the civilian rule. Just after the Military coup of General Ne Win, he quelled the dissents and demonstrations with his army brutally. He even dynamited the Students Union in the Rangoon University while some student leaders were still inside.

General Ne Win's first speech challenged or threatened the unarmed Burmese Citizens that he would respond knife with knife, spear with spear if any one dare to challenge him and his lap-dog army, in Burmese," Dhar dhar chin\_Lhan lhan chin shin mae".

In his last farewell speech he warned the Burmese citizens that next time if HIS Army had to be called to calm the uprising there is no vocabulary in the BURMA ARMY's guiding manuals to shoot up into the air for warning. Burma Army would shoot straight to the target, in other words Tatmadaw declared its "SHOOT TO KILL" policy even on unarmed civilians. General Ne Win took over in the early morning of March 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1962. There was an important announcement over the radio from the Burma Broadcasting Service. We heard marching songs being played and then the announcement came regarding the taking over of the country by the military and about the formation of the Revolutionary Council. There were 17 names mentioned as members of the

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<sup>1</sup> Burma Digest A Campaign Journal for Human Rights of All Ethnic Nationalities in Burma. - <http://burmadigest.wordpress.com/tag/contributors/maha-bandoola/>.

Revolutionary Council.

Rangoon university student protests started against the Military coup on 6 July 1962. On the 7<sup>th</sup> of July 1962 there were demonstrations against the Ne Win's military government and the government retaliated with severe measures. Aung Gyi and Tin Pe were the most senior officers and Sein Lwin was the field commanding officer in the university region. No one exactly knows who gave the orders to open fire.

On July 7, over 130 stubborn or diehard or brave would be martyr students who were demonstrating in the student's union building in the campus of Rangoon University were dynamited and brutally killed by the army.

The historic student's union building was destroyed into pieces. The 7 July student's massacre was merely a blood-stained on the Tatmadaw but they could not suppress the students' spirit of going on fighting against the militarism. The arrest, torture and imprisonment could not crush the spirit of the fighting peacock or the revolutionary student protests.

When the Students' Union building was dynamited with some of the students inside our heart sank and nearly broke. All the students, parents and the whole population felt very hurt up to the present time especially on this auspicious or rather a notorious day. The 7<sup>th</sup> July is the 9-II for all the Burmese.

Ne Win blamed Aung Gyi and Aung Gyi pointed back to Ne Win as a responsible leader. But the real butcher who pulled the trigger was SEIN LWIN. (During the 1967 Student Festival in Mandalay, there was a small fight between the students. One of the sons of Butcher Sein Lwin boasted amongst his friends that to quell that student unrest was a minor thing for his father who had shoot and killed a lot of students and dynamited the student's union building on 7th July. And the whole Mandalay knew that the Anglo-Burmese Primary School teacher from St. Peters School was teaching English daily to that illiterate North-West Division Commander.)

No wonder there was a popular rallying slogan during 8888 because Ne Win put Sein Lwin as his successor Prime Minister after his resignation:

“Sein Lwin Chauk Tan\_Tasauk Kan.”,

“Sein Lwin Chauk Tan\_sauk yan loke myi”.

“San ta pyi sae nga kyat\_Sein Lwin khaung ko pyat”.

“Sein Lwin Phar Kyo\_Hto' Kyo” e.t.c.

Ne Win was a drop out at Inter class for Bio and could not pursue his dreams to become a Medical Doctor. But he managed to snatch the wife of Dr Toke Gyi, Daw Khin May Than who was the

daughter of famous Professor Dr. Ba Than. Curiously both Ne Win and Dr Ba Than were notorious for womenisation.

Ne Win was notorious for never finishing any book except Adolph Hitler's book, MEIN KAMPS. (Note this is not a satire or just tried to run down on Ne Win but the truth!)

And he was the one to demolish the very famous "Burmese Research Association" just because one of the professors got drunk and touch his wife Daw Khin May Than during the association's dinner. He was shot and killed on the spot and the precious Burma Research Association was disbanded since then.

According to the General Ne Win, educated class or intellectuals are undecided, ignorant and corrupted class not to be trusted in their 'Socialist' revolution. Actually as a military dictator, he knew that he could not fool the educated class easily. The intelligent class always uses their heads (brains) and use to question and analyze each and every order. The dictators and especially Tatmadaw leaders never like that attitude. Subordinates must always obey the command given to them. They have no right to think whether it is right or wrong, just or not.

Intellectuals have no place under Military rulers. If do not want to keep their mouth shut, they must be put into detention or must leave the country to avoid the dangerous consequences.

In civilized countries the scholar is always placed above the 'man of war' believing that " Nations which trusted the gun perished by it earlier".

But in Myanmar under the Military rulers the opposite of the above rule is always correct.

For Myanmar Military, power comes out from the barrel of the gun only. The might is always right for them.

"The evil that men do lives after them..."

Julius Caesar III ii.75,.by William Shakespeare

Yes, all the perpetrators of 7th July Ne Win, Sein Lwin and ? Aung Gyi ? are no more on earth. But their evil of Massacring Students on this day would be remembered forever. Since that day students became the RESISTENCE SYMBOL and used to spearhead the successive uprisings against the illegal Military Rulers.

The 7th July is the 9-II for all the Burmese.

The spirit of 7 July will last forever.

**MAHA BANDULA**

**DOCUMENT 13: Excerpt from Aung Gyi's letter to Ne Win, 22. June 1988<sup>1</sup>**

**‘Please Do Not Cover Up‘**

Three widely circulated letters to Ne Win from retired Brig.-Gen. Aung Gyi, once a close confidant, had a critical effect on the events leading to the change of leadership in Burma. Aung Gyi, 70, was arrested along with nine others in the first week of August 1988. His third letter, dated June 22, 1988, was written a day after widespread rioting had again erupted in Rangoon. Excerpts.

Yesterday, an undesirable incident again took place. The ugliest was one in which the Lon-htain (riot police) surrounded the Singapore embassy, which children had entered for sanctuary. From outside the closed gate, the lon-htains pelted the embassy with stones, demanding that the gate be opened. The glass windows and doors were broken. Pieces of glass were strewn all over.

Another ugly incident was one in which school children in green uniforms were run over by trucks and killed. These were pupils from the former St Philomena's and the high school near Kyandaw cemetery, all around the ages of 10 or 11. There were two girls in the forefront, one of whom died. Both the dead and wounded were trucked away. I do not have the number of the truck. It was a Lon-htain truck. The school children saw one of the standard-bearer girls being dragged into the police station near the traffic lights and tried to recover her. The authorities lied about this, saying the students burned the police station. When the watching crowd could stand it no longer, they started to beat up the lonhtains. In that neighbourhood about ten lon-htains were killed.

Out in the forefront were school children, 11 or 12 years old. Unarmed, There were sounds of gunfire. The stones and brickbats came from a house being built near (the Singapore embassy)...

The crisis right now is rice, rice. I suspect: is it to divert attention that emphasis is being put on quelling the student riots? ... Troops at the front and their families are now facing a rice problem. Before too long, there is a possibility that they will turn their backs on the fighting at the front and return home.

At the time of the student riots in 1962, a "Crisis Committee" was formed. They did not require any orders from you. They had authority to make decisions. Later, the students were dragged into the Student's Union Building. It was an erroneous report that the students were armed. You were given a lie. When the troops entered the building, there were no students. They had escaped. At that point Hmwe Gyi (then Lt.-Col Hla Myint) said that if they used a recoilless rifle, Living quarters would

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<sup>1</sup> M.V. Pradhan (1994<sup>2</sup>) *Burma, Dhamma and Democracy. Being Historical and Cultural Survey of Burma and an account of the Pro-Democracy Struggle*. Bombay, Mayflower Publishing House: pp. 182-183.

also be damaged. While they were in a quandary a Junior officer suggested the use of dynamite. The decision to use dynamite was then reached.

At the time that you gave the order to destroy [Union building] by fire power, you gave It in anger, following exaggerated reports [of something] comparable to fortified insurgents. Actually, at about 6:30 p.m. the student affair was over.... . There was no longer any need to raze the building. Those who could not make the correct decision started to blame others. In the and the blame reached you

This time many of the embassies ware frantically making video recordings, including, of the damaging of the Singapore embassy... I am sure that embassies will report the matter to the U.N. human rights organization in Geneva. According to the students, you are not involved. Please make arrangements to prevent another “Shootout at RIT“ (Rangoon Institute of Technology), where many students were killed during protests March, Please do not cover up for anybody. The children that died were all 10 to 11 years old.

**DOCUMENT 14: Excerpt from Ne Win's Speech before the BSSP Congress,  
23. July 1988<sup>1</sup>**

I now have this to say. Be patient and listen to what I have to say. This part is separate from the other parts concerning the convening of the congress.

This may be the last time I am speaking before a gathering so, after putting before you matters concerning the Party Congress, I want to tell you about an episode which has led to misconception by students concerning me and the entire Revolutionary Council. The destruction of the University Students Union building on 8 July 1962 morning is known by all. Only if I reveal the role I played on July 7 evening will the events of the day become more complete, so I will do that. Around 5 that evening I heard gunshots, so I telephoned Bo Kyaw Soe to enquire. He said Sayagyi U Kar and family had been sent to a safe place, and that some 8 or 9 police had been injured. Asked if the students leaders creating disturbances had been apprehended, he said not yet and that some were in the Student Union building. In order that no more police and Tatmadawmen may get hurt I instructed him as follows:

(a) To use loud hailers to urge those in the union building to come out and submit to arrest, and to warn that large-calibre arms would be used if they did not do so.

(b) To use recoilless gun if necessary if they failed to submit to arrest peacefully

And that it be done before dark.

Here, I will tell you what is important. I and some of the Revolutionary Council members did not take part in the discussion and decision for the explosion which destroyed the building. Only when I enquired on hearing a very loud bang like the explosion of a big bomb on July 8 morning did I learn that the union building had been dynamited. There were also quite a number of Revolutionary Council members who knew of it only after they heard that explosion. However, all members of the Security Council composed of some of the Revolutionary Council members, Security Council Chairman Colonel Kyaw Soe who took responsibility for security, all security council members and all officials in charge of security were at the broadcasting station. Those persons were Security Council Chairman Colonel Kyaw Soe, Colonel Hla Han, Colonel Saw Myint, Colonel Ba Ni and from among officers Intelligence Colonel Maung Lwin and Chief of Police U Ba Aye. There were also many others present. When I called

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<sup>1</sup> : <http://www.burmalibrary.org/reg.burma/archives/199911/msg00329.html>.

Bo Kyaw Soe and asked of what I had learned of the destruction of the union building on July 8, he (Bo Kyaw Soe) replied that when I said on July 7 evening that recoilless gun could be used in necessary in apprehending the ring leaders in the union building, he had thought that he was being told to destroy the union building and had therefore destroyed it. That being the case with the acceptance of the concept of collective leadership, the statement by Revolutionary Council leader which included the words "Sword with sword and spear with spear" was broadcast.

Three or four months later I heard that foreign correspondent circles were saying that I gave the order to destroy the union building while I was drunk. I told Bo Kyaw Soe that I alone was being accused as the culprit who ordered the destruction while I was drunk, and asked him to tell me about the incidents of July 7. Then only did Bo Kyaw Soe say he would tell the truth. He said that, previously, soon after the Revolutionary Council emerged, some differences of opinion had appeared and that he was trying to cover that up. The fact was that one of those at the broadcasting station on July 7 had said that the union building was becoming a rebel headquarters and declared that it would be good to have it destroyed and thus whether or not to destroy it was discussed. Finally, he (Bo Kyaw Soe) said, it was decided to let me know about it and to destroy the building if I agreed.

Bo Aung Gyi had said he would go and submit it to `Bogyoke' and bring a reply as to whether it was agreed or not. He (Bo Aung Gyi) left in a car taking Ko Hla Han along. Later, Bo Aung Gyi returned to the broadcasting station and claimed that `Bogyoke' had agreed. The group at the broadcasting station

collected explosive materials and destroyed the building. After getting that answer, I called the Revolutionary Council member excluding Bo Aung Gyi and told them that Bo Aung Gyi, without submitting to me and without asking my opinion had told the group at the broadcasting station that I had agreed to the destruction of the building.

After learning the truth, I called Bo Aung Gyi to my office and told him that I had discovered that he had claimed that I agreed to destroying the building. So I told Bo Aung Gyi--if you want to be leader and think you can lead I will get out; do I get out or do you get out? Decide, I told him. He said he would

get out. He went back to his room and tendered his resignation.

I will provide evidence to support my statements:

First evidence: Beginning with second line on page 24 of Bogyoke Aung Gyi's letter dated 9 May 1988 --the person called Bogyoke Aung Gyi who became the culprit heard Bo Hla Han tell Rector

Sayagyi U Kar who was temporarily staying at a bungalow near Inya Lake Hotel when he went along to Bogyoke's House with Bo Hla Han and dropped in at that house that permission had been obtained to destroy the union building and ventured to call Bo Kyaw Soe at the broadcasting station on the phone and asked that the matter be delayed while he took the matter up with 'Bogyoke'; but when he arrived at Bogyoke's house he did not tell Bogyoke anything; but he claims to have tried to stop the matter in a devious way--that is the first evidence from what he had written.

Second evidence: When I called those concerned and asked them to write down what they knew to be true, there was in what Colonel Hla Han submitted—I have his letter with me--in line four, page 5 of his letter "Bogyoke Aung Gyi also arrived at that time. When there was talk about the union, (he said)

Wait, I will go and submit it to 'Bogyoke-gyi' and ask for orders, and taking me along, started out. On the way we dropped by to call on Sayagyi U Kar who was at Colonel Tin Soe's house. He also talked about the number of students killed and injured."

"At that time, I also told the Sayagyi about the plan to destroy the union building. Afterwards, the two of us proceeded to Bogyokegyi's house. Bogyoke Aung Gyi reported the situation when we met Bogyoke. The union building matter was not in what he submitted. We got into the car to return."

"In the car, I reminded him 'Bogyoke, that matter has not been included.' Bogyoke Aung Gyi said 'Let it be' and I kept quiet. When we got back to the broadcasting station, I heard Bogyoke Aung Gyi say 'Okay' to Colonel Kyaw Soe"--those are the points.

So, these two points are, as I said earlier, what were told to others without my knowledge but as if I knew; as if I had asked them to, and others destroyed it as they had been told that I agreed. So, taking the

above-mentioned points into consideration, I conclude by asking the entire people to judge for themselves who the real culprit was in the destruction of the union building. (Applause)

## **DOCUMENT 15: Peace Eludes U Thant**

True Story written by former leader of Student Movements in Burma, Henry Soe Win<sup>1</sup>

U Thant gave ten year of his life working for peace and goodwill among men, but he himself become the subject of a bloodbath that sent shock waves across the Burmese capital of Rangoon.

What made this sad irony of history even sadder was that the famous mediator could barely utter a word as his body lay inert and helpless while blood flowed freely and violence raged unchecked around him----in his own motherland to which he had finally returned to rest in peace.

U THANT had served as Burma's representative in the United Nations for three years before being unanimously elected to the post of the world' highest body. This calm, serene-looking statesman, the first Asian to be entrusted with “ the most impossible job in the world ”, as his predecessor Trygvie Lie puts it, had dedicated hid life to ward off the scourge of war and hunger and to promote peace and goodwill among mankind.

For his dedication, he had won accolades from fellow Asians and Westerners alike. Upon his death on November 25, 1974 at the age of 65, a Thai Foreign Ministry Spokesman had said : “ Thailand is very proud of U THANT for his contribution to world peace. The Thai Government recognises and praises his dedication.....” President Gerald Ford of U.S.A. had called him : “ Above all....., man of peace ”.

Unprecedented honours were bestowed upon U THANT when he become the first person to lie in state at the UN Headquarters, his body being on view for 24 hours. The UN flag was flown at half-mast and an emergency meeting was postponed for 24 hours in honour of U THANT.

The Burmese people were extremely proud of U THANT and when his remains were flown in from New York on December I, 1974, a huge throng packed Rangoon's Mingaladon Airport to receive the casket. There were U THANT's relatives, foreign diplomats, students, monks, and laymen. However, the people who were most conspicuous by their absence were the high-ranking members of the regime which rules U THANT's motherland.

Murmurs of indignation and shock rippled through the crowd over the apparent discourtesy. There were soon to find further evidence that the regime does not intend to give more than a perfunctory treatment to the remains of this illustrious son of Burma, and that the much-expected state funeral would never materialise.

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<sup>1</sup> Burma Digest. <http://burmadigest.wordpress.com/2006/01/25/peace-eludes-u-thant/>

In stark contrast to the unprecedented honours received at the UN.U THANT's body lay under a hastily built pavilion in the middle of a dust-blown, sun-scorched suburban field which was formerly the Rangoon Turf Club. It is now called the Kyaikkasan Grounds and is used as an assembly site for government-engineered rallies.

With a "guard of honour", consisting of a handful of callous Red Cross youths, U THANT's remains had lain for four days at the Kyaikkasan Grounds during which some thousands of people, including diplomats, had flocked to this distant field to pay their respects. December 5th, was marked for U THANT's funeral and internment at the Kyandaw cemetery, about four miles to the west.

By that day, students from Rangoon's colleges, universities and institutes had formed funeral committees and approached bus associations for hire of buses to accompany the funeral cortege. They were, however, courteously informed by the bus operators that the regime had expressly forbidden them to hire any buses in connection with U THANT's funeral.

Undeterred by this, the students then decided to rally at the Rangoon Arts & Science University (RASU) for a long trek to the Kyaikkasan Grounds. Students from various colleges, institutes and universities poured into the RASU campus amidst cheers and there were fresh bursts of cheers and elation when the Rangoon Institute of Technology students appeared on the scene with a few old Dodge Jeeps and loudspeakers.

This gathering has another significance for the students. It was the first time that the students had assembled in thousands since the Ne Win regime dynamited the Students' Union building on the campus on July 7, 1962, killing scores of students who were in the building. Many more were mowed down by machine guns when the march towards the Kyaikkasan Grounds. Through the loudspeakers, the students announced to the huge crowd of people who lined the route: "Dear respected elders, we, the students, are on our way to pay our tribute and accompany our beloved U THANT' the Architect of Peace, on his last journey."

The sympathetic crowd cheered the students and many were busy providing refreshments to the marching students.

Shortly past noon on December 5th, the students arrived at the Kyaikkasan Grounds and stood at attention on the dusty ground in the sweltering heat. The student representatives from each institution of learning, laid their wreaths and paid their respects to U THANT's remains. The students then stood at attention while Buddhist monks began chanting prayers and performing other funeral rites.

The burning heat and the dust-swept shelter-less atmosphere had, however, served only to intensify the gnawing dissatisfaction and resentment against the shabby and perfunctory treatment meted out to U THANT's remains by the "regime". "Why, why, they thought, "could the authorities not accord U THANT's state funeral?" Whispered consultation was taking place among the students' leaders and the public sensed there was tension in the air.

