

## BURMA'S MILITARY DICTATORSHIP

JOHN F. CADY

### THE ARMY'S FIRST CARETAKER REGIME

ALTHOUGH THE DESIRE FOR POLITICAL POWER ON THE PART OF influential officer elements of the Burma Army obviously contributed to the successive military takeovers at Rangoon in 1958 and 1962, it would be wrong to discount entirely expressions of patriotic and social concern of the army leadership. The platitudinous statement of "National Ideology" formulated by the Defense Services Conference on October, 1958, on the eve of the first takeover, ran in part as follows:

"Man's endeavor to build a society . . . free . . . from anxieties over food, clothing, and shelter, and able to enjoy life's spiritual satisfactions as well, must proceed from the premise of a faith . . . in a political-economic system based on the eternal principles of justice, liberty, and equality."

General Ne Win's apparently reluctant assumption of the Premiership for a six-month emergency period at the time was accompanied by labored protestations on his part of loyalty to national unity, to democratic principles of government, and to socialist patterns of economic organization as set forth in the Constitution of 1947.

The emergency arrangement of 1958 was inaugurated by general consent of the Parliament because the likely alternative was a disastrous civil war involving rival contingents of the armed forces as well as contending political factions. Such a conflict would probably have entailed political and territorial disintegration as well as much bloodshed. When it was found that the limited six-months emergency period as provided by the Constitution afforded insufficient time for the army to restore orderly governmental processes and to arrange for new elections, the Parliament agreed, in February, 1959, under pressure of General Ne Win's threat of resignation, to extend the authority of the army for another full year. The action required the suspension of Ar-

ticle 116 of the Constitution, but the formal integrity of constitutional processes was maintained at Ne Win's insistence.

#### ASPECTS OF NU'S FAILURE AS PREMIER

Premier Nu's inadequacies as head of Burma's elected government during the full decade of 1948-1958 stemmed not from any lack of faith on his part in democratic principles nor from deficiencies of moral character. In terms of native intelligence, personal courage, sincerity of purpose, and his remarkable capacity to establish rapport with Burma's peoples, U Nu was adjudged by many to be the best leader available within the small governing circle of the Anti-Fascist Peoples Freedom League, which virtually monopolized political power during the first decade of Burma's independence. Nu's personal deficiencies as administrator, in other words, were widely shared by his political associates. Nu's shortcomings,<sup>1</sup> derived mainly from his general lack of awareness of what was involved in the effective implementation of policy decisions. He failed to establish priorities and to delegate substantive responsibilities, and was unable personally to exert the sustained effort required to insure that projects once initiated were brought to completion.

The task of governing post-independent Burma was far from easy, of course. The reconstitution of an effective bureaucratic-type administration on the traditional colonial model was hampered by a civil service weakly staffed and suffering from political interference. To such problems were added the totally unfamiliar responsibilities connected with a government-planned and directed economic development program. Burma's large-scale economic operations in colonial times had been directed primarily by alien British, Indians, and Chinese residents, since indigenous Burmese were generally unable to withstand such strenuous competition. Burma's indigenous post-war government proved woefully inadequate as an administrative agency.

Premier Nu's incapacities extended also into the political field. He entertained no adequate appreciation of the essential requirements in terms of organization and discipline to be met within both the ruling party itself and the government for operating a successfully functioning democracy. He aspired to play the role of leader of the people as a whole, operating above the political

---

<sup>1</sup> See Louis Walinsky, "The Rise and Fall of U Nu," MS.

battle and depending on the support of no separately organized personal mass following comparable to that developed by his political associates. He undertook, with obvious sincerity, to give expression to the conscience of the nation, denouncing inefficiency and corruption within his party following but without any effective exercise of discipline. He also aspired to the traditional kingly role as the patron of the Buddhist faith, withdrawing periodically to monastic retreats to recover his sense of personal direction and identity. The elected Parliament from 1948 to 1958 constituted little more than a rubber stamp for the ruling elite. Meanwhile local administrative agencies were seriously weakened in the performance of their routine tasks by irresponsible political interference.