The staid and mournful atmosphere suddenly shattered when the students shouted: "A mausoleum for the Father of Peace, that's our goal." The students had decided to take matters into their own hands to give their beloved U THANT a funeral befitting a world's statesman and an illustrious son of Burma.

Using the loudspeakers, mounted on the Dodge Jeep, as their command post, the students requested everyone to leave the pavilion. The students then streamed into the pavilion and took their position around the casket. Through the loudspeaker, they announced to the public that they were going to take U THANT's casket to the Rangoon Arts & Science University campus and built a "peace" mausoleum for U THANT.

In order to request permission from U THANT's relatives, his elder brother U KHANT was invited to confer with the students' representatives. U KHANT, however, cautioned the students against taking any rash action and urged the students not to antagonize against the Government. Meanwhile there were clamours from the students and the public to escort the body to the University. U THANT's casket then passed from shoulder to shoulder and lain atop the roof of a Toyota pick-up truck draped with wreaths. The procession led by students and Buddhist monks then wound its way to the University grounds.

U THANT's casket was taken to the Convocation Hall of the university and placed on a dais where monks chanted prayers and students kept a vigil over the remains. The sprawling campus was filled with sea of humanity as people from all over the city came to pay their respects to U THANT. Outside the Convocation Hall, the students took turn atop a bonnet of a car to deliver "Hyde-park style" speeches against the regime.

"They call it democracy, but what they are actually doing benefits only a single party". "On behalf of the people who are now facing hunger and privations, we, the students, would like to ask the Government: Please care to look down from your heights. Do not ignore the people's suffering and waste your time in buying cars and building bungalows for yourselves."

A young college girl ended her speech with these words: "I am deeply moved and overwhelmed by this opportunity to exercise the democratic freedom of speech. Should I be imprisoned for opening

my heart to the injustices perpetrated by the regime, then so be it. I would then take consolation in the fact that I shall at least be assured of regular meals in the future.”

The huge crowd gave repeated and thunderous ovations as speaker after speaker stepped onto the makeshift podium, announced their names and the institutes of learning they belong to, and proceeded to roundly denounce the Government. The people had finally found a voice which echoed their feelings they had never dared to express. They listened with awe and fear to the winds to speak on behalf of the down-trodden and pathetic masses who had for thirteen long years suffered unwonted hardships, privations and oppression at the hands of a tyrannical regime. Old wounds, which had never healed during these miserable years, opened anew and held profusely as workers and people from all walks of life joined the students to express their sufferings.

Meanwhile, the students had formed an “ad hoc” funeral committee and announced to the public that they had sent a letter to the Government demanding a state funeral for U THANT and that if no reply was received by 4 p.m., the students, with the help of the people, would make their own funeral arrangements and build a “peace” mausoleum for U THANT. The speakers then resumed their “Hyde-Park” style speeches keeping one eye on the clock. This was on December 6, one day after U THANT’s remains were brought to the University.

When the deadline approached and the students found that the Government had turned a deaf ear to their demands, the students become more determined to go ahead with their plans.

Suddenly, the university campus bustled with a hive of activity. While speeches continued inside the Convocation Hall where U THANT’s body lay in state, scores of students were clearing the site of the dynamited old Students’ Union building where the mausoleum was to be built. Rangoon Institute of Technology students went to work drawing designs for the mausoleum and donations were being solicited from willing donors who, in many cases, took off their necklaces, rings, bangles and other valuable personal taken from the university library extension site, were being passed from hand to hand to the mausoleum site.

The extent of public sympathy was most touchingly demonstrated when an old lady, her face wrinkled with age and her body frail and bent, nevertheless insisted that she be allowed to carry a brick to the site as a token of merit. Public support did not end there either. Thousands of food parcels were donated by all and sundry, even from those who could hardly afford two square meals a day for themselves. There was one food parcel which contained all that the poor donor could afford: a bundle of cooked rice and a single banana. The students were deeply moved, but, nevertheless, ate the meal heartily.

At the mausoleum site, bleary-eyed architectural and engineering students worked day night to keep construction work rolling. At the Convocation Hall, a student suicide squad with red headbands kept vigil. There were also combined teams of students and people vigilantes at all strategic places across the campus. A few government spies were detected and were bashed up by the students.

In the meantime, more food parcels came pouring in to provide nourishment for the weary and exhausted students. Some of the parcels bore leaflets stating: “Young brothers, we believe and appreciate that what you are doing is just and right. Do keep up the good work right to the end.” In the satellite city of Okkalapa, about 6 miles from downtown, the people put a police station, which had been repeatedly harassing a citizen committee collecting food parcels from sympathetic residents from the area,

On December 7th, U THANT’s relatives invited representatives from students and monks for a meeting. There were seven student’s representatives, two monks, U THANT’s younger brother U THAUNG, and U THANT’s son-in-law, Dr. TIN MYINT OO. During the meeting, U THANT’s brother produced a letter from the Government agreeing to provide an alternative site for U THANT’ mausoleum. The site was to be at the Cantonment Garden, near the famed Shwe Dagon Pagoda. He also said that the Government had agreed not to take any reprisals against the students. However there was no mention of the demand made by the students for a state funeral for U THANT. U THAUNG also urged that funeral rites should begin next day at noon. U THANT’s son-in-law said that he had already drawn plans for a mausoleum and asked for co-operation from students.



The participants then agreed to decide by a majority decision on two alternative courses of action:-

- I. Whether to intern U THANT's remains at the Cantonment Garden after a temporary lying-in-state at the Peace Mausoleum,
2. Whether to go ahead with the internment at the peace Mausoleum which was nearing completion.

From the meeting, it transpired that; out of eleven participants, seven of them, including U THANT's relatives, two monks' representatives and three student's representatives had agreed to the first point. Therefore the majority decision prevailed, and the Government announced that U THANT's remains would be interned at the Cantonment Garden.

The four dissenting students felt that the wish of the majority of students and people were for the second proposal and, jading from later events, they apparently felt the pulse of the people and students correctly.

At 12 noon on December 8, tens of thousands of people converged on the university campus and thousands more lined the route leading to the Cantonment Garden. However there were other developments taking place on the campus.

As agreed, U THANT's casket was taken from the Convocation Hall to the Peace Mausoleum where U THANT's relatives and the general public paid their last tribute. After this an

announcement was made over a loudspeaker that the casket would be escorted to the Cantonment Garden for burial. Immediately this was announced, a loud roar comes from the student body enjoining: “Please do not remove U THANT’s remains from the campus? Then, from the public side, came an equally response concurring with the wishes of the students.

As a result, U THANT’s remains were interned at the Peace Mausoleum and a large UN flag was draped over it. At this a deafening cheer erupted from everyone present and the cry: “Victory, Victory “echoed across the campus.

That night, the state-owned Burma Broadcasting Service denounced the students for reneging on their agreement and declared that the students had gone against the wishes of U THANT’s relatives. Further, it charged that the students had illegally used the government’s construction materials and that the People’s Construction Corporation had lodged a complaint with the police and asked the government to take action against the students. Furthermore, the radio said, the university authorities had also lodged a complaint against the unauthorized use of the University site to build the mausoleum. Thus, the legal groundwork was laid for government action in the language of an authoritarian regime; this means nothing less than the use of battle-hardened soldiers, machine guns, armoured cars and bayonets.

After the radio announcement, the students tightened their vigilance Student suicide squads keep vigil near the mausoleum. They were joined by Buddhist monks, male and female university students and member of the public who where ready to sacrifice their lives and waited for the Doomsday. But it never came.....at least for the next two days. Thus, the weariness and exhaustion during the past four hectic days made them relax their vigilance and produced an illusion that things were going will in their favour. But unknown to them, Ne Win’s forces were surreptitiously and systematically at work for a bloody reprisal.

There was a two-day lull and during this time state-owned news papers and the radio kept up a constant barrage of denunciations against the students. More ominously, the military and its intelligence arms, the Military Intelligence Service, quietly and systematically cordoned off the area around the campus but out of sight of the students. No one was allowed to enter<sup>4</sup> the area and everyone trying to leave the area was intercepted and questioned.

Doomsday arrived at 2 a.m. on December 11<sup>th</sup>. A huge road building machine ( some witnesses described it as an excavator ) smashed the university’s massive iron gate and battle-ready troops and police stormed onto the campus with bayonets bared and lobbing canisters of tear gas. With the monster machine serving as a juggernaut, a detachment of troops made their way to the mausoleum

while the rest the army personnel used force to round up each and every found on the campus.

The scene at the mausoleum was even more violent and tragic. The soldiers bayoneted everyone who stood in the way trying to prevent the giant machine from smashing the mausoleum to exhume U THANT's remains. Some brave hearts, including girl students, clung to the tomb as the flowed freely around the tomb of this gentle, soft-spoken man who had abhorred violence and who had devoted so much of his life to the prevention and cessation of violence.

Fleets of army trucks were brought in and the dead and wounded students, monks and laymen alike were flung callously onto the trucks and carted away. Those not injured, were herded onto the coverless trucks and made to squat on their stood at each corner of the truck, their machine guns pointing at the hapless prisoners in a scene reminiscent of war movies. The scene lasted until eight o'clock in the morning when the last of the detainees were taken away to the Insein Jail, six miles from the scene of carnage.

The same day, as word spread around Rangoon of the massacre and the desecration of the mausoleum, emotions ran wild among the populace spawning violence and destruction in its wake. The people, who had lived in an atmosphere of frustration and subdued anger, gave vent to their feelings and violence spread across the length and breadth of Rangoon. Their first targets were, naturally, the Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) unit offices, which were the symbols of the much-hated regime. Next to this came other state-owned buildings, such as cinemas, police stations, a confectionery, and other state-owned buildings. All were smashed up or put to the torch.

As expected, retaliation came swift and sure, and with predictable savagery. The sound of G-3 machine gun fire echoed across the city as thousands of soldiers, mostly from minority indigenous races, were unleashed on the defenseless public.

Rangoon was transformed into a war zone as tanks and armoured personnel carriers rumbled through the streets and scores of people were mowed down by the machine guns. The dead were carted off in army trucks and thousands of people were rounded up. Martial law was declared and dusk-to-dawn curfew clamped on the city. Summary trials were held and many were sentenced from 3 to 5 years on charges of destruction of public property.

But it did not end right there. The government must have its revenge. The much-dreaded and hated Military Intelligence Service (MIS) swooped on the homes of suspected students and people. Even young high school students were not spared. Many fled their homes and families to go into hiding. Some had joined the anti-government forces in the jungles and some had sought refuge in the neighbouring countries even at the risk of being arrested as illegal immigrants and thrown back into

the lion's jaws. For these youths, all the years they had devoted to their studies, and all the money their parents had spent on their education had come to nought.

If the future seems bleak and uncertain for these young men and women, what of those who are languishing in jails? How long could their comrades stand by with folded arms and remain silent, especially when the people look forward to them as the last resort to help save the country from rack and ruin? That is why there will always be recurring protests, and bloodsheds as long as there is misery, poverty, injustice and oppression. This, indeed, is what is happening at the moment. As recently as June 5, 1975 thousands of students, workers and monks took to the streets again, demanding that their comrades and other people be released from incarceration, and that the government do something to alleviate the deteriorating living conditions of the people.

Knowing very well that violent means would again be employed to suppress them, they sought safety in the hallowed sanctuary of Burma's harm's way. Tanks, armoured personnel carriers and soldiers were again brought out and the protest was brought to a swift and bloody end. More arrests followed.

Before concluding this article, I should like to make one point clear to the readers in order to dispel any misunderstanding regarding the motives behind the U THANT incident.

The first point is that it was not due to any political machinations. It was wholly motivated by a sense of patriotism that honour should be accorded to those to whom honour is due. If a government under a parliamentary democracy had treated U THANT' remains likewise, the students had taken such a serious turn was entirely due to the regime's attitude to defy the popular will of the people.

Another factor, is that the mismanagement of the country for more than a decade, has reduced the country's economy to shambles and millions of people are suffering from countless hardships and miseries which they were never accustomed to. There is a perennial shortage of even basic necessities of life, like rice, meat, sugar, clothing, etc.

Whatever is available is being sold by black-marketeers at exorbitant prices. Unemployment is rife and those who are fortunate enough to get a job earn a measly 12 baths a day. Old and weed-blackened buildings are a common sight and rubbish littered the street. Only a trickle of tourists visits Burma.

The third factor is the suspension of the democratic freedom of speech, assembly, criticism, etc. some would call it a suspension of human rights. No criticism, etc. Some would call it a suspension of human rights. No criticism against the regime's ideology, economic policy or other important matters is tolerated. All media are under state ownership and even these are subject to censorship.

All forms of dissent, violent or peaceful, are mercilessly crushed by the power of the gun.

Given these conditions, one may ask how long can the regime suppress the recurring popular discontent, and how many citizens must die and thousands more languish in jails before Rangoon really becomes the City of the “end of strife “, which is what Rangoon (or Yangon) means in Burmese.

Indeed, one may well wonder<sup>4</sup>, when will Burma with all its rice, teak, gold, diamonds and other precious stones and minerals, and more importantly, oil: the black gold which has recently been found in abundant quantities on and off Burma’s coast; the magnificent sceneries and historical sites; when will these ever be rationally utilized and exploited to bring back the lost prosperity to the country and smiles on the faces of the happy, and-go-lucky people of Burma?

Henry Soe Win

## **DOCUMENT 16: Tin Maung Oo, A Rose In December 74**

By Maung Maung Taik<sup>1</sup>

It was in our adulthood. We young people appreciatively had long hair, bell-bottom pants and long-sleeved shirts for a couple of years. At the same time, we were introduced to dynamic music songs on the radio. And not only songs, but also self-defense sports such as judo and karate attracted the youth. We had some challenges among ourselves, and then fighting followed. It became a tradition in that period. Basically, it was rude behavior. However, with those actions, they vented their anger at the so-called Socialist regime that had undressed from their military uniforms and cracked down on the people.

During that time, we university students were put in prison. One of my prison mates, a lawyer called Kyaw Linn, named that period "the long-haired revolution" because over 2000 of the students who participated in the U Thant demonstration had long hair. Actually, we not only had style, which changes over time, but also activities for the country and people. To give some examples, we participated in June 1974 labor strike and student demonstrations.

I sometimes think about those activities and am reminded of someone. He is Ko Tin Maung Oo, a Chin ethnic student who was the first political prisoner to face the death sentence after the Socialist military junta took power in 1962.

I can still hear his speech. "Look back at the year 1962. Students were brave enough to participate in political activities---". Under the hot afternoon sun, holding a microphone in one hand and standing on a car, he talked to students. It was during the U Thant demonstration. The junta had been jealous of U Thant, a Burmese diplomat who became Secretary General of the United Nations (from 1961 to 1971). The junta was running the country into isolation and economic ruin; U Thant was receiving international respect for his handling of various crises during the Cold War era. After he died in New York, his body was flown back to Rangoon, but the junta ordered that no state official should meet the body and he would be simply buried like any other ordinary person. His body was disrespectfully laid out at an old racetrack. The people and we students became angry with the junta and gathered there. The sun was on our heads. We were thinking about what to do next, when we heard someone shout. "Now, we students are going to manage the funeral!" It was Ko Tin Maung Oo. The crowd applauded his announcement and four or five Red Cross members who were near

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.aappb.org/article11.html>.

the corpse left. Students took responsibility for holding a dignified funeral.

Thus, on December 10, 1974, we were put in prison for opposition to the government. Over 5000 people were arrested and about 520 were sentenced to four to ten years imprisonment.

Ko Tin Maung Oo was not included in the arrests. However, in prison, there were plenty of rumours about him: He was shot dead, he had betrayed the student activities, he had joined an ethnic armed group etc. Within two years, while prison conditions deteriorated, he was arrested and sent to the prison with other student leaders.

Strikes began after the junta made a new constitution announcing that there were no political prisoners. It meant that we were not political prisoners anymore and we had to behave like criminal prisoners. The labor unionists and student activists including high school students inside the prison rejected the authorities' idea and refused their unjust orders. We decided that our next step would be a hunger strike. Consequently, the prison authorities cracked down on us brutally. We were beaten and pulled out to the cells on death row. Some of us passed out. 5 to 8 of us were put in the 8' x 12' cells. We secretly planned to continue the hunger strike until we died. We were all very young, aged between 15 and 25 years old.

The experience was totally terrible. The weather was hot and we weren't allowed change of dress. For the toilet, there were only two bowls at the corner of the cell. Those two bowls were full and overflowed with urine. The cells were very small so we had to stand up.

Eight people were given the death sentence. Ko Tin Maung Oo was one. They were fed good rice with thick pea curry in the morning and meat curry in the evening. They shared their quota with the prison staffs and sometimes with us. However, we did not want to take those special meals from the people who were waiting to be killed.

One day, one of the cell-mates who went outside to clean the toilet bowl came back with a letter from Tin Maung Oo. He used to talk with his close friends while pretending he was exercising. He was handsome as he had a tight muscular body and healthy skin. While exercising in short pants, he was like a beauty king.

While we started to read the letter about the hunger strike in Hall 3, a prison officer came in and seized it. We shouted at him as he beat our friend who had brought the letter. The staff also shouted at us from the corridor. Tin Maung Oo arrived near us then. "Give the letter to me!" he ordered the staff, who handed it to him. After reading the letter, he chewed and swallowed it. And then, he challenged the staff in a karate position, "What are you going to do to me? Do you dare to kill me?" "We saw it clearly as it happened right in front of our cell. The arrogant staff dared not say anything

and ran away.

Tin Maung Oo said, "There is a hunger strike in Hall 3. You guys need to participate. I don't know whether I'll be executed or moved to another place." Then he ran away, the muscles on his back covered in sweat. It made him like a stone statue. It was the last time we saw him.

Two weeks later at 4 a.m. in the morning, we heard someone shout. It was him. "Go ahead my comrades. I want to say goodbye" The words were incoherent because the prison staff were crying out loudly. They did not want the rest of us to hear Tin Maung Oo. But I heard him and grit my teeth while I held the iron bar. My heart was not strong anymore and I cried although I tried to control myself.

Later, I gently approached the two criminals who sent breakfast. They said, "Tin Maung Oo said goodbye to you all. However, the staff yelled aloud and you were not able to hear him."

Tin Maung Oo who had said goodbye to us was not moved to another hall or prison for a moment. He was sent to the place where we could not reunite again. The authorities hanged him, destroying a future prominent leader who opposed the junta. However, his portrait is still alive in the hearts of current student activists as he bravely gave his life for his beliefs. The hero of the December 1974 student movement will be alive within the history of the country as there is a saying, "Martyrs never die".