As leader of the government, Premier Nu was impatient of administrative delays, since he lacked any realistic appreciation of the detailed requirements associated with the execution of policy decisions. Not infrequently, he adopted policies without adequate examination of the difficulties and complications involved. The result was irreparable waste in the utilization of the limited managerial talent available to the Burma government, along with the sacrifice of financial and material resources. Leaders of the government were responsible to neither the electorate (which was politically apathetic) nor to the elected representatives, but only within the small circle of the political elite itself. In matter of religious affairs, foreign policy, Nu brooked no interference from his colleagues.

Serious frustration within Rangoon's governing circles began to develop after 1955-1956, when the world market for rice suffered a temporary collapse following the cessation of the Korean War. Much of Burma's grain surplus, badly stored, proved unsaleable. Collapse of rice exports denied to the government the high profits previously realized from its monopoly of sales abroad, which income was essential if the planned development program was to proceed. Nu also became dismayed by evidence of flagrant irregularities connected with the general elections held in the late spring of 1956. In protest, he withdrew temporarily from the political and governmental arena for the ostensible purpose of regenerating the deteriorating political standards.

After he resumed the Premiership in early 1957, Nu became increasingly suspicious, irritable, and impetuous in relations with

his friends and associates in the Cabinet. Anti-corruptionist activity of the Bureau of Special Investigation, operating under Nu's personal direction, became in reality an instrument of bureaucratic intimidation. The secretive operations of the Bureau threatened to paralyze administrative initiative from the level of the Cabinet down to district officials. Nu's abrupt issuance in June, 1957, of a series of new economic directives without consulting the agencies concerned threw the entire development program into shocked confusion.<sup>2</sup> The new trend veered sharply away from state planning and toward the encouragement of private enterprise. Nu's arbitrary assertion of policy control, combined with his lack of administrative capacity and increasing personal irascibility, contributed to the irrevocable split which developed within the AF-PFL leadership in the spring of 1958

U Nu's near desperate political maneuverings to stay in office during the summer of 1958 was the prelude to the army takeover of control in September-October. Instead of bowing out as Premier when he lost the support of most of the ruling party in Parliament, he managed to put together a precarious majority by corraling political support from a number of highly disparate elements. He enlisted the temporary backing of the Leftist National Unity Front by promising amnesty to the Communist rebels. He also attracted the votes of the Rightist Mon and Arakanese nationalist factions by promising sympathetic consideration of their aspirations for political autonomy. When this patchwork majority began to disintegrate by August, 1958, Nu undertook to certify the annual budget by executive decree without seeking Parliamentary approval. The result was rising political tension and threatening civil war. The outcome was the transition to emergency army control.

When General Ne Win agreed with some reluctance to take over as emergency Premier until elections could be arranged, he pledged not only unqualified allegiance to the Constitution but also non-interference by the army in administrative and political affairs. He indicated that the top priority of his administration would be the curbing of insurgency, naming the Communists, the peoples Comrade Party (Leftist veterans' group), and the Karen National Defense Organization as the principal offenders. He also declared that the establishment of a functioning democracy was

---

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

prerequisite to the development of the desired non-totalitarian Socialist state based on justice, liberty, and equality, and the outlawry of capitalist exploitation of the people.<sup>3</sup>

#### THE RECORD OF THE CARETAKER REGIME

The published accounting of the eighteen months trusteeship by the army's Caretaker Regime constitutes an impressive document, even though its theme is excessively labored. Ne Win reorganized the rival Union Military Police units as a Union Constabulary, which was made to cooperate with the army in restoring order throughout most of the Union of Burma. A vast clean-up program was inaugurated at Rangoon to deal with an accumulated mass of garbage and other litter, including droves of ownerless dogs, which had for years polluted the atmosphere of the capital. Illegal hutments constituting serious fire hazards were torn down, and the squatter occupants were removed to new housing prepared in the suburbs of the city.

The Caretaker Cabinet was organized along non-political lines, with the headship of all but six of the twenty-five Ministries assigned to non-political civilians of experience and integrity. Approximately 150 officers of the armed services, mainly at the Colonel level, were assigned to work with the several Ministries. General Ne Win himself served as Prime Minister and headed the Departments of Defense and National planning. Second in line was Brigadier Tin Pe, who headed the three Ministries of Mines, Labor, and Public Works. Brigadier Aung Gyi also assumed broad responsibilities over development and trade.<sup>4</sup> Even following the army's eventual surrender of control in 1960, the Defense Services Institute and the military-operated Burma Economic Development Corporation continued to provide extensive economic services under restored civilian rule.

The Caretaker Regime curtailed many aspects of the grandiose program of economic development which had never really got under way. It sent home the team of American advisers who were responsible for drafting the plans and concentrated major attention on the improvement of agricultural output. The Pre-

<sup>3</sup> *Is Trust Vindicated? The Chronicle of a Trust, Striving and Triumph* (Rangoon 1960), 543-547.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 561-567. Army personnel were particularly numerous in the economic Ministries: 25 in the Department of Transport, Posts, and Telegraph, 21 in Trade Development, and a total of 43 in Public Works, Agriculture and Forests, Industries, and Supply.

mier assumed effective control over foreign trade by cancelling hundreds of import licenses held by phony Burmese traders, who merely sold their rights to Indians and Chinese. He also made an effort to reduce the prices of consumer goods, and suppressed dissident student political activities at the University of Rangoon.

The Regime's efforts to restore order and centralize governmental control were moderately effective. Particularly noteworthy was Ne Win's success in persuading the *Sawbwa* princes of the Shan States to surrender their hereditary prerogatives. They continued to exercise political authority, but the Constitution was amended to deny to feudal chiefs the seats previously assigned to them automatically in the Parliament's Chamber of Nationalities. Part of the government's inducement was the allocation of cash awards to the *Sawbwas* in compensation for surrender of their rights. At the conclusion of the Caretaker period, General Ne Win honored fully his pledge to return to constitutional rule by staging free elections. The population was obviously glad to be free from arbitrary military control, but many thoughtful persons conceded that a dangerous political crisis had been weathered and much constructive work had been accomplished by the army. The army's official chronicle of a vindicated trust was a proud one and not wholly unjustified.

#### NU'S FINAL PREMIERSHIP

Premier Nu's Union Party won an impressive victory in the elections held in late 1959 and early 1960. His principal political opponents were westernized doctrinaire Socialists, who could match neither his popular rapport nor the over-generous promises which he made to minority groups. Nu turned sharply conservative in his election campaign, disowning any support from the National Unity Front pledging the establishment of Buddhism as the state religion, and promising non-interference with the promotion of private business enterprise, covering a substantial period of time. He also repeated pledges made in 1958 to minority ethnic groups. These included plans for autonomous Mon and Arakanese states and further concessions of self-rule for the Shans and the Kachins. The fortuitous discovery of a white calf elephant in north Burma and its transference to the Rangoon zoo, a Buddhist portent of high good fortune added to the traditionalist pro-Nu swing of the political pendulum during the autumn of 1959.

Nu's huge majority in the election proved to be as much of an embarrassment as a help. His Parliamentary following lacked homogeneity of character and purpose, and his Cabinet proved correspondingly weak. During the ensuing two years of restored constitution rule, the Premier repeatedly was forced to the defensive by the varied demands of his heterogenous following. Lef-tist student unrest once more became vocal, and religious par-tisanshp got out of hand when monk-led rioters attacked Mus-lim mosques. Nu's promise of full toleration for minority reli-gious groups was not enforceable. Lackadaisical habits of admin-istration reappeared, along with garbage heaps and pariah dogs. The Premier's plans for economic development under semi-private auspices ran firmly aground, mainly because business confidence was woefully lacking. The new Four-Year Plan, published belat-edly in February, 1961, envisaged little government investment in new industrial enterprises. The economy stagnated. Minority ethnic groups held the Premier to his election pledges of a larger measure of self-rule. A bill for Arakanese statehood was prepared for consideration by Parliament in February, 1962.