#### 4. 1988 until 2007

### **DOCUMENT 17: Excerpts from Aung San Suu Kyi's Speech at Shwedagon-Pagoda, 26.8.1988<sup>1</sup>**

Reverend monks and people! This public rally is aimed at informing the whole world of the will of the people. Therefore at this mass rally the people should be disciplined and united to demonstrate the very fact that they are a people who can be disciplined and united. Our purpose is to show that the entire people entertain the keenest desire for a multi-party democratic system of government.

It is the students who have paved the way to the present situation where it is possible to hold such a rally. The occasion has been made possible because the recent demonstrations have been spearheaded by the students and even more because they have shown their willingness to sacrifice their lives. I therefore request you all to observe a minute's silence in order to show our deepest respect for those students who have lost their lives and, even more, in order to share the merit of their deeds among all of us. So while doing this please keep perfect silence for the duration of one minute. -

I believe that all the people who have assembled here have without exception come with the unshakeable desire to strive for and win a multi-party democratic system. In order to arrive at this objective, all the people should march united in a disciplined manner towards the goal of democracy. [.]

Another thing which some people have been saying is that I know nothing of Burmese politics. The trouble is that I know too much. My family knows best how complicated and tricky Burmese politics can be and how much my father had to suffer -on this account. He expended much mental and physical effort in the cause of Burma's politics without personal gain. That is why my father said that once Burma's independence was gained he would not want to take part in the kind of power politics that would follow.

Since my father had no such desire I too have always wanted to place myself at a distance from this kind of politics. Because of that I have kept away from politics. Some might then ask why, if I wished to stay out of politics, should I now be involved in this movement. The answer is that the

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<sup>1</sup> „Speech to a Mass Rally at the Shwedagon Pagoda“, in Aung San Suu Kyi (1991) *Freedom from Fear and Other Writing*. Foreword by Vaclav Havel. Edited with an introduction by Michael Aris. London [u.a.], Penguin Books: pp. 198-204.

present crisis is the concern of the entire nation. I could not as my father's daughter remain indifferent to all that was going on. This national crisis could in fact be called the second struggle for national independence. [...]

I have a few things to say about the students who have been at the forefront of this nationwide movement. The students are most able. They have already demonstrated their physical courage. I believe that they will now go on to demonstrate their moral and mental ability. May I appeal to the students to continue to march forward with the same kind of unity and resolve? At this moment there are a number of student groups. I would like their groups to come together as a unified body. I understand that they are soon going to call a conference for this purpose. Should this occasion arise may I pray that it will result in an entire cohesion and unity of the students.

Some students have asked me which politicians are standing behind me. They are apprehensive that such politicians might manipulate me and then take over the students. I am happy that the students have been so open and honest with me. Young people are frank and free from deviousness. I answered them truthfully. There are no politicians behind me. What I am trying to do is to help achieve the democratic system of government which the people want. For the achievement of this system, there are some veteran politicians who wish to help me in various ways I have told such politicians that if their object is to obtain positions of political power for themselves, I would not support them in any way. Should these politicians try to obtain positions of political power I promise in front of this assembly of people that I myself will not hesitate to denounce them. [...]

**DOCUMENT 18: Excerpts from Megan Clymer „Min Ko Naing, Conqueror of Kings’: Burma’s Student Prisoner.“<sup>1</sup>**

**A Student Union**

Aung San Suu Kyi initially played no role in the democracy movement. She had first returned to Burma to care for her ailing mother. However, after witnessing the 8-8-88 uprisings, and with her father’s memory in mind, she was unable to remain uninvolved. Initially, she put out a statement calling for an independent committee to oversee multi-party elections. Encouraged by others, on August 26 she addressed more than half a million people in front of the Shwedagon Pagoda, characterizing the national crisis as “the second struggle for independence.“ [...]

At her speech, Min Ko Naing invited leaders of the various student groups, including Minzayya of the All Myanmar Federation of Student Unions (AMFSU) and Maung Maung Kyaw from the Burma Youth Liberation Front (BYLF), to a meeting the following day to plan the first student congress in twenty six years. Aung Saw Oo, a student from the 1970s generation, says he was excited when he heard about it. His generation of students “were always trying to [revive] the ABFSU, but then it was not like it was in 1988. The people were not ready in the 1970s, the political situation was not mature then.“ While many student groups existed in Burma, and were represented at the meeting, the ABFSU was considered the most dominant because it was well-known and intended to “unite all the students within Burma under one banner (Aye Kyaw 1993: 63).“ The organization was originally pyramidal in structure, with students organized at the township, district, and national levels. At the meeting, the students decided Min Ko Naing should be the temporary chairman of the ABFSU until student elections could be held. He was chosen because of his charisma, “because he is very helpful and flexible, polite and not aggressive, and is respected by all the people,“ says Aung Saw Oo. He was also chosen “because of his name,“ says Aung Din, “he is really famous among the people, and most people were familiar with Min Ko Naing.“

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<sup>1</sup> Megan Clymer (2003) „Min Ko Naing, ‚Conqueror of Kings’: Burma’s Student Prisoner.“ In: *Journal of Burma Studies* 8: pp. 33-63.



**Paw Oo Tun in 1989**

On the following day, August 28, 1988, the ABFSU hosted the ABFSU on the RASU Campus. Thousands of people attended. As Chairman Min Ko Naing gave the opening address, which according to Thu Rein, “everyone liked;” he received “the loudest applause from the audience” Min Ko Naing described a metaphorical wall built by the BSPP in the 1962 coup. “In the beginning the wall was too thick - we could not destroy it,” he said. “But, from 1962 to 1988 our older brothers and sisters have been trying to destroy this wall. More and more cracks have appeared in the wall Since that day in 1962. Now the wall is weak enough, If we unite, and push down the wall, it will totally crumble and fall down.”

Min Ko Naing closed with his poem entitled “Faith,” “He spoke excitedly” remembers Thu Rein. As he read each line of the poem, the crowd repeated after him:

### **Faith**

In memory of our comrades,  
Who have sacrificed their lives for our national cause,  
I make this pledge of faith.

In this unfinished revolution,  
Should my blood be not red enough,  
Splash your blood over me  
As a potion to make me brave.

In this unfinished revolution,  
Should my soul be gripped with fear,  
Be hesitant and lack courage,  
Let your souls enter into mine

And steer me along.

In this unfinished revolution,  
Should I  
Become traitor to our proud people  
And act inconsiderately and recklessly  
With your firm  
Peacock hands  
Crush and punish me.

In this unfinished revolution,  
Should I have to sacrifice my life half-way  
It is no sorrow to leave this world.  
As a duty fulfilled, I will believe  
My soul enhanced with joy,  
And holding up our peacock flag flapping in the wind  
I will come to where you are.  
Welcome me with open arms.

Min Ko Naing

“I still hear those words,” says Thu Rein. As they chanted his poem, Min Ko Naing made an oath to the memory of the students who had sacrificed their lives for democracy, and pledged to the people before him that he would never give up their fight until democracy and human rights were restored to the people. “The people loved that speech,” says Thu Rein, and it marked the time when “even the old politicians recognized him as a student leader.” The crowd left the meeting singing the union song and carrying the union flag. Supporters joined them outside, and the streets became full with the people of the city.

## **DOCUMENT 19: Two Interviews with Ko Ko Gyi**

### **Democratic Voice of Burma: Interview with Ko Ko Gyi after his release Thu Mar 17, 2005**

“We cannot build our country with anger and selfishness” - Kyo Kyo Gyi

Ko Ko Gyi: “In fact, hatred and selfishness are anger. Anger does control the person who keeps it and it spreads and burns the surrounding areas. We could not build our country with anger and selfishness. If we strongly believe that and bury hatred and selfishness, we should start to meet, discuss and cooperate for the sake of future of our country and people. That is the main thing. Even a student like me who had been detained for a long time has the desire that strong, why can't other people have that feeling also? I do hope and believe that it is possible for sure.

As for my political belief, I want a peaceful and smooth political transition. I have been trying to make that possible throughout my life. I still believe in this. Politics is an art. It is very subtle. You can't sort problems unilaterally by violent means. Only when all the parties concerned in politics work together with great compassion and patience, would the future of the country be peaceful and beautiful – that is what I believe.

Moe Aye: You had spent around 14 years in prison. Do you feel aggrieved by this? Are you angry for the losses?

Ko Ko Gyi: “When I was detained initially, I was feeling rather frustrated. After passing many months and years – some military intelligence agents said something when we were at interrogation centre. They said how much they loved the country with their lives and how much they sacrificed their lives and the like! I was able to have a chance to show how much I love my country and my people by sacrificing all my youth, my family and social life – that is how I regard myself.

Moe Aye: Student leader Min Ko Naing is now freed. Zaw Min, Htay Kywe and now you are freed. You all spent 13,14,15 years in prison. Have you ever thought at the beginning of your detention that you would be detained that long?

Ko Ko Gyi: “It is true that I never thought that I would be imprisoned that long. The reason is – there were times when we were very surprised by the authorities' actions. Our actions were meant to solve political problems of our country peacefully. They gave us 20 years for our activities in 1988.

Then, they read out the release warrant that at the gate of the prison that I was to be released after serving 10 years of my sentence with general amnesty. Then, they extended my sentence and continued to detain me with Act 10A. I was very surprised by that for sure. Whatever you say, these

things had happened. My personal feelings when compared to the situation of more than 50 million people, sacrifice and loss like mine are not very unusual. I believe that I have to pay for this with content. I am ready to continue to pay for this.

Moe Aye: If the new generation of Burmese students asked you what have you done to deserve life sentence – what would you say?

Ko Ko Gyi: “If I have to tell the new generation of students about this, they will feel that it is unbelievably like a mythical story. The reason is – if I have to talk about what we did in the circumstance at the time and the punishment we were given, I think the students will ask me with suspicion whether we are telling the truth.

**Interview with MIZZIMA (No Date)**

Topics: 8888 uprising and Ko Ko Gyi.

**Mizzima: Tell us of your involvement in the 8888 uprising?**

KKG: Basically on September 5, 1987, demonetization of currency notes affected the grassroots level and people were annoyed and grumbled and so did I. I felt that in our country nothing can be guaranteed because hard-earned money became rubbish despite one having saved it.

Again, a student Ko Phone Maw was shot in the Engineering University in downtown Rangoon which should not have happened. I have never seen him but we felt like we had lost a brother when we heard of a student shot in the university campus. The bad news spread to our Rangoon University from Rangoon Institute of Technology. Friends near and dear ones gathered and discussed the barbarous act. We all agreed that these culprits should be punished by the authorities. Furthermore, we felt there should be an organization to protect students' rights. Then, explicitly, after the incidents in March 14, 15 and 16, 1988 in the university and the Dadarni (Red bridge) riots led me to enter politics.

**Mizzima: Just before 8888 what did you do?**

After I passed Technical High School, I joined the Association of Government Technical Institute. I attended Rangoon University after I got a diploma in Electrical Engineering. It was in the first year in university which had introduced the subject International Relations and I was very interested in that. It made me study there. There was a journal called international news published by the Burma Socialist Program Party. I liked that journal very much and used to buy to read it. I was also interested in politics that was why I studied International relation in the university.

When I was studying International Relations I used to discuss the political system of our country with my close friends because the subject itself dealt directly with politics. Analyzing politics had been going on and at that time when I was sitting for my third year examinations when the event of discarding bank notes happened. In my final year Ko Phone Maw passed away. Because of those events I became devoted to politics.

**Mizzima: When there was the military coup, some students died, some were arrested, some went out to another country and some students fled into the jungles. At that time what did you experience?**

Ko Ko Gyi: All the universities were shut down on March 16, 1988. When universities reopened in June the interuniversity student movement started demanding release of detained students, to allow dropped out students to rejoin and to establish a students' union. I took part in this movement. After that all universities were shut down again and during that period we gathered chaotic student groups and organized the 8888 uprising. In the vicinity of Students' Union building, on the grass field, we established an All Burma Federation of Student Unions with Min Ko Naing as Chairperson, I was Vice Chairperson, and the general secretary was Moe Thee Zon. All Burma Federation of Student Unions was founded on August 18, 1988.

The military seized power in a coup on September 18, 1988. After the coup some students went to the borders. At that time Moe Thee Zon founded DPNS (Democratic Party for New Society) in order to unite students and he acted as chairperson because there was no possibility that the Students' Union could stand legally. We, Min Ko Naing and me were still in the Students' Union and worked on the union's issues. When we got organized to establish the Students' Union again Min Ko Naing acted as Chairperson, I was vice-chairperson (1), and Ko Aung Din who was acting director of the US Campaign for Burma, became vice-chairperson (2).

So as mentioned earlier students from DPNS and students from the Students' Union were the same. But because of its status after founding a party by them Students' Union had different activities. When we were organizing political activities and seminars Min Ko Naing was arrested in March along with me. After about two months in jail and I was set free.

After I was set free, I went into some activities in order to support democratic groups to win the 1990 elections. After the election we were still into some activities. Near the vicinity of the University we held a ceremony to honour Daw Aung San Suu Kyi for receiving the Noble Peace Prize. We called it 10 D activity that is December 10, 1991. Because of that I was sentenced to jail for 20 years.

**Mizzima: When you were arrested what was your morale like and belief?**

Ko Ko Gyi: Prison is a place where a person is in trouble mentally and physically. To face and overcome those troubles a person's morale primarily plays an important role. Being arrested we lost several things but on the other hand (for me who had been in a small cell in prison for 14 years) I got a lot of strength and energy to do politics steadfastly.

Now we should be proud of our work and respect that as invaluable work. It is very important because we do that sort of work without getting benefit from it. What we do is to bring change in our country, to change the political system for all the citizens get their benefits. So this belief is very important.

For a Buddhist another fundamental thing is Buddha's teaching. In Buddhism when you are getting into trouble you need to think about how to steadily face and pass those obstacles by looking at the current situation you are in. Some obstacles can be overcome and some cannot. For those we could not overcome one had to forget those.

In a conversation with a warder, a guy who was friendly on a personal level, he told me he would like to suggest to me not to do politics because we can survive easily because of our education background, family's business and social class. For a person to be sent to jail because of his or her political activities make him or her regret it. My response to his suggestion was I was sentenced to jail not because of my political activities.

He was a bit amazed. And said to me "Hahh!, you were sentenced to jail because of your political activities, wasn't it?" Not so, I said. When we do politics we never intend to harm anybody and to get in trouble but for those including authorities, who sent us to jail, and you too, to have a good living standard and are into a progressive living situation. What I have done was done by my good will but the effect has not yielded result yet. The reason I was sentenced to jail was not because of my political activities, is the one he never ever heard. He was astonished and did not know what to say for a while. And he said, "Yeah. I give you my respect and do what you believe". "Nevertheless you will get results for what you have done". He died in a stroke later.

While we were in jail for 14 years we were confined by them in an 8 feet by 10 feet room the whole day. However, we did not treat them as our enemies. After a long time they spent their time with us for the whole day and they went home just to sleep. And they became like our family members. We advised them as much as we can about their needs and difficulties. After staying with us for 14 years the prison staff became not only close friends but also they were very sad when we were set free. They were very sad as if one of their family members was going somewhere far away from

home. It is important for the morale, I think, having the will to treat no one as our enemy when we passed a difficult time in prison.

**Mizzima: What would you like to see in Burma?**

Ko Ko Gyi: We basically would like to see Myanmar as a developing country. By development I mean that comparatively our standard of health, education, economy and politics should be higher than those of the neighbouring countries and the other countries.

That is our desire coming from the bottom of our heart.

**Mizzima: In a democracy what are the things you like best?**

Ko Ko Gyi: Primarily the political system of a country is fundamental to a developed country. In politics there must be an open and free society. From that society every citizen can freely describe their desire to work for development of their country not because of force and fear but because of having the idea that if I do it I will get it; for the country and for me are the same. In such situation in a country the people have a chance to fulfil their desires. Hence, democracy is fundamental for a country to develop.

**Mizzima: What kind of government do you want?**

Ko Ko Gyi: I want a government where people feel there is no government. In a country when the administrative system is systematically being operated people do not know who is governing them because there is no control, no forced labour. When a governing system and laws are systematically operating in a country the role of the government is very subtle.

If people face situations like when one wakes up in the morning and goes out they have to bribe then that sort of government is the worst.

Mizzima: Could you please compare and tell us the difference between the situation in a developed country you want and the current situation in Burma?

Ko Ko Gyi: In a country I want people are governed by knowledge not by fear. Highly civilized nationals in a highly civilized country, is what I want. I don't like a situation in a society where one fears the other, one does not trust the other, one is selfish. Now we are in situation where we do not trust each other, one lies, steals or puts somebody into trouble if he gets the opportunity. I don't like that sort of country.

**Mizzima: If the military does not go back to the barracks and governs properly, what would you say to that?**

Ko Ko Gyi: It is not a normal condition when the military governs a country. This is a bizarre situation we are facing. Power must come directly from citizens. That is the foundation of

democracy. We are now in a period of transition and we accept that the military government and this situation should not be in place longer than needed. The government needs to deeply believe the fact that people are the owners of power. So to control civil society it must have a system run by laws not by a person or an organization. A situation should be created in which everyone can compete and defend their rights within the law.

**Mizzima: To have a country you envisage what are the obstacles?**

Ko Ko Gyi: There is fear. There is doubt. Imagine how bad the fear is that they think someone who has a different opinion is a threat so in turn they threaten people. In reality they themselves are afraid. What they are afraid of is that others do not fear them.

**Mizzima: What do you think about the role of the people who participated in the 8888 uprising?**

Ko Ko Gyi: Our Myanmar people are very weird. If they are patient one might think "Do they have knowledge? Are they still not responding?" If they create an uproar the international community is amazed. That is the particular characteristic of our national people. When in an uproar not only do they go out on the street but also if there is a lot of unfairness they are still inactive but in their mind grievances stay. "In your turn you can do what you want but in my turn let's see". That is there. That is invisible. They showed the latter one during elections when the parliament democracy era called "human- Te Mye, vote-Thant Shin". In the election the military was from Te Mye's side and they used force, threatening and stealing to get vote. But people vastly voted Thant Shin. The concept is not whether they suppose Thant Shin or not but they showed that they opposed unfairness as a signal.

Also during the 1990 election people voted heavily for the NLD not because of they supported the NLD but because they opposed NCP derived from MSP (a party backed by army, people believed). That is Myanmar people's traditional behaviour. That is history.

So demonstration on the street does not really mean there is an uproar. I believe if there is free, really fair and square election people will show their grievances and demonstration of their desires. Our people will continue to maintain their tradition.

**Mizzima: Since 88 you experienced historic events tell us one of those you still remember?**

Ko Ko Gyi: That was during the 1990 election. What I would like to tell is that: I was young when the 1974 constitution voting happened and they wanted all citizens to vote. They wanted to get supportive votes. So newspaper propaganda articles were written and from radio actors and actress were asked by force to sing propaganda songs so that people voted. Even sick people lying in bed

were encouraged to vote helped by someone.

During the 1990 election, the unforgettable event I saw was that old, weak and shaky women without any help got up before down and went to the voting station and queued up to vote. Voting stations had not opened then. They showed their enthusiasm because they could not go out to the streets to demonstrate because of their poor health. Some passed away in bed after they voted. The scenes I saw are etched in my memory through my years in politics.

**DOCUMENT 20: Min Ko Naing on Burma's Human Right Day (Monday  
13.3.2006)<sup>1</sup>**

“We understood from the beginning that a very valuable thing could not be obtained easily. Therefore, we had already sacrificed what we had to sacrifice. We are all still ready for our country if more is necessary. Compared to the past, we are closer to the goal our country wants to reach.”

“If I have to talk about 13 March, 1988 - we were students who became human beings in the dark age of 26 years. As we had to go through the dark age since we were born, the situation was so bad that we didn't know how much rights we had. Only when Ko Phone Maw fell, did we realise that we would have to create, demand and fight for students' rights. For this, we realised pragmatically that we have to sacrifice our lives. 18 years later, however much suppressed, the blood of those students who became human beings after that dark age ending 1988 – is still very red. It is the blood of courage of students in whichever age or era they are in. When they realise why their older brothers, the students who preceded them sacrificed their livelihoods and lives, they will know what to do. We have nothing in particular to tell them. However much you try to cover up the truth, it will inevitably re-emerge when it is the right time.”

“We still haven't reached our goal. It is very important that we keep the spirit of a long distant runner as we need to keep on maintaining the long-term morale. We understood from the beginning that a very valuable thing could not be obtained easily. Therefore, we had already sacrificed what we had to sacrifice. We are all still ready for our country if more is necessary. Compared to the past, we are closer to the goal our country wants to reach. When it comes to the pragmatic situation, we have the 1990 election to show as palpable evidence. There is also an organisation which was voted by 82% of the population to represent them. And, there is an offer to 'wash the slate clean' (forgive and forget) for our sacrifices. The international (community) also understands that the offer is based on a feasible basis and it is the gentlest possible offer. We need to react to it wisely. We all need to drive on by concentrating on this offer. While there is a good chance, if the other side (the military junta) reacts to the offer and cooperates, our country will become a dignified one. We are at a crucial time for the whole of our national dignity. We, the students will always be with (on the side

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<sup>1</sup><http://www.burmanet.org/news/2006/03/13/democratic-voice-of-burma-student-leader-min-ko-naing-on-burma%e2%80%99s-human-rights-day/>

of) the people. We will be working with all our might – I want to say thus on behalf of all, at the anniversary for the record.”

## DOCUMENT 21:

### Burmese Government Confirms Activists' Arrest

VOA News - Washington - 03 October 2006



**88 Student Generation: Htay Kywe (left), Min Ko Naing (center), and Ko Ko Gye (right) (Photo Courtesy: Democratic Voice of Burma)**

Burma's military government has confirmed the detention of five pro-democracy activists, saying they were taken into custody to prevent unrest in the nation.

Authorities in Rangoon rounded up the activists prior to a ceremony last week marking the 18th anniversary of the founding of the National League for Democracy.

A statement appearing in a state-run newspaper Tuesday says the five former student leaders were held as a precaution against what the government calls internal commotion, instability and terrorism.

The five, Min Ko Naing, Ko Ko Gyi, Htay Kywe, Min Zeya and Pyone Cho, all had key roles in a pro-democracy uprising that Burma's military government crushed in 1988, and each also has served at least 10 years in prison.

Burma's military government links its concerns about potential unrest to a US-led move to put the question of Burma on the agenda of the U.N. Security Council.

This would trigger further U.N. scrutiny of Burma.

The National League for Democracy won Burma's national elections by a landslide in 1990, but the military prevented the N.L.D. from taking power.

Party leader Aung San Suu Kyi has been in detention for 10 of the 16 years since then.

## DOCUMENT 22: Interview with Min Ko Naing 2007<sup>1</sup>

### Empowering Peaceful Dissent

By Min Ko Naing

April 30, 2007

Former student leader Min Ko Naing and his 88 Generation Students group have created a movement which gives ordinary Burmese a political voice. The celebrated social and political activist, who spent 15 years in prison for his leadership during the nationwide pro-democracy uprising in 1988, now heads a peaceful activist organization. The Irrawaddy speaks to Min Ko Naing about his group and its role in promoting democratic reform in the military-led country

**Question:** *The 88 Generation Students' "Open Heart Campaign" has inspired ordinary Burmese to express their views about the country openly. What is the current status of the campaign and what has it accomplished?*

**Answer:** The aim of the campaign is to encourage the people to exercise freedom of expression, which is their basic right. We have seen the people become increasingly aware after launching the campaign. Some citizens wrote their opinions on paper and hung them on the fence of their homes. We have received a huge amount of letters from across the country and can draw the whole picture of the Burmese people's desires. We have categorized the letters according to social, health and economic issues, and we are preparing a research report. After that, we will announce the result to the world.

**Q:** *You and other leaders of your group were arrested last year on the charge that your efforts might lead to civil unrest. Do you feel that the current climate in Burma could become violent?*

**A:** I think that depends on both the regime and the democratic forces. First, we all have to avoid acting out of emotion. When we publicly express our opinions and attitudes, we always take care to avoid violence. on the other side, there should be those who have the ability to listen to us. It is



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<sup>1</sup> Irrawaddy online edition: [http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art\\_id=7117](http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=7117) (13.12.2007)

crucial [for the regime] not to approach everything with doubt. If they translate the situation simply into an attempt to overthrow their power, it will end up in a great tragedy. What's more important is the people have to exercise that right to express their desires peacefully and with non-violent means. on the other hand, the authorities should approach them in a positive manner and choose the best way to improve the situation. If they view our activities as a threat to their power and respond violently, our future does not look good.

*Q: Do you think the road to national reconciliation remains open?*

*A:* Actually, the doors are on both sides—one on our side and another on the government's side. Our door remains open. While we are the oppressed who have been struggling against injustice in the country, we continue to open our door because we usually find the answer to a problem is based on the principle of national reconciliation. The issue is the status of the government's door. We will continue to knock so that we can give them the message that we need to work together in making a nation instead of annihilating each other.

*Q: The military government has taken a one-sided approach to national reconciliation—one that excludes [opposition leader] Aung San Suu Kyi and the National League for Democracy. Are you prepared to accept such an approach to reform?*

*A:* We never focus simply on the view of an individual or a party. But we can't accept a one-sided solution, which has forcibly distorted the results of the 1990 election. If we did, how could the people believe in any future election? An election can't guarantee anything. We have chosen non-violent means by which people of all walks of life can participate. A government alone cannot shape a country's future. The consent of all citizens is the most important prerequisite for governing.

*Q: How can the Burmese people participate in politics under the current military regime, and what role is your group playing to establish democracy?*

*A:* Our efforts, such as the signature campaign, white campaign and the open heart campaign, have given the people access to political actions. After we [the group leaders] were released from detention, we stood together and chose a path that the people could follow. They are so oppressed and weak that we have had to be patient in organizing them for political action. While we have chosen non-violent means, we have encountered various kinds of oppression from the authorities. It is difficult for us to work under these conditions.

Even though we are ready to serve the cause of democracy both physically and mentally, we have to consider the circumstances of many people in Burma and move forward only when they are

prepared to follow. Our future campaigns aim to be more effective and broader in scope and will use only methods that reflect the true desire of our people. We will systematically organize their participation, which will eventually lead to a turning point in our history.

**Q:** *How do you feel about regional countries that conduct business with Burma's regime rather than support the democratization of the country?*

**A:** An individual or a country usually acts on the basis of self-interest. But that doesn't mean that actions should lack ethical or moral motives. If their efforts are balanced, then they should be considered. But a state-to-state relationship is narrow. For the long-term interest of Burma, it should be, I believe, a citizen-to-citizen relationship. We welcome good relations built on ethics and morality. Even the world powers who voted against the resolution on Burma in the UN Security Council acknowledged our country has problems. So these countries should consider the interest of the Burmese people if they want to deal with the country openly and honestly. The state-to-state relationship is just temporary and historically weak.

## **DOCUMENT 23: Statement of the 2007 Generation Students' Union<sup>1</sup>**

Today our country, Burma, is facing failures in all aspects like economy, social affairs, education and even religion under the evil military dictatorship. All the citizens are suffering a lot daily from such general hardships as starvation, forced labour, poor health care, substandard educational system and loss of freedom and human rights because of oppression by a handful of bureaucratic military dictators. All democracy-loving Burmese people have the responsibility to break free from these dire troubles.

Like all Burmese people of all walks, we students highly yearn for values of liberty, democracy and human rights that every free people of the world are enjoying. In order to fulfil our hopes, we believe that we students too have as much responsibility as the Burmese people. History has given proof that we students have served in the forefront of all stages in Burma's struggles for liberation and democracy along with other classes, sacrificing blood, sweat and tears. Hence, the duty to work for democracy is the one relayed by history to be borne by us.

To accomplish this historical task to our utmost by risking our lives, we have established the "2007 Generation Students Union" consisting of students all over Burma. We "2007 Generation Students Union" would peacefully fight for fundamental rights and democracy for the entire student mass. Therefore the "2007 Generation Students Union" solemnly urge all students throughout Burma to work together with uniform spirit so that our student strata's stature would be glorious.

"We have responsibility for our history"

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<sup>1</sup> Issued January 24, 2008. Source: BurmaNet News 28. January 2008

## 5. BURMA'S STUDENT MOVEMENT: A CONCISE HISTORY

by Aung Saw Oo (Hmaing Centenary)

Third Edition, September 1993

[18 pp. Burmese, 26 pp. English, 21 pp. Photographs; only English below]

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### THE STUDENT MOVEMENT UNDER THE COLONIALISTS

After Burma had been completely conquered by the British, the remaining feudal lords and the citizens of Burma, each wanting to be a ruler of the country, revolted against the colonialists. However, they were still governed by feudalistic ideas.

It was only at the start of the nineteenth century that some semblance of mass resistance against the colonialists and the modern struggle for independence materialized. During the colonial era, there was the Rangoon University Students' Boycott in 1920, the 1935-36 Rangoon University Students' Second Boycott, and in 1938 a strike participated in by workers, farmers, students, monks and the public.

The First Rangoon University Students' Boycott in 1920 aimed for nationwide resistance of the Colonial Policy and Complete National Independence.

The G.C.B.A. Movement, the 1931 Saya San Movement or the Farmers' Revolution and the 1938 B.O.C. Strike or 1300 Revolution and the students' movements were all of the same mould.

During that period of colonial resistance and the struggle for National Independence, the University Students' Union came into being. The Union was formed with the following aims:

- (1) to be able to live in a society where one can work for better living standards of the society,
- (2) to be able to live a life in which one can depend upon oneself and work independently,

(3) to make people realize their responsibilities and duties. The Union stood for independence of thought and the ability to talk freely of thoughts and ideas.

In 1926, a wealthy doctor named U Nyo donated 170,000 Kyats in silver coins to establish the Union.

On September 12th, 1930, the boarders and the day scholars of Rangoon University came to an agreement and three students named Ko Kyaw Khin, Ko Tint Swe and Ko Ba Gyan met a judge named U Ba and obtained permission to form a committee to draw up the rules and regulations for the Union.

On 20 September, students held a mass meeting and decided to form the University Students' Union. Then during the October holidays the rules and regulations for the Union were drawn up. They were finished in the first week of November and on 24 November, they were signed and shown to the student body for comment.

In January, 1931, a mass student meeting decided unanimously to form the Union with nine executive members. The executive members had the right to negotiate and discuss with the University authorities about the matter of building a Union building as well as the rules and regulations of the Union on behalf of the Union. In this way on 31st January, 1931, the Rangoon University Students' Union was formed. The first chairman of the Rangoon University Students' Union was Ko Kyaw Khin and the last chairman was Ko Ba Swe Lay. Ko Ba Swe Lay died courageously in the forest after the military coup d' etat in 1962 while fighting against the military junta . Therefore, the Rangoon University Students' Union lasted from 1931 till 1966 through all sorts of conditions: the colonial era, the Fascist Japanese Regime, the Independent Era and the military regime. For thirty five years it served for the benefit of the public and the students.

During the period of 1935-36, the All Burma Students' Union (ABSU) was formed [The first chairman of the All Burma Students' Union (ABSU) was U Raschid (M.A.) and the first general secretary was Ko Aung San. The last chairman was Ko Khin Maung Ohn and the last general secretary was Ko Tin Tun (Phyapon). In 1962, a group of people, including Ne Win, staged a coup d' etat so the next day he (Ko Khin Maung Ohn) declared that they

supported the coup d' etat. Therefore, the All Burma Students' Union (ABSU) (HQ) called an executive members meeting and Ko Khin Maung Ohn was expelled from the organization and the vice-chairman Ko Thet was made the chairman]. In 1936 the 2nd Students' Strike took place.

In 1938 (1300 in the Burmese Era), on 25th April, the Third National Students' Union Annual Meeting was held in Bassein. In that meeting the representatives of the students put up an important proposal: The Rangoon University Bill had not yet been considered by the government and if by the coming August nothing had been done about the students' proposals then they would see that they got what they wanted. The proposal was put up by Ko Kyaw Myint (B.A.) and supported by Ko Tun Tin. At that time the acting M.C., who was the general secretary Ko Aung San, said that every time they went on strike, even if they did not succeed fully, their proposals were mostly granted. "In the 1936 strike, even though at first we were successful our strength was becoming weaker so in order to recuperate without losing face we backed down. Now our strength is fortified and in the coming year when I become the chairman either the name Aung San will fall or our work will be successful," said Ko Aung San (General Aung San).

Again in statement No.10, Ko Ba Hein and Ko Toe Yin of Mandalay University Students' Union put up the proposal that students should be involved politics. That proposal was objected to by Ko Mya Shein from Myaung Mya. M.C. Ko Aung San said anyone agreeing to the proposal should say "Aye" and anyone objecting should say "No". Only two people objected to the proposal. Then the majority of the students shouted them down, so M.C. Ko Aung San apologized and the proposal was agreed upon.

After that students' meeting, Ko Aung San, the general secretary of the Students' Union left the Students' Union and became a member of the Doh Bamar Asiayone (We Burmese Association). He had entered the political arena, as the Burmese saying goes, with both feet. The duties of Ko Aung San were taken over by Ko Ba Hein. He joined hands with monks, workers, farmers and the public for the BOC Strike or the oilfield strike. While Ko Ba Hein was imprisoned in Magwe jail, he opened the roof of his cell and shouted out bravely "Comrades, please carry on marching If the colonial police horse kicks once it shall set the country aflame."

#### 4.1 Students, Society and Politics in Burma/Myanmar – Documents and Essays

The 1300 strike slowly gained momentum and in December, 1938, when the students demonstrated in front of the Secretariat the student leader Ko Aung Gyaw died from injuries sustained from being hit by colonial police clubs (heavy wooden sticks known as "numbered clubs"). Concerning the death of Ko Aung Gyaw, the Burmese Newspaper "The Light of Burma" sent a certificate of honour to one of the people who had sustained injuries.

The Certificate of Honour for the Cause of Independence Serial Number 61.

To go about freely, to talk freely and to write freely are the rights which every citizen ought to enjoy. If these rights are denied then they are being denied the right to be human beings.

When obtaining Independence, oppression is an obstruction. While one is trying to eradicate this oppression, if one sustains injuries or death, it is considered a death of honour or injury of honour therefore one would want those injuries or death.

Scars which are sustained while fighting for the cause of Independence are more honourable, valuable and more respected than the medals awarded by a Sovereign or a King.

The person mentioned below has sustained injuries in the fight for the cause of Independence, so we honour and pay our respects to him.

Name Ko Ba Than

Class

School University

Names of Parents

Person honouring and

paying respect Chit Maung

Editor

The Light of Burma Newspaper

In the cause of independence the martyr Ko Aung Gyaw, who truly loved his nation, died an honourable death.

The Light of Burma - 8415

In this way, unarmed Ko Aung Gyaw, who had demonstrated peacefully, died on December 23rd, 1938, from injuries inflicted by the heavy clubs of the military police, stooges of the colonial powers. A letter was also sent to the martyr from his political comrades imprisoned in Insein Jail.

Martyred Comrade Aung Gyaw,

You as a true Burmese have given up your precious life blood for the Burmese people. You have done your duty. You are a true man. We who still have life in our bodies will spend the rest of our days struggling for the cause of Burma, whether it leads us to the hanging post or to independence.

If the Burmese nationals procrastinate then you and those who have worked tirelessly for independence day and night will be betrayed and not only that, the torch of Burma's independence which was transferred into our hands will be extinguished.

We do not grieve for you even a little bit for losing your life in the cause of Burma's independence.

You have given up your life so that we can build a heaven on earth governed by our own rulers.

May the cause be successful.

Ko Ba Hein

Ko Ba Swe

Thakhin Htein Win

Thakhin Soe

Thakhin Pe Thein

Thakhin Lay Maung

Thakhin Khin Aung

At the funeral of the Martyr Ko Aung Gyaw one of the student leaders, Ko Hla Shwe said these words in grief:

"While lying beside each other, our heads inflicted with injuries, on the top floor of the Sun Newspaper (Thuriya Newspaper) he said 'We will die for our fellow-nationals. Don't let them touch the Chairman.' And when I went to visit him at the hospital he said almost deliriously: 'Ko Hla Shwe we will march forward.' And when we first opposed the authorities, he said 'Let me die holding the flag in the front.' I can still hear and see him. Ko Aung Gyaw, Comrade, your wish has been fulfilled to be recorded in history.

Then Ko Aung Gyaw's mother Daw Shwe Kyawt said, addressing the monks:

"The blood of my bosom, my young son Maung Aung Gyaw, was not even armed with a needle or even a short stick yet he was beaten by the police with heavy clubs, so the public and the monks were shocked and could not bear his death. If you can imagine how great their anger was, can you imagine how I must feel as a mother who had carried him for nine months and gave birth at ten months -- your reverend sir.

Aung Gyaw, more than the grief I have for your death -- I grieve because I can no longer give birth to another son like you, my son" said his mother inconsolably.

In that funeral ceremony Myoma Saya Hein said:

"Comrade Martyr Bo Aung Gyaw who has fallen in the cause of our Independence, you are a pioneer leader. As long as there are Burmese in this world we will remember and honour you, Martyr Comrade Bo Aung Gyaw.

"The sound of colonial police beating with heavy clubs mercilessly in the ears of the public will be like the sound which is urging us to fight for independence.

"Martyr Comrade Bo Aung Gyaw your honoured and memorable death will send us people to the goal of Independence. We take it as an omen.

"Martyr Comrade Bo Aung Gyaw. your honourable mind, constant diligence, self-sacrificing attitude, and sacrificial courage have ignited the flame that set our hearts on fire and continues to burn roaringly. The Independence goal you have set we will continue to march towards, till we reach it as we have pledged."