During the course of Nu's final two-year tenure, the army leadership, still standing in the wings and wielding real power, gradually discarded its previously-affirmed faith in political democracy. It became convinced that Nu's government lacked both the will and the authority to hold the country together. It was, therefore, the cumulative effects of Nu's faltering performance both before 1958 and after 1960, coupled with the accompanying threat of political disintegration, that prepared the way for the military's assertion of naked dictatorship in 1962.

The immediate occasion for the army *coup* of 1962, was the Premier's attempt to permit the right of unfettered democratic discussion, conducted outside the bounds of the Parliament, with reference to minority demands for autonomy. The cause of democracy was thus discredited in the eyes of many nationalist Bur-mans by the tactics of its principal proponent. On March 2, 1962, Nu convened at Rangoon a conference of Shan political lead-ers, including a number of ex-*Sawbwa* princes, to consider plans for the future self-governance of an autonomous Shan state.<sup>5</sup> The Shan leadership included individuals whom Ne Win had previous-

---

<sup>5</sup> George Kahin, ed., *Government and Politics in Southeast Asia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1964), 106.

ly persuaded to surrender their hereditary powers. The *coup* leaders made no pretense of maintaining constitutional forms and democratic procedures, as General Ne Win had required in 1958. He declared flatly that representative government had been demonstrated to be unworkable in Burma, and that a Revolutionary Council set up by the army would henceforth initiate policy decisions looking toward the establishment of a socialist state. On the night of March 2, army officers arrested the leaders of the government, dissolved the Shan State seminar, and dismissed the Parliament. Constitutional processes were simply ignored.

Foreign visitors at Rangoon heard few expressions of regret at the time over the repudiation of democratic processes. Some spokesmen contrasted the tangible progress made under 18 months of the rule of the Caretaker Regime with the factionalism, confusion, and economic stagnation which characterized Nu's restored civilian control. In view of General Ne Win's previous record of effectiveness and moderation, coupled with his forthright anti-Communist commitment, and since no feasible alternative was available, the Western powers promptly recognized the *de jure* status of the Revolutionary Council government. Thus died the attempt on the part of independent Burma to operate a democratic system of government.

#### THE REGIME OF THE REVOLUTIONARY COUNCIL

The army leadership as a whole was less well educated and had enjoyed less intimate contact with the outside world than the displaced political leadership could boast. General Ne Win himself lacked professional military training and had known only limited contacts with the University prior to the war. He gained prominence as a close associate of U Aung San, Burma's national hero, and as one of the "thirty heroes" who aided the Japanese conquest and then assisted in their defeat. He came to the leadership of the army in 1949, when the professionally trained Karen commander was obliged to resign at the outbreak of the Karen rebellion. In subsequent years, Ne Win served for brief periods in Nu's Cabinet, but he demonstrated little interest in governmental routines, preferring the army life. The elite corps of graduates from Burma's post-independence military academy were for the most part too young and inexperienced to assume leadership. Many of the middle and junior officers had won promotion through the ranks, and the majority came from a peasant back-

ground. As strongly nationalist and traditionalist in their political and cultural orientations, coupled with xenophobic and socialistic overtones, the army leadership entertained little or no respect for politicians generally and even less for the older generation of Western-trained pre-war officials and professional men.<sup>6</sup> A genuine revolution had indeed occurred.

The strength of the eighteen-man Revolutionary Council which was set up in 1962 (all but two of whom were army officers) derived from the fact that the army had maintained its discipline and morale while the rival political elite had become hopelessly divided. The soldiers enjoyed the advantages of comfortable barracks quarters, access to superior clothing and health services, and social prestige extending beyond their own circles. Army leaders also gained additional respect as a result of their administration performance after 1958. They were capable of vigorous decision, and could act, presumably in the national interest, independent of political pressures and public opinion. The army elite included some men of independent judgment who did not always see eye to eye. Brigadier Tin Pe led the more doctrinaire Socialists, for example, while Brigadier Aung Gyi represented the gradualist moderate point of view.