Therefore, the aims of the students' movement in the colonial era were:

- (1) To get full independence from the yoke of the British colonial policy and
  - (2) To do away with the colonial educational system and to build a national educational system.
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#### PRE-INDEPENDENCE ERA STUDENT MOVEMENT

In 1941, the Students' Union was suspended, and an emergency Students' Union came into being in 1945-46. When the general strike broke out in 1946 the students, workers, peasants and the public participated.

In 1948, the civil war started and in 1949, a strike against the Anti-Fascist Peoples' Freedom League (AFPFL) government took place. The Students' Union also participated. In 1951, the All Burma Federation of Students' Union (ABFSU) was formed by joining the All Burma Students' Union (ABSU), the Rangoon University Students' Union and the Rangoon District Students' Union. It fought against the colonial system, for internal peace, and democracy and to build up a national educational system.

In 1953, the Strike To Close the University for One Month in October took place, and in the university area the first sound of gun shots was heard during the AFPFL government. Twenty-nine students were imprisoned, thirty were expelled from the university for life and ten were expelled for one year.

In March, 1956, the seventh standard questions were supposed to have leaked out and the Harry Tan Incident took place. The students' body was shot at and the seventh standard student Harry Tan died. This was the first time that the blood of a student fell on the ground after Independence during the period of the AFPFL Government.

In October, 1956, the AFPFL government announced that the Students' Union would have to be abolished within thirty days. This was the highest form of oppression against the democratic rights of the students so that the students went on a strike. Twenty-six students from the whole of Burma were imprisoned and 256 students were expelled.

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THE STUDENTS' MOVEMENT(FROM 28TH OCTOBER 1958 TILL 3RD APRIL 1960)  
DURING 17 MONTHS (523 DAYS)  
UNDER THE RULE OF THE SO-CALLED CARETAKER GOVERNMENT AFTER THE FIRST COUP  
D' ETAT

In 1958, the 10th Anniversary of the Internal Peace Strike took place and the students participated.

On September 28, the Rangoon University Students' Union held a swearing-in ceremony. On that day U Nu had transferred power to a man called Ne Win. The students showed their objection by marching around the University campus on 30 September. On August 31, 1959, Rangoon Arts & Science University (RASU) leaders Ko Ba Swe Lay, Ko Nyan Yin and Ko Myint Thein were not given the right to enroll in the university by the military authorities. This fact was not known by the Rector. Therefore the Rector permitted them to enroll.

In October, 1959, it was announced that those who could not go back to their homes during the holidays were allowed to stay only in the two hostels Amara and Ramanya after paying lodging fees of Ks 14. The students considered that the announcement was against the tradition of the university and disturbed their research. Then, it was announced that during that time the University Corps was going to be kept in the hostels.

Therefore on 23rd September, 1959, the University Students' Union called a mass meeting and objected to (a) the fact that they had to pay Ks 14 and were not allowed to stay in their own hostels; (b) the army had used the University Corps as an excuse to install troops inside the university campus. Directly after the meeting the students marched through the university campus to show their objection. The military authorities said in response that the executive members of the Students' Union had violated the regulations and caused a disturbance so the Rector had to sign a written apology within a week.

In the University Executive meeting after serious thought it was agreed that the teachers and the students should decide about this matter peacefully. Therefore, to keep the peace of the university and so that

the students could study peacefully, and friendship should not be destroyed, this case should be handled by the teachers and the students jointly. In order that the parents and the teachers should not feel unhappy the University Students' Union executive members on the 1st October went to the Rector to convey their repentance.

In that year, more unjust hostel regulations were announced. The hostel committee was under the University Council and in the Hostel Committee there are always two students; in 1959 when the university re-opened; it was announced that two representatives from two hostels would serve in turn. However, because they did not recognize the members that represented the students, the University Students' Union objected.

A bill to reform the Rangoon University Act was announced in order to exclude the two University Students' Union representatives. Therefore the University Students' Union objected to the bill but on 2nd March, 1959, it was passed in the parliament.

The students that were detained by the Caretaker Government were not permitted to take their examination though the Union had appealed for them.

The collection of the subscription fees for the Union was stopped half way in the year 1959-60 and for the year 1960-61 they were never collected.

All Burma Federation of Students' Union (ABFSU) chairman Ko Khin Maung Ohn, secretary Ko Aung Ban and executive member Ko Pho Tha Be were sent to Coco island.

All Burma Federation of Students' Union (ABFSU) vice-chairman, former executive member Ko Myint Oo, Ava Hostel Social & Reading Association executive member Ko Kein Ngwe, Pioneer student executive member Ko Ko Gyi and Shan national Sai Nuan Saing were arrested.

The University Students' Union vice-chairman Ko Ba Kaung, Secretary Ko Khin Aung, executive member Ko Yu and the University Students' Union chairman Ko Zaw Win had to go into hiding after a warrant to arrest them was issued.

THE STUDENT MOVEMENT IN THE PERIOD OF THE SO-CALLED REVOLUTIONARY COUNCIL  
1962-63 AFTER THE SECOND COUP D' ETAT

On 2 March, 1962, a man named General Ne Win took control of state power for the second time.

On 30 April, 1962, the 11th Co-conference of the Army Commanders was held at the Yatanabon Naval Base and there the policy of the Revolutionary Council was announced.

On 2 May, 1962, the conference supported the Revolutionary Council's policy. In that conference the coup d' etat military leader Ne Win said that the army which was the backbone of the Revolutionary Council, stood united and strengthened, therefore there was no danger to worry about.

On 4 May, 1962, the leaders of the All Burma Federation of Students' Union (ABFSU) discussed the case of a student who had been expelled from his hostel because he did not get on well with his warder. In 1963, the Burmese and English curriculum of the high school examination was changed.

On 9 May, 1962, Pioneer Ko Mya Than, Ko Thet, Ko Tha Ban and Ko Zaw Win were arrested for demonstrating at the Dutch Embassy. Ne Win told the University Council that as the teachers had misbehaved and among the students there was political influence, the University Council had to be abolished. The Union commented that the governing body of the university had been taken over by the Revolutionary Council.

On 11 May, 1962, the Rangoon University Rector Dr. Tha Hla handed in his resignation and the Burmese Professor U Aye Maung retired; U Wun (Minthuwun) changed his faculty. On 12 May, 1962, some wardens and assistant wardens from the Rangoon University hostels resigned. On 17 May, 1962 the Revolutionary Council's order No.30 was announced and the University Council was reformed. The Adipadi (Chancellor) was Brigadier General Than Pe, Brigadier General San Yu, Col. Than Sein and Col. Tin Soe were included. The Rector was the former Education Minister U Kar of the 1958 Caretaker Government.

On 26 May, 1962 five tutorial schools were closed down due to the

leakage of questions.

On 18 June, 1962 more unjust rules of the hostels were announced. For example, the people who ate vegetarian food were not allowed to eat it for one or two days unless they ate it the whole year.

On 2 July, 1962 the high school leaving examination was abolished. The All Burma Federation of Students' Union (ABFSU) requested a discussion with the authorities.

On 3 July, 1962 in the hall of the Union there was a meeting to discuss the abolition of the system of education, and the unjust hostel rules.

On 4 July, 1962, the embryonic Burmese Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) was formed.

On 5th July, 1962, a strike at the Dutch Embassy was carried out by three big unions. The military authorities then stated that the people involved in the strike did not really represent the unions. The Students' Union felt that the statement made their Union appear insignificant so they objected.

On 6 July, 1962, the Revolutionary Council reformed the University Senate and the Hostel Committee according to their wishes.

On 7 July, 1962, at 1:00 p.m. the Students' Union held a meeting to discuss the reform and after that the students went on a protest march through the university campus. At first the Security Police (Lone Htein) arrived and they tried to control the situation by throwing tear gas. In the evening at about 5:30 p.m. two army trucks arrived and along Mandalay Hall, Ramanya Hall and Chancellor Road the soldiers started shooting at the students with automatic rifles. The soldiers were from No. 4 Burmese Rifles Battalion and the shooting order was 3 minutes shooting 2 minutes rest and 3 minutes shooting. The guns were made by a joint venture of a Burmese and German Company. They were G-3 and G-4 rifles which had never been used in any battle field.

The military government declared that 17 students died, but in Mandalay Hall alone more than 17 students died according to the official records and altogether over a hundred students died. Ko Kyaw Win, a student from Myaung-mya had written on the wall of Mandalay Hall with blood from his

body "7-7-62, do not forget it". Ko Kyaw Win had taken refuge at the Union Building.

On 8 July, 1962, at dawn the Union Building, which had a prominent standing in the history of Burmese Independence, was destroyed by dynamite because the military government had said that it was the headquarters of the above ground communists and the refuge place of the student leaders. It was an act which had not even been committed by the colonialist foreign government. It was bloodthirsty fascists who had cruelly destroyed the Union building by dynamite. Ko Kyaw Win of Myaungmya, who was in bed with injuries, had been blown up together with the building.

The next morning at 8 a.m. when the news was announced from the radio, the military dictator called General Ne Win said, referring to the students' uprising, "If it was done purposely to oppose us, I have nothing more to say except that we will face them with sword against sword, and spear against spear, that is the only solution. " With these words he insulted the students and 'the people en masse.

When the university reopened in November, in the place of old Union Building a hut was built temporarily; and along with the Bo Aung Gyaw Monument, a stone monument was built, 77 inches in length and 62 inches in breadth. In memory of the students who died on 7-7-62, because more than hundred students had died, it was named "Yar Gyaw Kyauk Taing", which means "Over Hundred Monument".

However, before long there were protest rallies "to stop the civil war" and "to have peace within the country", and together with the over hundred monument the temporary hut was again destroyed.

During the last days of the Burmese Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) on July 22, 1988, (1350 second Waso, waxing day of 10th) at the Saya San Hall of Kyaikasan at the last conference of the Burmese Socialist Programme Party (BSPP), U Ne Win (retired General) mentioned the destruction of the Union Building, as if he was not responsible; he tried to put the blame on Aung Gyi. But, in fact in 1963 when the temporary hut was destroyed Aung Gyi was no longer in the army. One thing is sure that "In history one cannot lie or one cannot be merciful".

Later, it was secretly decided to re-establish the Union and the Students' Affair Committee. And in 1966 it existed in all kind of guises. Some even went into the armed forces and fought against the military dictatorship till today.

Therefore, the history of the post-war students' movement had various levels of significance:

1. It was the continuation of the students' movement under the colonialist era, still trying to perform the unfinished duties.
2. It was a segment of the Peoples' fight against the colonialist, for complete national independence, and the fight to maintain national independence.
3. It was the history of the fight of the students and the people for peace within the country, so that they could study peacefully.
4. It was the history of the protection of the rights of the students and the rights of democracy in general.
5. It was the history of the fight to end the topsy-turvy Educational System and to establish a National Educational System.

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#### THE STUDENT MOVEMENT DURING THE BURMESE SOCIALIST PROGRAMME PARTY ERA

In 1964, when all associations, organizations, clubs, etc. were declared null and void, the Students' Union automatically became an underground organization.

After 1964, some student leaders joined the armed revolution groups.

Most of them joined the Communist Party of Burma and some joined the ethnic armed Revolutionary Groups, and some were imprisoned and tortured by the military regime (Revolutionary Council).

In 1969, the political prisoners and the student leaders were sent to Coco island. At Coco island, there was a hunger strike and eight prisoners died; among them, from Prome (Pyi) district, the student leader

Ko Chit Swe made himself famous in the history of the Students' Union by going on hunger strike for 55 days.

On 1 December 1969, after the uprising of the South East Asia Peninsular (S.E.A.P) Games in Rangoon, Mandalay and Moulmein, the some students from all the universities were expelled and some were imprisoned.

In 1970, the Golden Jubilee of the Rangoon University was celebrated. And the history of the 1962, 7 July was written, printed and published. Before the Golden Jubilee Celebrations ended all the universities were closed down. Many students were imprisoned and some were expelled.

In June, 1974, there was a Burma Workers' Strike and some workers from the Textile Factory in Thamaing and Sinmalike Dockyard died from gun shot wounds. In that movement the students had participated.

In December, 1974, there was the incident of U Thant's (former General-Secretary of the United Nations) Funeral and over 5,000 people were detained, including monks, students and the people, and they were sentenced from 3 years to 7 years under military tribunals. And the schools were closed for four months.

On 6 June, 1975, the students and the workers held a commemoration ceremony. From then onwards there were strikes and over 250 were detained. From middle school students up to university students were sentenced to imprisonment of from 4 years to 9 years under military tribunals. The schools were again closed for nearly seven months.

On 23 March, 1976, the centenary celebrations of the birthday of the famous national writer and winner of the Stalin Peace Prize Thakhin Ko Daw Hmaing were held. Yin-pwint-than Ni-dan chronicle was published, criticizing the educational system devised by the Burmese Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) to suit its own purposes. From various universities, over two hundred and thirty students were detained and were sentenced from 5 years to 14 years of imprisonment under military tribunals. Hundreds of students from universities all over the country were expelled for life. When they were expelled the Burmese Socialist Programme Party's student affairs unit called the parents of students to the party unit office and gave them certificates from the universities

they were attending signed by the Rector saying that they had been expelled because they had committed political crimes.

A Chin national, Ko Tin Maung Oo, a student from the Rangoon Arts & Science University (RASU) was given a death sentence; he was hanged in Insein Prison sometime in June, 1976. Ko Tin Maung Oo was the first person to be given a death sentence after Burma's Independence under the government which was formed by the constitution of 1974, for which 90% of the public had voted. For the Hmaing Centenary, a Rakhine monk, U Pyinya Thiri, had written a criticism about the Burmese Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) government referring to Sayagyi Hmaing's Khwe Di Kar, (a detailed life of a dog), and was sentenced six years of imprisonment under the military tribunal No.1.

Therefore, the fascist military dictators had not only killed the monks, students and the public openly in view of everybody on the roads; hidden from peoples' eyes in the prison cells they had also killed cruelly in cold blood.

In 1976-77-78, the workers and students who were imprisoned inside the Insein prison had gone on hunger strike asking for prisoners' rights.

Thus they had fought on wherever they were.

The military junta tortured the students' and workers' leaders by sending them to completely dark cells, military dog cells, and Leper cells. On 13 February, 1977, they went on hunger strike for 6 days and on 16 August, 1977, when they went on hunger strike for the second time for 10 days, the military authorities cut off their water supplies as well.

In 1978, "A-Yay Daw Pon Thamaing", a history of the uprising and the 7 July incident was published by old student union members, from the years of 74-75-76. The old student union leader, Rangoon Institute of Technology (RIT) students and students from the Institute of Medicine No.2 were detained, altogether about 50 students.

In 1986, the new generation students secretly and actively begin to move for the re-establishment of the Students' Union. They circulated pamphlets to re-kindle the spirit of the Union and its heritage.

In September, 1987, there was a strike because the government had demonetized the paper money unjustly.

On 13 March, 1988, there was a students' uprising in the Rangoon Institute of Technology (RIT) campus and the Burmese Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) government declared that only one person had died from an injury inflicted by a sharp weapon. But on that day Ko Phone Maw, Ko Soe Naing, Ko Maung Maung Soe, Tin Maung Oo, Ko Win Aung, Ko Than Shwe, altogether six people died.

During the uprising, Ne Win was known as Mar Ga, the President Sein Lwin was known as Chin-the, Home Minister Min Gaung was Pyan Lhua-1 (Swallow-1), Khin Maung Win from Rangoon Division Party was known as Pyan Lhua-2, the Head of Police Department Pe Kyi was Daw Na, and with those secret code names they had crushed the uprising. Sein Lwin had broadcasted directly from the Burmese Broadcasting Station (BBS): "Chinthe speaking, Pyan Lhua can you hear me? Shoot hard, shoot a lot, those who shoot a lot will be rewarded."

Later, on March 16, 1988, the Red Bridge Uprising took place, and on 21 June the Myay-ni-gone Uprising, and on August 8-9 uprisings had happened one after the another and hundreds of monks, students and people had fought an unarmed battle by marching peacefully, and hundreds had died.

During the uprising days of 8-8-88 (known as the four eights) the students union was temporary re-established on the old site of the Students' Union Building by the All Burma Federation of Students' Union (ABFSU) whose Chairman was Min Ko Naing, and General Secretary Moe Thee Zun.

After the 1988 movements of the students, the Burmese Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) tried to cover the dead elephant with the leather of a goat as the saying goes. On 14 May, 1988 (1350, 14th day of the waning moon of Kason) Saturday's Working Peoples' Daily had announced the declaration of the State Councils on the findings of the Enquiry Commission

"Some students from Rangoon Institute of Technology (RIT) and the people from the West Quarter of Kyo-gone had a tussle, and the Rangoon Division Peoples' Police Commander in charge had given orders to disperse the mob with tear gas and if the mob did not disperse and if the police had to

face danger then out of the twelve policemen who were armed with Remingtons, a single cartridge was put into the guns and they were ordered to shoot low, skimming the ground," they had lied to the public openly. After that, for show, the Prime Minister Maung Maung Kha, Min Gaung, and Chief of Police Thein Aung were made to resign from their jobs and Pe Kyi was suspended from his job.

After that the Burmese Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) committed blunder after blunder and on 23 July, 1988, (1350, 10th day of the waxing moon of the 2nd Waso) Saturday, at Saya San Hall, Kyaikasan ground, Burmese Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) Chairman U Ne Win said "In the months of March and June, 1988, the bloodshed in the uprising happened because of the people who participated themselves. The people who encouraged the movements behind the scenes showed that they do not believe in the party which controls the government. I feel that I am indirectly responsible for the March and June incidents....." As the saying goes "When one is trying to cover the front, the back is being exposed."

After 18 September, 1988, the army took control of power, and the State Law & Order Restoration Council (SLORC), claiming that they respected the law, gave a top ranking post to Pe Kyi, who was suspended from his job as a person who was responsible for the 1988 uprisings. It was not known which SLORC court decided, but he was awarded a high position or whatever. After the military had taken control of power on 18 September, 1988, many students joined the indigenous ethnic armed groups. The All Burma Federation of Students' Union (ABFSU) which was formed on a temporary basis during the uprising of The Four Eights continued to be active in three different forms: within the country the All Burma Federation of Students' Union (ABFSU) functioned as an underground movement; the Democratic Party for New Society (DPNS) functioned as a legal political party within the country; the All Burma Students' Democratic Front (ABSDF) in the border areas joined the armed revolution to fight the policies of the military junta. Though many students had joined the armed revolutionary groups after the military had taken over control in 1962, up till 1988 the armed revolution of the students had not been outstanding.

After the military had taken control of the country on 18 September, 1988, thousands of students had come over to join the armed revolution of the students. The Students' Army, which had not existed in any country of the world had come into existence in Burma. From 1988 till 1992 in the armed revolution of the students many students lost their lives and they are still doing so.