The principal initial concern of the Revolutionary Council was to establish a unitary state. It would operate under a common system of law with a single budgetary program and would be held together by a tightly-integrated hierarchy of regional Security and Administrative Councils. Elements of the older constitution which the central Council chose not to ignore remained operative. The Council replaced the Cabinet; its Chairman (Ne Win) assumed the roles of both President and Premier; Parliament was dissolved. A new Chief Court was set up to replace the Supreme and High Courts; its role was to reflect the philosophies and policies of the revolutionary regime rather than to interpret the Constitution. It would hear appeals from lower courts on important criminal and civil cases. Responsibility for the promotion of law and order at the provincial levels was entrusted to the hierarchy of Security and Administrative Councils. These included as *ex-officio* members the chief military, civilian, and police officials of the locality, functioning under the chairmanship of the military officer. Such groups supervised the selec-

---

<sup>6</sup> Kahin, *op. cit.*, 108-109.

tion of local headmen subject to revocation of particular selections by the Home Minister. The local Councils were also responsible for encouraging the improvement of agriculture and animal husbandry. A comparable system was extended into the peripheral states of the Union, where the divisional military commander acted as chairman and local representatives were selected from the non-feudal political leadership. Such State Councils could establish their own administrative structure and maintain contact with the center via a States Liaison Committee. All appropriations would be allocated by the center for the realization of developed programs related to the needs of the nation as a whole.

The ideology of the Revolutionary Council regime emerged only gradually. The initial statement by Brigadier Aung Gyi on March 7, 1962, suggested that the military was still loyal to the spirit of the Constitution and to democracy, as well as being determined to establish a socialized economy. But the new socialist democracy was one under which the socialists would lead and the people follow. The Council's approach would be pragmatic rather than doctrinaire, seeking to create under conditions peculiar to the Burma scene, social and political organizations consonant with the basic goals of ending unemployment, improving living standards, and narrowing the gap between the wealthy and the poor. As stated officially and formally in *The Burmese Way to Socialism* (April, 1962), the contemplated nationalization of agriculture, industry, and communication and transport facilities, would be accomplished by degrees mainly via state ownership of economic resources, but also by cooperatives and collective unions or syndicates. The nationalist emphasis emerged in the statement that the Burmese would monopolize the limited private sector of the economy during the transitional stages to full socialization. Priority would be given to the modernization of agriculture and to industrial development.

For a time, the program of the Revolutionary Council contemplated the possibility of enlisting wide popular support. It made membership in the new monolithic political party open to all who would accept the ideology expressed in the *Burmese Way to Socialism*. Press comment remained free so long as it refrained from promoting opposition to the new regime, while political parties were allowed to continue existence even though most of their articulate leaders were held in jail. The public response was disappointingly meager apart from the support of the pro-Comm-

nist National Unity Front and a few opportunists drawn from other political ranks.

On July, 1962, the Revolutionary Council adopted a different tactic by creating the Burma Socialist Program Party. Candidates must obtain the endorsement of a member in good standing and must undergo a two-year probationary novitiate. In the end, membership was virtually limited to the personnel of the several armed services. Agencies of the BSP Party included a Control Organizing Committee and a Discipline Committee. The Communist pattern of Democratic Centralism failed to develop mainly because no local units appeared. A serious effort to enlist peasant support was nevertheless made through the Security and Administrative Councils. These were directed to obtain the cooperation of village elders and headmen in eliminating the oppressive landlords and intermediate political corruptionists allegedly characteristic of the old program sponsored by Premier Nu.