In November, 1991, the Democratic Party for New Society (DPNS) opposed the military regime outright and joined the armed revolution en mass.

Therefore, if the movements of the students of Burma were to be viewed from a historical point then it can be said "The history of the students' movement is the history of an armed revolution" and it is supported by the activities of the All Burma Students' Democratic Front (ABSDF) and the Democratic Party for New Society (DPNS), which are like beacons lighting the way.

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THE DECEMBER 20TH LAMENTATION(OR) THE COMRADE'S POEM

Hard bitten lips of mine,  
Burst, and broken,  
Drops of blood,  
Came flowing slowly.

I, grind my molars,  
Squeeze my hand into a tight fist.

Bo Aung Gyaw,  
Comrade,  
Had fallen in this place.

If that road could be peeled off,  
And according to historical materialism,  
We could do research  
Comrade's  
Scarlet glory would be found.

Who can deny?  
About the flowing of Comrade's blood.

Those of you,  
Who are denying,  
To glorify your many attributes.

Who else would it be?  
But the ones whom, you, Comrade hate.  
Their hate  
Comrade would have smiled indifferently,  
That I believe.

The shine of Spartacus's glory  
The rebel of Konbaung Era,  
Galon Saya San Ngu Yin Van Troy  
Endless  
Starting with Chequebara  
Together with tens of thousands of martyrs  
Comrade had shone, red, bright and brilliant.  
At the just battle of the people  
Comrade, your blood had shone red.

People's beloved  
The core of the martyr  
In any era  
Shall be youthful and fresh  
It is definite, I believe.

Bo Aung Gyaw, Comrade  
In this place; I had  
Distributed the pamphlets, together.

Bo Aung Gyaw, Comrade  
I had, In this place

Comrade, paid tribute to you many times.

Comrade's series of battles  
About the just battles of Comrade  
After coming to this place  
Comrade's red blood which had flowed  
Over it  
With my white tears  
And courageless sighs  
I would not tarnish  
Comrade's attributes of glory.

A Poem?  
Yes, it is my poem,  
A poem to describe  
And disclose Comrade's attributes of glory.

Accept it, please Comrade.  
I beseech you with a shout.

Let me refuse it,  
This poem is not my poem.

Read it and see.  
Drops of blood which had flowed  
Whose blood was it?  
Comrade's warm blood  
The blood which had not dried yet.

Oh.....with Comrade's drops, drops of blood.  
Shimmering red,  
Strung together into  
Comrade's poem.

Maung Lay Aung (Late)  
Translated by Aye Mya

I dedicate this article to Ko Aung Gyaw to commemorate on 20th December 1992 the 54th anniversary of his death. I honour him and bow my head in respect.

Aung Saw Oo (Hmaing Centenary)

National League for Democracy (Liberated Area)

### III. Bibliographical Note

Up to now, no comprehensive academic work on the Burmese students' movements exists. The following notes intend to provide some basic information on the literature which may be helpful to write such a work and to contextualize the documents of these working papers dealing with students' affairs. The comments on the literature are arranged in chronological order and parallels the sequence of the documents in part II.

For an overview over the whole period since independence, see Aung Saw Oo (1995). The author participated in the Burmese student movement since 1974. The same applies to Aung Htun who compiled a history of the Student Movement in Burma since 1903 in Burmese language. Because of this activity, he was imprisoned in 1998. Parts of the book were released in late 2006 by the All Burma Federation of Student Unions in Chiang Mai.

#### 1. 1920-1940

Aye Kyaw (1993) offers a fine narration of the developments of the Burmese students' movements since the events leading to the first strike in 1920. He stresses the importance of the establishment of the National Schools and the attempt to found a National University for the growth of the nationalist movement in Burma and mentions a lot of persons involved in the events who may be remembered in Burma but whose biographies are not known in Western literature. It would be useful to compile short biographies of Burmese nationalist leaders who participated in the 1920 strike and were instrumental in the movement to set up and maintain national schools and a National University. Aye Kyaw's book is based on his MA-thesis submitted to the History Department of Rangoon University in 1963. This thesis contains some document some of which are reproduced here (see documents no. 1 and 2).

For the context of the student movements, the following works are of special value: Taylor (1974) gives an assessment of the Burmese politicians' efforts to gain the students' support. His work is mainly based on British sources. Maung Maung (1980) provides some detailed information about the events based on Burmese newspaper and sources. Like Aye Kyaw's work, his MA-thesis from 1976<sup>1</sup> provides translations of many interesting documents. Document 1 of this paper is the only one dealing exclusively with students' affairs. Khin Yi (1988) highlights the relationship between the students and the *Dobama Asiayone*. – Finally, a dissertation on Aung San in German language shall

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<sup>1</sup> The work can be consulted in the library of Hamburg University's Asia-Africa-Institute.

be mentioned which contextualises Aung San as a student within the Burmese cultural context (Prager 1998).

## 2. 1948-1962

For this period, a monograph on the role of students is still missing. Some details on the early years of independent Burma can be found in Tinker (1957: 202-212 and the index). The only empirical study on the subject was undertaken in the early 1960s by Joseph Silverstein and Julian Wohl (1964 and 1966).

Most works written by ex-students after 1988 like Aung Saw Oo (1995) deal only very scantily with the period between 1948 and 1958 and start with the repression of student activities by Ne Win's caretaker government in 1958.

## 3. 1962 – 1988

For this period, a lot of information is available from the internet as a retrospective from a post-1988 standpoint. Some of this material is contained in this volume. For articles written during the period of the Burmese Way of Socialism, see Silverstein's articles between 1968 and 1976 which provide some comparisons with other Southeast Asian countries.

## 4. 1988 until Today

Up to now, the only scholarly work on one of the protagonists of the 1988 students' uprising is Clymer (2003). Zöllner (2001) links the situation of Myanmar's universities at the beginning of the 21st century with the events in the colonial era (in German).

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## IV Essays

## **1. Barbara Zeus, The Internet: a new weapon of the Burmese student movement?<sup>2</sup>**

### 1. The student movement in Burma

The student movement in Burma (Myanmar) has a longstanding reputation as a catalyst of change and a challenger of the governing. The roots of the movement can be traced back until 1920, when students staged a strike against the *University Act*, which was seen by the Burmese as a move to restrict higher education to a privileged few. This strike gained the support of wide parts of the population and thus formed a fertile soil for Burmese nationalism. At the end of the 1930s the alliance of students at the forefront, with Buddhist monks, workers and farmers as well as the general public, emerged as a model for mass movements, which would step forward in times of political and economic crises. The idea per se of students participating in political events of the country originates from 1938 at the latest. From then on students were also actively involved in the fight for independence from the British colonial power (Thaung Htun, 1995).

Later student generations of the independent Burma grew up with this knowledge about and admiration for the commitment of students during the independence movement. Students thus take an outstanding position in popular historical interpretation where quixotic abilities are attributed to them: as for instance democratic acting in the interest of all the people, most importantly including all the various ethnic groups. General Aung San, who once began his political career as a student leader, is to be particularly thought of here. Owing to their youth, freedom and their idealism, students appear as very dynamic and show the readiness to sacrifice themselves for their country in order to bring about political change.

The largest protests staged by students took place in 1988. After striking down and arresting student leaders, who had not fled to the border areas or abroad, the military government adopted measures aimed at preventing students from intervening in politics. As done before, universities were closed for longer periods of time. New institutions were built on the outskirts of cities as well as in the provinces; on top of this distance education courses were introduced. These measures suggested that the students were to be deprived of opportunities to organise and form unions as commuting to their campuses, sometimes several hours a day, also limited students' free time and their opportunities to

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<sup>2</sup> This essay is a translation from its German original, submitted on August 13<sup>th</sup> 2007.

gather together and plan political activities. Rather, from now on they were subject to even stricter controls by the military as university campuses had been moved within the proximity of military bases. It is reported that in 1996 a declaration of loyalty to the regime that included a passage on non-interference in the political affairs of the country was demanded for admission to university (Archambault-Cyr, 2001).

In the meantime, however, Burma as well has entered the age of the Internet. With the Internet offering opportunities to communicate independent of location, the question therefore arises whether new possibilities of organisation for the scattered university students will open up. Little academic research has been carried out on the role of the Internet in Burma's student movement; this essay thus aims to explore new possibilities and problems of the mass medium Internet in the students' "fight" and in doing so examines both the situation inside Burma itself as well as in exile. For this a cross-section analysis of relevant Internet sources is undertaken. In addition, results of seven guided interviews that were conducted in July 2007 with Burmese students living in exile – partly by email, partly in personal discussions – will be incorporated. Moreover, secondary sources that look at the topic in other countries of the region are consulted.

#### 1. The Internet - new possibilities and old problems

As a new global communication medium the Internet is praised for its manifold amenities. In particular the availability of just about any kind of information which can not only be read by everyone, but also be produced by anyone is remarkable. Thus, the Internet covers all possible information modes and also enables a mutual dialogue between information producer and recipient. This gives more power to the reader, who can immediately speak out on comments and reports on the Internet in an uncomplicated way and without much effort. Hence, the reader can possibly find like-minded people and discover new possibilities of social organisation. Generally speaking, new opportunity structures for the articulation and aggregation of interests have developed by facilitated communication links via the Internet. The easy reproducibility and the immense speed of forwarding information enable the information producer to address a global audience, irrespective of where the information is produced. Efficiency thus is much higher than with traditional media. What is more, the theoretical possibility of anonymity on the Internet allows for the venture to sharper tones and more critical contents than is often the case in print media. Particularly in authoritarian states this might be clearly noticeable.

However, reports of so-called Internet dissidents can be heard of from those states again and again, and not only from there has one learnt of Internet censorship. The West seems nevertheless to be united over the fact that the Internet eludes in principle from the adjustment and control by individual states. This supposed uncontrollability is justified by the technology of the medium, the geographical distribution of its users and the nature of its contents. Representatives of the “digital libertarianism” are not only advocating for the state to keep out from Cyberspace, but also stress that the Internet does have specific characteristics that permit evasion of control. Thus, the Internet is celebrated by Western politicians as a medium of freedom of opinion, which downrightly enforces a free flow of information of any kind, be it in form of texts, pictures or sounds, and thereby undermines state control of the media and contents usually transmitted through these regulated channels in authoritarian states. In view of the People's Republic of China former US President Clinton once announced the attempt to control the Internet is doomed a failure and is just “like trying to nail Jell-O to the wall”<sup>3</sup> (Wacker 2002).

Regarding China, Martin Woesler furthermore makes the assumption that the Internet has transformed the republic socially and politically into a more liberal and open society, since great quantities of information about world events as well as about China itself have entered the country from outside via the Internet (Woesler 2004). In principle this liberalising effect is more clearly and sooner visible in semi-authoritarian regimes such as China. While the Cultural Revolution led to a brainwashing, the people now eventually developed their maturity: “a predominant majority generally sees the Internet as a medium that enables greater freedom and criticism of the government.” (Woesler 2004, 11). Woesler presumes that the “new public of the Internet” will not be easily suppressed despite threats of punishment, massive monitoring personnel, censorship, appeals at national feeling and verdicts acting as deterrent (Woesler 2004, 18).

Considerations about Malaysia are not less optimistic concerning the positive impact of the Internet. Derichs comes to the conclusion that “despite the little guaranteed access to alternative information on the Internet in rural areas, the political culture in the whole of Malaysia has changed” (Derichs 2002, 113).

For the Tibetan exile community the Internet apparently plays an immense role for the upholding of a community feeling and the maintenance of Tibetan identity (Piltz, 2006).

Moreover in Indonesia the use of the Internet was considerably involved in the fall of Suharto, as students in 1998 no longer availed themselves of bamboo spears, swords and other weapons, but

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<sup>3</sup> [http://www.businessweek.com/bwdaily/dnflash/jan2006/nf20060113\\_6735\\_db053.htm](http://www.businessweek.com/bwdaily/dnflash/jan2006/nf20060113_6735_db053.htm) (04/08/07)

took to the streets with banners and posters, organised themselves via the Internet and reported the events in the country to the world with the assistance of the new medium (Hill 2005, 33).

But what are the potentials of the Internet for Burma, are these optimistic theses transferable to the country? Can the Internet promote political change there as well and can the student movement benefit from the positive characteristics of the Internet already and use it as a weapon in the “fight” against the military regime?

In the following it is examined, how the Internet is used by today’s student activists. Due to differing conditions inside the country and abroad, first of all possibilities of Internet usage inside Burma will be looked at; in a next step possibilities for exiled Burmese will be regarded.

## 2.1 The role of the Internet in today’s student movement in Burma

### 2.1.1 Use of the Internet inside Burma

Even in the regional comparison Burma is a latecomer what concerns the Internet. Only in 2000 the Internet was made accessible to the general public and two years later the first Internet cafés opened in the then capital, Yangon. Initially, a free email service was not available, and therefore only a small part of the population could actually use online communication. One year later about 25,000 people had access to the *Myanmar Wide Web* (Reporters Without Borders 2004). In 2006 there were an estimated 64,000 users, which, however, constitutes still a tiny fraction of the more than 50 million inhabitants of the country, making Burma one of the countries with the lowest Internet penetration world-wide (Asienhaus 2006).

The *Myanmar Wide Web* (MWW) is the Intranet of the military government, including those websites approved by them. It is to keep users away from information which – in the eyes of the government – could endanger the regime or cause political instability. The government thus sensed the conceivably subversive potential of the Internet even before its introduction and feared hostile forces from in- and outside the country that would infiltrate the nation by means of the Internet. This was to be prevented with the assistance of the latest technology by containing websites perceived as destabilizing and dangerous. According to the organisation *Reporters Without Borders* Internet censorship in Burma is still stricter than in China or Vietnam (Reporters Without Borders 2006).

The severe pre-censorship since introduction of the Internet through partially erratic and

unsystematic blockades of certain websites, as for instance foreign news pages or oppositional groupings' sites, makes clear that users in Burma cannot move freely on the net. Likewise, Internet café owners must save screen shots and store information and websites visited by their customers every five minutes and hand in to the authorities on a weekly basis to create an overview of users' online activities. The creation of a web page must be approved by the authorities, and everyone who gets involved in political discussions online or distributes articles potentially posing a threat to the interests and security of the state notionally faces imprisonment of up to six months (Asienhaus 2006).

In theory, given the abundance of alternative information on the Internet, it seems possible to break through the state's monopoly on information distribution. And yet the question arises in how far users inside Burma are able to access alternative information or even spread those. Can the national censorship authority then be avoided and will the Internet actually turn out to be uncontrollable, or will the government be able to hold on to their information monopoly and control the Internet just like they have been carrying out successfully with books, magazines, newspapers or video material? These are examined thoroughly on state-endangering contents before publication by the national censorship authority, the *Press Scrutiny Board*. Considering the enormous amount of information on the Internet such a procedure seems however inconceivable. Nevertheless the state cannot be written off rashly what concerns the control of the Internet, on the contrary: the military government seems to prepare for a cyber war. In May 2007 the independent news magazine *The Irrawaddy* reported about training programmes for government "cyber warriors", who are taught in techniques of online monitoring (The Irrawaddy 2007). A point to keep in mind thus is that virtual censorship on a national level may not function perfectly, but it is not impossible either. Against the background of this strict censorship the question arises to what extent online activities are conceivable and possible at all for the student movement inside Burma in particular.

Firstly, there is the possibility of availing oneself of proxy servers which also make those web pages blocked by the government accessible to the greatest extent. According to my interview partners this method is well-known and commonly used in Internet cafés. Thus, at least access to alternative news or also alternative historiography is guaranteed, provided the users have the necessary knowledge how to get to this information. In this case, users would be provided with at least two versions of events, for example the protests of 1988: the official version of the government and alternatives or sources from abroad. An increasing number of these alternative versions could thus, alongside a growing discontent with the economic and/or political situation in the country, lead to a

further loss of credibility of the state's print media.

Another absolutely substantial condition of course is access to the Internet itself. So far this access has been granted to the population of larger cities only. Therefore it cannot be assumed that online activities in Burma reach a broad public. And yet, committed students find ways to get around this problem. Interesting reports from the Internet are printed out, multiplied and distributed among people in the hometown or village upon return. One of my interview partners reported of this – not completely innocuous – method. He indicated to travel regularly to his home region in Kayah State across the green border from Thailand to distribute information downloaded from the Internet. In this way, even inhabitants of remote regions would obtain alternatives to state propaganda.

Discussion forums represent another convenient way to use the Internet for those Burmese students who do have a more or a less regular access to the Internet, since taboo topics can often be discussed in a more relaxed way, than this is possible in the streets or in teashops. In view of Internet censorship, *BaganNet* a discussion forum controlled by the government, here is to be examined more profoundly. It represents an interesting example, since it shows just how much dissent is possible and is dared on an obviously controlled website.

*BaganNet* was initiated by *Bagan Cybertech* in 2003 and belonged to Prime Minister Khin Nyunt's son until his father's dismissal in 2004. Meanwhile it is subordinate to the parastatal Internet Service Provider *Myanmar Teleport*.

Rules for participation in the forum are conspicuously announced in both Burmese and English on the top of the forum sites:

„Messages posted in BaganNet Forum must be according to the Myanmar law and culture. Please don't use any rude or offensive words and don't discuss political issues. Please help us to keep the BaganNet Forum enjoyable for everybody by following these simple rules. Anybody who is not behaving according to these rules will be blocked from further usage of the Forum.”  
[<https://www.bagan.net.mm/forums/index.asp> (21/06/07)]

Nevertheless, some contributions can be found that would have had difficulties passing the *Press Scrutiny Board* with considerable certainty. General Aung San for example is celebrated as a hero on *BaganNet* once again after a long time. Probably due to his similarity with taboo topic number one, his daughter and icon of the “democracy movement” Aung San Suu Kyi, he had to yield in favour of three pre-colonial kings in the national press. On *BaganNet* young Burmese can now exchange views about their national hero; and discussions are lively as within one month more than

one hundred contributions to this topic were already online in the forum. Contributions are either put online in English or Burmese probably depending on participant's command of language and are of quite different nature. Some contributions seem almost scholarly, other users claim not to be very familiar with the topic and therefore encourage other more knowledgeable users to continue their discussion so that they can "listen in" and attain knowledge beyond what the school books taught them. The quality of those is in all other respects only derided in the forum: when a forum member ended his contribution with the words "this is what the school books say", he raised nothing but laughter in the form of 'smileys' from other users. Communication in the forum, however, demands quite some skills with formulation, as a forum participant remarked on her second attempt phrasing a question: she would now express herself "more moderately", so that her contribution would not be blocked again; an indirect criticism of censorship. Another participant expresses his admiration by the wish: "if only the next generation politicians were as flexible [sic] and long-sighted as General Aung San".<sup>4</sup>

As expected, the search words "Aung San Suu Kyi", "democracy" or "politics" yielded no results on *BaganNet*, it is however, as shown above, a question of how one formulates one's opinion in the forum. Further taboo topics can certainly be found in other threads; the most popular topic areas on *BaganNet* being "Love and Romance", "Music" and "Internet", where a participant advises members for example to a *Gmail* email account and gives hints to its setting up. Topics of the discussions are generally formulated very conform to government propaganda. And yet, it is noticeable in principle that the longer a thread, the more critical participants' voices will become, i.e. the longer a topic, the more probable it is that participants dare to reformulate the original topic. This happened for instance in a thread titled "problems of studying abroad". This thread evolved itself more and more into a discussion of advantages of studying abroad and enumerating problems of the Burmese education system.

These forums may still not reach the majority of young Burmese, yet they do represent a beginning. They allow for a far freer exchange of views than this is otherwise possible in the country: an exchange of views above all, which is independent of locality, with which even students for instance from Kachin State can communicate with students in Rakhine State in a relatively simple way. More and more young Burmese getting acquainted with the Internet and becoming more adept

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[http://www.bagan.net.mm/forums/display\\_topic\\_threads.asp?ForumID=1&TopicID=3862&SearchPagePosition=1&search=aung+san&searchMode=allwords&searchIn=Topic&forum=0&searchSort=dateDESC&ReturnPage=Search&ThreadPage=1](http://www.bagan.net.mm/forums/display_topic_threads.asp?ForumID=1&TopicID=3862&SearchPagePosition=1&search=aung+san&searchMode=allwords&searchIn=Topic&forum=0&searchSort=dateDESC&ReturnPage=Search&ThreadPage=1) (04/08/07)

and nimble in dealing with the medium will increasingly undermine the control mechanisms of the government.

### 2.1.2 Use of the Internet outside Burma

*“Inside they have the gun, outside we have the Internet.”*- a student and former KNU (Karen National Union) fighter in a personal conversation.

Preconditions outside Burma are substantially less restricted. Shortly after the coup in September 1988 Burmese activists who had fled abroad already began to use the Internet to spread information and exchange news about the situation in the country (Aung Hla 1998). Thus they were the first ones to discover the Internet with its advantages and soon made use of this new liberty to discuss political affairs or human rights violations in Burma. Like this they received uncensored and unedited information about their home country even in their own language. This surely is not a purely Burmese phenomenon; also Indonesians living abroad for example organised themselves intensively starting from the 1990s via the Internet. Cross-linking of Burmese living in exile has evolved successful for a number of reasons. The medium Internet allows interest groups scattered across the whole world with diaspora communities each relatively sparsely populated to gain an identity and achieve a high level of collective capability and above all reactivity. Particularly in the early days of exile, Burmese communities in Western industrial nations were very small and scattered, in contrast to the refugee community in neighbouring Thailand. Nevertheless one wanted to be involved in the political events in the home country, and somehow participate in the fight for democracy. Without the Internet this would have been hardly possible. The most remarkable example here is Zar Ni, who came to the USA as a student having taken part in the demonstrations of 1988 as one of the leaders. In Wisconsin, USA he did not know a single compatriot within a radius of 300 miles and so in September 1995 he decided to bring into being the campaign *Free Burma Coalition*.<sup>5</sup> Despite the geographical dispersion he succeeded in creating a platform for exiled Burmese regime opponents who within the shortest time were to exert substantial pressure on their country from the outside by coordinated collaboration. Only a few weeks after the birth of the *Free Burma Coalition* Zar Ni succeeded to coordinate a ‘Burma Action Day’ at dozens of American universities and was able to stimulate the establishment of over 100 local action groups until spring

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.freeburmacoalition.org/> (04/08/07)

1996 (Specker 1997). The Coalition heightened pressure that led Washington to impose economic sanctions on Burma, multinationals including *PepsiCo* and *Apple Computer* to pull out of Burma and universities to terminate contracts with multinational companies investing in Burma. The activities of the *Free Burma Coalition* thus had tremendous efficacy, as the West's sanction and boycott policies towards Burma in the late 1990s have often been attributed to their efforts. In an interview Zar Ni stressed that it was not some well-thought out scheme that had led this campaign towards the Internet. Rather, it was simply the best alternative for Burma activists, allowing them a cost-effective way to spread their message and to respond to the needs of supporters around the globe (Krebs 2001). In the meantime, Zar Ni has changed his policies, instead of isolation and boycott he now rather propagates dialogue between all major stakeholders. His change of course, however, was not met with much approval among many of his followers who therefore teamed up to form the *US Campaign For Burma*, which regularly publishes black lists of companies active in Burma and also particularly calls on students to raise more awareness at their universities for the situation in Burma or create chapters in their communities.<sup>6</sup>

For emigrated Burmese the Internet represents a new form of communication and they succeeded in using it as a space for expressing political opinions and transforming these scattered and isolated voices into a global movement and making their points of view known to the world. What has distinguished itself as a particularly useful source of information seems to be the newsgroup, as for example the daily published *BurmaNet News*, an extensive online roundup of Burma related news compiled by Burmese exiles from all over the world.<sup>7</sup> “The proliferation of information has put Burma higher on the US policy agenda than it ever would have been otherwise”, says Mike Jendrzeczyk, director of Human Rights Watch/Asia in Washington (Specker 1997). Burmese diplomats alike do make use of these mailing lists to react to criticism and in response spread state propaganda as it is found on official web sites of the military government (Eng 1998).

Any comments in the popular *Yahoo!-Group* mailing lists that are consistent with government views are immediately retorted with questions about remuneration for the “spreading of state propaganda”. Over a period of two months (from end of May until end of July 2007) different *Yahoo!-Groups* like *freeburma*, *burma\_campaign* or *88\_Generation\_Students\_Exile* were observed as to make out the most popular topics and ways of application.<sup>8</sup> Remarkably, it became apparent

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.uscampaignforburma.org/> (04/08/07)

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.burmanet.org/news/> (04/08/07)

<sup>8</sup> <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/freeburma/> (04/08/07)

[http://groups.yahoo.com/group/burma\\_campaign/](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/burma_campaign/) (04/08/07)

that particularly Burmese exiles living in Japan are very actively involved in these as well as from the USA but also other countries. These groups are primarily used to distribute Burma related news, often in commented form, albeit some topics may prevail for a few days in case participants get involved in discussions around the respective topic. One of the most frequent topics, however, is Aung San Suu Kyi who although having spent most of the last 18 years under house arrest, still is the hope of the student movement. Groups are furthermore used to circulate online petitions, letters to Senior General Than Shwe, calls to release political prisoners including Aung San Suu Kyi or calls for prayer ceremonies on the occasion of her birthday on June 19th 2007. The resumption of the National Convention in July 2007, presumably its final session, has also incited some heated debates. For this reason inter alia, the *Free Rohingya Coalition* called for a country-wide campaign in Burma on July 7th via the *burma\_campaign Yahoo!-Group*. On this day all private businesses and restaurants should remain closed and people were to stay indoors as a sign of boycott of the National Convention and the political course of the military as well as to the memory of the students who died on July 7th 1962. The *Burmese Students' Democratic Organization (Canada)* held a commemoration day in honour of those students and circulated invitations via the *freeburma Yahoo!-Group*. The largest commemoration ceremonies, however, are again expected to take place on August 8th to commemorate the demonstrations in 1988 for which numerous groups are already sending out invitations and programs.

Invitations for Burma related events and discussion rounds or demonstrations are distributed via these groups as well. These groups even allow for the attachment of links which will lead readers to pictures and documentations of previous events and campaigns. Very popular features are political statements recorded on video that are posted on *YouTube*, links to these are then included in the groups' newsletters. One can then listen to peace messages of monks or also to appeals to combative spirit by "Student Freedom Fighters" posing in front of the red peacock banner.<sup>9</sup>

*Yahoo!-Groups* of course are not only used to propagate peaceful ways, now and then pugnacities do emerge, like a contribution titled "A Recipe for the Burmese Students' Revolution" that was circulated via the *freeburma Yahoo!-Group* on July 24th. It praises the achievements of the Burmese student movement, since it has successfully raised international awareness for the situation in Burma, has contributed to international sanctions and embargos being imposed and thus pressure being exerted on the military government. Failure to topple the regime is mainly attributed to their

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[http://groups.yahoo.com/group/88\\_Generation\\_Students\\_Exile/](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/88_Generation_Students_Exile/) (04/08/07)

<sup>9</sup> See for example: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_kYt2KO8RLg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_kYt2KO8RLg) (05/08/07)

immense military strength, this being the reason why even armed student groups like the ABSDF (All Burma Students Democratic Front) have not been successful in the fight against the regime: “Fighting to win the 500,000 troops is like crying for the moon and it is just a waste of energy, time, resources, weapons and lives.”<sup>10</sup> Since the military, however, appears to be immune against sanctions, the peaceful democracy movement as well as the armed struggle along the borders, a new strategy is suggested: “What lacks in the students’ struggle against the authoritarian regime led by General Than Shwe is guerrilla warfare, a form of political violence that the current regime fears. Any government, whether it is democratic or authoritarian, fears the students and the ethnic groups wage a guerrilla war in inner cities like Rangoon, Mandalay, and Naypyidaw, it will disrupt the government’s daily activities.”<sup>11</sup>

The ‘old student generation’ of 1988 (*88 Generation Students*) has in the meantime as well shifted public political discussions from the streets to the global net due to extremely repressive political conditions inside the country and uses among others its own *Yahoo!-Group* for disseminating statements, as for instance on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of Martyrs Day (July 19th 1947) or the National Convention. Moreover, those are circulated via *BurmaNet News* where the group also calls for the creation of a democratic climate and for dialogue between all political stake holders in Burma. In July a rumour spread about a meeting between representatives the *88 Generation Students* group, the largest opposition party NLD (National League for Democracy) and the authorities, which however neither the *88 Generation Students* nor the NLD confirmed. A representative of the *88 Generation Students* spoke out on *BurmaNet News*: the rumours merely reflected the desire of the people who longed for a stronger political commitment of the *88 Generation Students*. This in turn vests the self-appointed politicians with the perfect legitimacy for political acting. My interview partners saw this rather uncritical: “In a country where the totalitarian rule of the military regime has been unchecked for many years, the question of legitimacy of the students’ political commitment is irrelevant.”, says a 25-year old Burmese student.

What effect the peaceful campaigns of the *88 Generation Students* would really have was being discussed on the BBC’s (British Broadcasting Cooperation) Burmese pages by homeland and exile Burmese alike in October 2006 after the “White Expression Campaign” for the release of political prisoners and the beginning of a dialogue for national reconciliation.<sup>12</sup> This campaign collected around 270.000 signatures for the petition within three weeks while the government spoke of

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<sup>10</sup> Available at: <http://www.tayzathuria.org.uk/bd/2007/7/7.htm#15.07.2007%20issue> (05/08/07)

<sup>11</sup> Available at: <http://www.tayzathuria.org.uk/bd/2007/7/7.htm#15.07.2007%20issue> (05/08/07)

<sup>12</sup> [http://www.bbc.co.uk/burmese/forum/story/2006/10/061018\\_white\\_expression.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/burmese/forum/story/2006/10/061018_white_expression.shtml) (04/08/07)

falsifications. The discussion on BBC made clear that the campaign was particularly praised by exile Burmese. Voices from inside Burma, weary of the political stalemate, agreed, but did indeed express the wish for a stronger and more active political commitment of the student leaders.

The enormous possibilities for dissemination both qualitatively as well as quantitatively enable Internet activists to get furthermore in contact with students from other parts of the world, where similar political conditions prevail, and exchange themselves about strategies or also share ideas about the political organisation of the future of their countries. One of my interview partners told me he regularly surfed on the web page *Taking It Global*.<sup>13</sup> This site offers a communication platform to young people world-wide, lists student organisations and offers country-specific information. Like this he made virtual friends in Pakistan and some African countries, with whom he is now leading inspiring political discussions.

These specifications on different possibilities of Internet usage for the student movement in- and outside of Burma make clear, how manifold these theoretically are, and how strongly these can be limited by censorship. Against the background of the rigid censorship inside the country, the question remains whether the Internet can nevertheless function as a new weapon in the student movement's fight for democracy.

### 3. The Internet as a new weapon of the student movement?

“I like the computer more, [...] we can fight without bloodshed. We can send statements to the entire world and we can send a virus to the SLORC machine...”<sup>14</sup> (a young Burmese activist in exile, Eng 1998)

Three of the seven interviewees share the view that the Internet can in the first instance be regarded as a kind of weapon in the “fight” of the student movement in multiple ways and possesses considerable potential capable of development. There can be no doubt that spaces for freedom of expression in Burma have increased since the introduction of the Internet, even if the state can still supervise these virtual spaces. Since however discussions in cyberspace are led predominantly

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<sup>13</sup> <http://www.takingitglobal.org/> (04/08/07)

<sup>14</sup> SLORC (State Law and Order Restoration Council, former name of the present military regime)

anonymous (under an alias), the Internet in contrast to other media opens the possibility – at least in many fields – to relatively free expressions of opinion in a quasi-public space. What the student movement in exile has already achieved, can initiate itself in Burma eventually: a virtual social movement availing itself of the medium Internet, in order to not only supply its organisations and activists with information, but above all also the unknown masses of sympathizers and mobilise them. The Internet provides political reform forces, like the student movement, above all the 88 *Generation Students*, with an important forum for political discourse but also with new opportunities for networking activities, disseminating information and awareness raising campaigns among the population. All these undertakings would be far more difficult had they to be carried out with the help of traditional media only. Exactly this mobilisation and information of the population will according to one interview partner transform the Internet into a “sharp spear”.

Lobbying for sanctions in the mid-1990s, the movement with the *Free Burma Coalition* at the fore demonstrated that student commitment on the Internet can have substantial influence on international political decision-making and strategies, even if the isolation policy has not succeeded in toppling the regime in Burma. But a first step had been done, namely to give the scattered voices of the Burmese student movement world-wide hearing. Strengthened by this success students will avail themselves more intensively of the medium Internet and hope for an imminent regime change in their home country through a victory in the cyber war with the government.

One interview partner contained himself with his optimism and replied to the question whether he would call the Internet a weapon: “May be. However, one point to ponder is the fact that a weapon is effective only in the hands of a master.” It is however foreseeable that the Internet will continue to spread also in Burma and users in the country will become increasingly familiar with dealing with modern technologies and will learn new ways to circumvent the restrictions. In the long term, the prospect of the Internet being able to undermine the control mechanisms of the government exists.

Even if the Internet thus far represents a very exclusive medium and is directly accessible to only a minority of the population, indirect possibilities of information dissemination are various. A tiny percentage of the Burmese population having the chance to surf the Internet does not necessarily mean that those groups without direct access will not generally benefit from the advantages of the world-wide net. The commitment of the young Kayah, who distributes hard copies of latest news from Burmese exile organisations on the net when travelling to his home state, demonstrates this. Such private activities as the distribution of alternative information in rural areas is thus not to be

ignored in an impact analysis of the Internet.

Large hope is set on new satellite technologies that would enable even remote regions to get online independently and beyond the *Myanmar Wide Web*. According to my interview partners this possibility of Internet access via satellite (*IPStar*) is already available in some of those regions. Many active students in exile in Thailand are at the moment eagerly seeking ways to finance such satellite equipment in order to link up their respective home regions with the world-wide net.

As long as Internet access is to a large extent dependent on government servers, however, censorship – as opposed to digital libertarianism representatives' views – remains nevertheless a substantial factor that is capable of defusing the weapon Internet by abstracting its ammunition. Even if there have not been any reports about arrests of Internet dissidents from Burma so far, menace of punishment alone provides for a latent anxiety and an uncertainty about the use of the Internet. Responsibilities for dissent on the Internet are not clearly stipulated: is it the author, the Internet Service Provider through which the message was transported or is it the owner of the Internet cafés, or is it in the end the readers of such web sites esteemed state-endangering? On a psychological level, these uncertainties will lead to intimidation and even to self censorship and restraint in usage of the Internet. Therefore, there is still a long way to go before one can speak of freedom of expression in a country like Burma, even on the Internet.

To counter the digital libertarianism's claim to absoluteness of liberty on the Internet, James Boyle has represented this descriptively with Foucault, and Bentham's image of a prison constructed in the shape of a wheel around the hub of an observing warden, who at any moment might have the prisoner under observation. Unsure of when authority might in fact be watching, the prisoner would strive always to conform his behaviour to its presumed desires (Boyle 1997). Boyle then transfers this paradigm of control to the Internet and draws the conclusion that censorship can be made an integral feature of the underlying technology; however, it does not need to be based primarily on law and punishment.

How far reaching this form of psychological pressure can be becomes apparent in an account given by one of my interview partners, who registered in the *BaganNet* forum with the intention of placing regime-critical contributions online from "safe exile" in Thailand. A couple of days later he could not access the Internet from his Mae Sot-based computer anymore and saw himself traced by the military regime even as far as Thailand. As a matter of fact he was that much intimidated by this occurrence – whether this really was a blockade arranged by the Burmese government or not can of course not be assessed – that he terminated his membership in the forum.

All of the conducted interviews demonstrated a lack of confidence in the new medium itself when it came to the question of how information flows between homeland and Thai exile were organised. Strategically important information, reports or arrangements are so far not sent by email. Due to fear of monitoring by the regime these are preferentially carried by intermediaries, who regularly cross the border.

Considering this lack of fundamental confidence in the medium's technology and security, it becomes clear that the Internet can not serve as a fully functional weapon. The West's confidence capital into modern information technologies, cannot be applied so easily to authoritarian states. As:

“In an authoritarian state, where citizens have experienced censorship for decades, this presents itself possibly in a different way. Doubts both about ‘accessibility’, in particular however ‘confidentiality’ of information on the Internet suggest a lack of ‘foundation of trust’ and uncertainty about the capacities of the state (and its aids) to monitor the Internet, which – at least with the majority of users – entails behaviour compliant with rules, in the sense of the revolving prison described above, whose inmates do not know for sure when they are observed, but assume that they are being observed.” (Wacker 2002, 85. *Translated from German*).

The Internet alone can thus surely not trigger a democratisation process in Burma. And yet it can provide the student movement very probably with a “useful tool” in their fight, to put it in the words of three interviewees. Firstly, however, fundamental socio-political factors and conditions must be complied with in the country. The student movement will still have to carry out a great deal of work on political information, education and awareness in the country in which the Internet can prove to be quite helpful not only for organisational purposes. Finally, it can be concluded that the Internet surely can not function as a fully-operational weapon in the fight against the government in the present situation, and yet it can to a certain extent serve as an acceleration instrument in organising a broad social movement in interaction with other instruments and socio-political conditions.