#### THE MORE RIGOROUS PROGRAM OF 1963

A number of factors contributed to the stiffening of the Revolutionary Council's program in early 1963. One was the realization that encouragement of voluntary economic cooperation and resort to half-way measures had failed to produce results. The general popular acceptance of the army's authority had been far from enthusiastic. Articulate elements of the civilian party groups, except for the National Unity Front, had not responded favorably and no revolutionary progress had been realized in the economy. Even when the NUF praised the new brand of Burmese Socialism, it was done from motives which were highly suspect. Proponents of democracy decried both military dictatorship and the machinations of the NUF. It was completely unrealistic for General Ne Win to expect that the revolutionary fervor of the pre-independence period could be revived and that civilians could be rallied to the leadership of the army in such a cause.<sup>7</sup>

The first dramatic expression of the stiffening of disciplinary standards and resorting to a program of overt coercion was the abrupt dismissal of Brigadier Aung Gyi from the government in February, 1963. The more radical Brigadier Tin Pe and his intelligent Communist adviser U Be Nyein, took over much of the

---

<sup>7</sup> Fred R. von der Mehden, "The Burmese Way to Socialism," *Asian Survey*, III (March, 1963), 129-135.

definition and direction of governmental policy and propaganda.<sup>8</sup> Workers must henceforth labor more diligently; students must apply themselves more effectively; teachers must establish higher standards and develop a more appropriate curriculum for the schools and University. A new Puritanical emphasis (ironic in the light of Ne Win's personal conduct) included the outlawing of public music and dancing, beauty contests, horse racing, and gambling. Secular concerns were accorded priority over traditional religious customs. A uniform 5½-day-week was established for offices, factories, and schools; the slaughter of cattle for food was permitted; religious pilgrimages abroad were banned for a year; the lay Buddha Sasana Council dedicated to the propagation of the faith was abolished. Businessmen were ordered to hold down commodity prices under threat of arrest, while doctors were required to register for service assignment by the government for periods of up to two years duration. Publishers (previously registered) were required to avoid arousing religious and racial antagonisms and offending the nation's moral sensibilities. The press must report the news accurately and also refrain from attacking the Revolutionary regime.

By August-September, 1963, virtually all articulate opposition leaders were confined in jail along with offending editors and publishers.<sup>9</sup> A principal item of opposition protest challenged Ne Win's generous offer of amnesty to Communist rebel elements without demanding their prior surrender of arms. None of the political prisoners was granted a legal hearing or trial, although selected individuals were released from time to time.

The new economic program of 1963, at first demonstrated commendable realism with respect to choice of objectives and the utilization of limited resources and managerial skills. Grandiose industrialization schemes were shelved and much caution was exercised in initiating new projects. Very little use was made of the credits available from abroad, particularly the 84 million dollar interest-free loan from China. In operations already established, incentives were provided for superior worker performance. Overt efforts were made to enlist the confidence of workers and peasants

---

<sup>8</sup> P.H.M. Jones, "Burmese Deadlock," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, (March 25, 1965), 557-560.

<sup>9</sup> *New York Times*, August 9, 1963. The arrested included AFPFL leaders U Ba Swe and U Kyaw Nyein ex-ambassador to the U.S., U Win, Chief Justice U Chan Tun (lay Buddhist leader), and the outspoken Edward Low Yone, editor of the *Nation*.

in patterns suggestive of Communist China by encouraging the airing of popular grievances in a series of local conferences initiated in February and March, 1963. Press and radio broadcasted the government's propaganda regarding economic ends and emphasized the need to hold officials and factory managers to strict accounting. The general response to the government's exhortations was apathetic if not warily hostile.

The most problematical aspect of the new program concerned the attempt to socialize business and manufacturing activities. The pattern virtually eliminated the private sector in industry, including joint-venture enterprises of large dimensions. Business and industrial talent was directed henceforth to seek employment in state-operated enterprises, where indigenous applicants enjoyed a distinct if not an exclusive advantage. The socialization of all banking facilities followed in due course, and the elimination of even minor shopkeepers came in 1964. But the Burmese Road to Socialism did not include the cancellation of cultivator land titles. In a continuing bid for peasant support, the Revolutionary Council, in April, 1963, approved the Peasant Rights Protection Law, which reserved cultivators' lands and implements from creditor claims. In another blow aimed at moneylender operations (largely Indian and Chinese), the Council allocated 700 million Kyats as loans to cultivators in 1963 on an acreage basis. Agricultural production enjoyed a temporary stimulation, but the loans were often spent for uneconomic ends, while the monopoly price paid by the state for rice output provided insufficient income to cover purchase of seed, fertilizer (if used), new equipment, and labor, plus a surplus for repayment of the loans. Many of the latter were defaulted. Continued careless handling of purchased rice by the Agricultural Marketing Board persisted. The army, like Nu's government, was simply unable to provide competent managerial talent to cope with the greatly expanded business activities of the state. Meanwhile, the experienced business community was completely alienated.<sup>10</sup> During the course of 1963-1964, several hundred thousand destitute Indian shopkeepers and laborers evacuated from Burma.