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## **2. Anna Jüschke, „Reformasi“ versus Revolution – Burma’s and Indonesia’s Student Movements in Comparison.**

This essay is a comparison of the student movements in Indonesia and Burma.<sup>1</sup> It aims at highlighting similarities and differences in terms of the movements influence on their countries’ policies, their range of activity and their aims and demands, as well as their approaches to reach these aims. Due to their special importance during the time of *reformasi* from 1998 to 2004 one could assume that the Indonesian students were rather reform-oriented, so to say moderate and in favour of a slow and controlled change, whereas the Burmese students pursued a more revolutionary strategy and were thus seeking for rapid and radical changes. Before discussing this thesis, a short overview of both movements’ histories will be given first. It is important to note that the sources dealing with the Indonesian student movement have already been analysed whereas there has not been that much research about the Burmese movement so far.

### **The Burmese movement**

The beginnings of this movement date back the students’ boycott of the ‘Rangoon University Act’ in December 1920. Most of the demonstrators were students of the Rangoon- and the Judson-College and their protest was directed not only against the colonial educational system in general but especially against the opening of a new university in Rangoon. They criticised the centralistic system which enabled only members of the upper classes to send their children to college, because most of the ordinary people were not able to afford the high fees of the boarding schools. Apart from that they spoke out against the admission restriction, the time limitation for master degrees and the hierarchical structures of the college administration. However, the students focused most on the high importance which was attached to the use of the English language within the educational system. They pushed their claims by organising a large-scale boycott which they intended not to call off until their demands had been met.<sup>2</sup>

The next highlight was the boycott of 1936. The central theme was the resistance against the British colonial rule and connected to this the growing national consciousness. Due to two reasons, the nationalistic ‘*Dobama*’-movement used to be very popular at this time. The first reason was the increasing disaffection with British foreign rule and the administration of Dr. Ba Maw, respectively. The second reason was the great number of Chinese and Indian residents living in Burma. During

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<sup>1</sup> By using the term ‘Burma’ instead of ‘Myanmar’ the author does not intend to make any political statement.

<sup>2</sup> Maung Aye Kyaw, History of the Students’ Movement. p. 97-101.

the 1930s nearly sixty percent of the inhabitants of Rangoon were of non-Burmese heritage. Additionally, great parts of this section of population were economically very successful, a fact that led to even greater nationalistic sensations.

One important feature of this wave of protest was that U Nu and Aung San, who were both to play an important role in Burmese politics later, gained nationwide publicity. Aung San used to be chairman of the All Burma Students' Union, the first student organization which operated all over the country. Both of them aligned themselves with the *Dobama Asiayone*, but stayed in contact with the student movement afterwards.

After forming the caretaker government in 1958, Ne Win took over power for the second time in March 1962. The students' protest was no longer directed against the foreign rule of the British but against the Burmese government. At the beginning, only few smaller groups of students protested against new campus-regulations in Rangoon, but soon larger protests against the military emerged, which led to the occupation of the Campus of the University of Rangoon. On 7 July 1962 the clearance of the campus was commanded, a task carried out by security forces in a violent way which caused the death of several students. The next day the situation escalated with the blasting of the Students' Unions' building which was located on the campus. When unrests broke out again at the end of this year, the government decided to close all universities for ten months.<sup>3</sup> This development towards an anti-military movement indicates that the students were not only concerned with issues connected to the educational system but saw themselves in the responsibility to perform as a critical voice of the Burmese society.

After the death of former UN secretary general U Thant in 1974 new protests emerged. U Thant used to be very popular in the students' community and therefore many of them were upset about the government refusing to organise a state funeral and decided to organise an appropriate funeral by themselves. Some students hijacked the coffin and announced that they were going to build a mausoleum at the campus of the Arts and Science University. Parts of the society supported the students' plans with donations but a dispute between the students and members of U Thant's family and government representatives emerged. During the construction of the mausoleum a speaker's corner was set up on campus and several students took the chance to deliver speeches critical of the government. The military brought an end to this situation by using massive violence, which provoked violent reactions by the inhabitants of Rangoon who destroyed a number of BSPP<sup>4</sup>-offices

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<sup>3</sup> René Hingst. 2003. *Burma im Wandel*. p. 154.

<sup>4</sup> Burma Socialist Programme Party.

and other buildings. These unrests were put down by the military as well.

Disregarding the events of September and October 2008, the most recent and at the same time most intense uprisings took place in 1988. Even if the demonstrators consisted of many different parts of the society, the students were once again to play an important role. The protests had mainly economical causes: Due to the bad economic situation the government was not only forced to apply for the LCD-status but decided to devaluate the 25-, 35- and 75-Kyat notes in September 1987 to keep the situation in check, a move that led to the further impoverishment of large parts of the Burmese population. The emergence of student demonstrations on the same day resulted in the closing of all educational institutions until end of October. Afterwards several smaller protests occurred but the situation escalated not until March 1988. During the abolition of demonstrations in front of BSPP-offices in Rangoon three students were shot which led to further waves of protest in the following weeks, giving way to mass protests in July. As a consequence, Ne Win resigned from office on 23 July after having failed to convince the delegates to resolve upon the implementation of a multi-party system. Sein Lwin, who was held responsible for the brutal abolition of the protests in 1962 and 1974, was elected Ne Wins successor. The demonstrators called for the immediate appointment of a transitional government and this shared demand had an integrative impact on the movement. Despite the promulgation of martial law on 3 August, monks and students called out on general strike on 8 August. The military reacted quite brutal, killing numerous demonstrators, many of whom were students. The situation did not ease even when Sein Lwin resigned on 12 August and Dr. Maung Maung, a civilian, assumed office. On 18 September the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) under leadership of Saw Maung took over power which brought an end to the demonstrators' hope for the establishment of a democratic system. New protests broke out and were put down by force.

As mentioned above, the students played an important rule during these uprisings. They coordinated the nation-wide networking of the protests through several students' unions what made the cooperation of different parts of society possible and in addition tried to organise an emergency administration together with monks during August and September which was intended to sustain public policy. Moreover, the All Burma Federation of Students (ABFSU) under leadership of Ming Ko Naing decided to create an alternative government in cooperation with the General Strike Council. However, they were not able to implement this plan.

### **The Case of Indonesia**

As well as in Burma, the Indonesian student movement is no new phenomenon but has a long tradition dating back to the beginning of the 20th century. During these times education used to be a privilege of the upper classes and so the main topics of the first social movements were education, youth and nationalism. Key actors were organizations like ‘Young Indonesia’ and the ‘Young Muslim League’ and in 1928 an important declaration, the ‘Youth Pledge’ was released, proclaiming that students and youth wanted to overcome ethnic differences and build up a united and independent state. The keywords of this statement were “one nation, one country, one language”.<sup>5</sup> It is noteworthy that future president Sukarno was involved in generating this declaration.

In 1965/66 the student movement played an important role in the mass-protests against president Sukarno and the communists. In the name of the people (*rakyat*) the students demanded not only the lowering of the living costs, but furthermore the dissolving of the PKI (the Communist Party of Indonesia) and of the Cabinet. After being implemented successfully, these claims became known as “the three demands of the people” (*tritura*). The protest movement achieved Sukarno’s retirement and moreover the students became supporters of Suharto’s ‘New Order’ by spreading the respective ideology. From these times onwards the students used to be regarded as “a moral force with political influence”.<sup>6</sup> Another notable point is the support of the student movement by sections of the military forces, whereas it remains uncertain whether this relationship was an one-sided one or if parts of the student movement sympathized with the military. By fulfilling the three demands the *angkatan* (Generation) 66 did not only lose its means of existence but further was confronted with the problem of being glorified in the history books of the New Order while at the same time suffering from the restrictive policies of this era.

During the 1970s several new laws were passed which aimed at controlling and restricting the political activities of the people, and especially those of the students. Of special importance were the ‘floating mass doctrine’ of 1971, which prohibited collective political activities, as well as NKK (Normalisation of Campus Life) in 1978, which banned all political activities from campuses and put more pressure on students to prevent them from getting involved in policy while studying. Moreover, the former Student’s Council was replaced by the state-controlled BKK, a board in which students had only very limited influence.<sup>7</sup> This led to a loss of confidence and interest in representative bodies in the student community. In spite of the restrictive policies, two meaningful

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<sup>5</sup> Mikaela Nyman. 2006. *Democratising Indonesia. The Challenges of Civil Society in the Era of Reformasi*. p. 61.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62/63.

<sup>7</sup> Dave McRae. 2001. *The 1998 Indonesian Student Movement*. p. 4.

protest movements evolved during this time. The first one became known as ‘*Malari*’-incident and occurred on 15 January 1974 on the occasion of the Japanese prime minister visiting Jakarta. Indonesia’s bad economic situation was ascribed to the exploitation through Japan and China. That caused the organization of large-scale demonstrations during Tanaka’s visit in the course of which six students were killed and over 600 were injured.<sup>8</sup> The second protest wave emerged in the years 1977 and 1978 in the run-up of the 1978 presidential elections. The students demonstrated against corruption in economy and policy, while antimilitarism had become another important issue. In addition, they spoke out directly against Suharto’s re-election and demanded greater political freedom. Unlike the *angkatan 66* the *angkatan 77/78* was not very successful, due to two reasons. The first one was the fact that the students failed to achieve coordination and cooperation with other sections of the population and the second one was the absence of conflicts within the ruling elite, wherefore no fraction had an interest in supporting the students.

As a result of the strict repression there were hardly any bigger student protests during the 1980s. Most students tended to organise themselves in small discussion groups called *kelompok studi*, where they debated different political theories or became members of rather apolitical NGOs (non-governmental organizations) that operated mainly in the sector of community development. The majority of the students therefore tried to avoid direct confrontation with the state.<sup>9</sup> A smaller group of students criticized the engagement in NGOs and discussion groups as they regarded mass-demonstrations as the only effective instrument of protest. From 1988/89 onwards the phase of *keterbukaan* (liberalisation) began. This enabled the student movement to regenerate and to become more active again.<sup>10</sup>

Finally in the 1990s large-scale protests emerged again. Even when *keterbukaan* was brought to an end and replaced by strict repression, the dissatisfaction with the Suharto-regime grew steadily. The situation escalated on 12 May 1988 when four students who took part in a demonstration were shot by security-forces on the campus of Trisakti-University. On 18 May students and other demonstrators occupied the parliament and three days later Suharto resigned. In this sense the *angkatan 98* was successful, but Suharto’s downfall had not been the only objective of the movement. Other aims had been the abolition of corruption, the lowering of the living costs and further democratic reforms. The diverse demands of the different groups the movement consisted of

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<sup>8</sup> Edward Aspinall. 1993. Student Dissent in Indonesia in the 1980s. p. 5.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p.13 – 14.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p.16 – 19.

were summed up in the term of *reformasi*.<sup>11</sup> After Suharto's downfall the students were no longer able to represent themselves as a united movement and due to the absence of a nationwide consensus the movement split up into smaller groups which were mainly concerned with local issues.

### Similarities and Differences

In the time of the emergence of the student movements the situation in Burma and Indonesia used to be quite comparable. Both countries were colonies and in the wake of a nationalist consciousness the students became part of the struggle for independence. A second noteworthy similarity is the fact that in both cases former student leaders were to become influential politicians later on, the most famous examples being Sukarno and Aung San.

Yet from the time of their countries' independence onwards, the student movements developed as differential as the countries' histories did. Whereas Indonesian students of the *angkatan 66* cooperated with sections of the military when demonstrating against Sukarno, in Burma such an alliance would already have been unthinkable during the 1960s. Indeed, some former Burmese student activists hooked up with the military and even tried to suppress the student movement later on from their influential position as politicians. But still the Burmese students' protests were constantly directed against the (military-) government whereas in Indonesia co-operations between parts of the student movement and parts of the ruling elite, including the military, emerged for several times even until the 1990s. As one example the occupation of the parliament in May 1998 would have been impossible without the support of the Wiranto-fraction.<sup>12</sup>

Admittedly the Burmese students had the support of the people while the Indonesian students at all times had problems to integrate the *rakyat* into their activities, even though they always pretended to act in the name of the people. Especially in 1998 it became clear that many students had strong prejudices where the 'urban poor' were concerned. Partly this can be explained by their socialization under the New Order due to which they grew up with the belief that the cooperation with the lower classes would inescapably lead into chaos and anarchy. During the occupation of the parliament many students tried to be optical distinguishable from the other demonstrators by wearing respective clothes.<sup>13</sup> Other actors criticised the often dismissive attitude of the students

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<sup>11</sup> Mikaela Nyman. 2006. Democratising Indonesia. The Challenges of Civil Society in the Era of Reformasi. p. 74 - 75.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 76.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 77.

what might be one reason for the decreasing support of the student movement by the people.<sup>14</sup>

Whereas student activists in Burma as well tried to educate the people, they obviously acted not as arrogant as the Indonesian students did and achieved to present their claims and positions in a way that convinced the society of supporting them. At least the strong relationship between the students and the people in Burma is emphasised since the 1920s and especially in 1988 it became clear that efficient networks between the students and other parts of the society existed when they acted in close cooperation with the political active monks and were able to mobilize great parts of the Burmese society. In this year it also became apparent that the students enjoyed a high status in the society due to their engagement and for instance Aung San Suu Kyi referred to them as a the ‘spearhead of the pro-democracy movement’.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore it is important to note that even today students are eminently respectable in the Burmese society whereas the reputation of the Indonesian students declined from 1998 onwards and even former student activists refer to the movement as rather unimportant for the reform process.

Another advantage of the Burmese student movement was the unifying impact of a common enemy: the military government. Certainly the Indonesian student movement had shared aims during several times, like in the 1998 protests against Suharto, but these were never as distinctive as was the case in Burma. Due to this antagonism a dialogue with the government was never a realistic option for the Burmese movement and furthermore the Burmese military suppressed the students in a much more brutal way than the Indonesian security forces ever did. Even though it came to occasional deaths of student demonstrators in Indonesia the numbers were far from reaching Burmese dimensions.

As the case of Indonesia shows, the using of violence by the security forces provoked violent reactions from the demonstrators and for this reason the radical attitude of many Burmese activists seems comprehensible. The Burmese activists’ readiness to make sacrifices can partly be explained by the brutal approach of the military, even though this ‘sacrifice-motive’ dates back to the 1920s. Generally the Burmese students had significantly less options open than the Indonesian students had. They were regarded as intellectuals and therefore put under general suspicion, what left them hardly any space for legal activities. In contrast to this, the Indonesian students’ activities were tolerated within certain limits due to their historical role as supporters of the New Order.<sup>16</sup>

Characteristic of the Indonesian activists is their self-portrayal as a “moral force, seeking to correct

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 160.

<sup>15</sup> Aung San Suu Kyi. 1991. *Freedom from Fear and Other Writing*. p. 198 – 204.

<sup>16</sup> Mikaela Nyman. 2006. *Democratising Indonesia. The Challenges of Civil Society in the Era of Reformasi*. p. 69.

government rather than a political one seeking to overthrow”, as former activist Arief Budiman put it.<sup>17</sup> This is reflected in the movements’ peaceful approach and its attempt to avoid direct confrontation with the state and trying to uphold a dialogue with the government instead as was especially the case during the 1980s, when small students’ delegations visited politicians to advise them of their misconduct in a very polite manner instead of organising large-scale demonstrations.<sup>18</sup> All Indonesian student generations placed strong emphasis on the purity of their movement wherefore several radical activists were not able to implement their positions. Nevertheless, there were some extremely radical activists who were even willing to sacrifice their lives for the movements’ success.<sup>19</sup> However, the majority of the Indonesian students were not willing to accept violence as a legitimate instrument and had no interest in taking over political responsibility. For a long time the Burmese students had no ambitions to take over political responsibility as well, but in 1988 at least one group, the ABFSU, changed their mind and decided to build an alternative government together with another group of activists. Even if this situation was an exception in the Burmese student movement, such an event would have been unthinkable in Indonesia. In this regard it is interesting to note that in contrast to the situation in Burma, the Indonesian student movement lacks of leadership figures since the 1990s.

A further distinguishing feature is the much greater heterogeneity of the Indonesian movement. There are several reasons contributing to this condition, like regional differences emerging out of Indonesia’s geography and contentions between Muslim and non-Muslim groups. But moreover, one important factor were the significantly better opportunities to communicate with other social movements abroad. Especially during the 1980s this connections enabled the then popular discussion groups to learn about and debate different theories ranging from Marx and the Frankfurt School to Muslim theoreticians and Paulo Freire.<sup>20</sup> This discussions had the positive impact of raising the movements’ level and revealing new courses of action while at the same time leading to even greater heterogeneity which finally resulted in the movements’ weakening. Due to Burma’s isolation it was much more difficult for Burmese activists to get in touch with and benefit from international discourses and even though this was partly tried by the Nagani Book Club, the movement was not able to achieve a standard comparable with the Indonesian one.

Bambang, and Indonesian activist, described the typical Indonesian student as follows: ”And I am

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 64.

<sup>18</sup> Edward Aspinall. 1993. *Student Dissent in Indonesia in the 1980s*. p. 41.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 43.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 33.

truly convinced that thousands of young people in this nation are conscious that the choice they have made is grounded on lofty, holy and noble ideas. I am simply one out of thousands or even millions of these young people – who have hearts that are noble, honest, clean and brave.”<sup>21</sup> This description might as well originate from a Burmese activists and reminds strongly of a speech delivered by Ko Ba U on 20 December 1920.<sup>22</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Is it therefore possible to assume that the Burmese students were more revolutionary, so to speak more radically and willing to change existing structures from scratch, than their Indonesian counterpart used to be?

There are several differences as well as similarities between both movements. Although they dealt with likewise issues like corruption, social injustice and greater political freedoms, they adopted different approaches to reach their aims. The majority of the Indonesian students spoke out against the use of violence and focussed on a dialogue with the ruling elite instead, for they considered themselves as a moral force and a corrective and their aim was to achieve a slow, but steady change instead of a radical shift.<sup>23</sup> In contrast to this rather ‘reform-oriented’ course of action, the Burmese activists adopted a radical and total attitude right from the start. Several activists associated with armed resistance groups, boycotts and large-scale demonstrations were popular forms of protest and finally some students even tried to take over political responsibility. The general political situation within the countries seems to have been pivotal for the movements’ development and the activists’ attitudes. All in all one can assume that the Burmese students acted more radical and revolutionary than the Indonesian movement did, even though the latter was more successful in exercising influence on policies.

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>22</sup> Maung Aye Kyaw, *History of the Students’ Movement*. p. 102-107.

<sup>23</sup> Edward Aspinall. 1993. *Student Dissent in Indonesia in the 1980s*. p. 12.

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## INVITATION

Readers are invited to participate in the project by

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- contributing **essays** on Burmese/Myanmar literature as a medium between the international world and Burmese society;
- providing **material** that sheds more light on the Nagani Book Club, its context and impact on Burmese intellectual and literary life;
- offering **assistance** as translators and commentators of book reports.

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