#### MINORITY RELATIONS

The Revolutionary Council faced a particularly difficult problem in attempting to attract minority support. The officially

---

<sup>10</sup> *New York Times*, December 30, 1963.

proclaimed policy of promoting national unity while permitting diversity of custom and language was not accepted at face value, mainly because the majority Burmans habitually refused to recognize the equality status of subordinate ethnic groups. It did not help that the *coup* of March 2 had violated the safety guarantees accorded to Shan political leadership which had accepted in good faith Nu's invitation to attend the conference seminar at Rangoon. Distrust increased when it became evident in time that the Revolutionary Council was prepared to use coercion as well as persuasion. Lower Burma's Karens resented the whole trend towards the Burmanization of dress, language, customs, and religion, as well as the poverty and niggardly resources which characterized the autonomous Karen state. They joined the National Liberation Alliance which operated along the Salween border with Thailand. It included the Karen National Defense Organization (KNDO), the Shan and Kayah state rebels, and eventually a revived Kachin Independence Army, dating from 1959. Other dissident groups were the nationalist rebels in Arakan and the Red Flag (Trotskyite) Communists in the same area, plus the Mons of Tenasserim, and the White Flag Communists in central Burma. The rebels lacked coordination, but military suppression of them was virtually impossible.

General Ne Win's efforts to conciliate rebel elements piecemeal, initiated in mid-1962 and continued persistently until November, 1963, were largely abortive. The Shans refused to forgive the betrayal of their leaders, including Sao Shwe Thaik, ex-President of the Union and a man of wide political experience, who died in jail in November, 1963. Communist spokesman, including a number of Burman Communists exiles transported to Rangoon in Chinese planes, demanded recognition of their separate political and territorial identity, a requirement which Ne Win refused to concede. The Kachin Independence Army's resistance was eventually blunted somewhat by kindness, but the government actually controlled little more than the urban centers and chief lines of communication within the Kachin country. The one tangible success achieved by the Council was the reconciliation arranged with the majority KNDO faction of the Karens in April, 1964, thus ending sixteen years of rebellion. It was accomplished by advancing promises to reconsider the boundaries of the Karen state once general pacification was achieved, to include Karens in local Security and Administrative Councils, and to expend a substantial portion of

the China-aid loan of 84 million dollars in Mon-Karen-Shan territory.<sup>11</sup> Projects included a sugar factory at Thaton, a paper mill at Moulmein, plus improved health facilities, and the construction of bridges over the Salween River. While the military regime achieved a substantial measure of stability by throttling all means of legal Burman protest, conspiracy and rebellion appeared likely to continue indefinitely among dissident ethnic minorities.

#### EDUCATIONAL POLICY

The Revolutionary Council inherited a sadly deteriorated governmental educational system. Standards of discipline and instruction were extremely low, especially in areas of languages, including Burmese, and scientific training. Only the mission schools were able to maintain reputable standards of instruction, which attracted the children of well-to-do families who could afford to pay the fees required. Disorderly student elements (crypto-Communists) dominated the Rangoon University Student Union (RUSU) prior to 1958 and kept Premier Nu, as *ex-officio* Vice Chancellor, perennially on the defensive. He himself had gained political prominence by heading the famous student strike of 1936. A favorite student complaint was the so-called three-F ruling, which suspended those who failed three successive examinations over the same material. Crowded classrooms and living conditions, coupled with the lack of books and the never-ending political agitation contributed to inattendance at classes and to the prevailing indiscipline.

Ne Win's Caretaker regime of 1958-1960 had introduced reforms calculated to improve the educational situation. It refused any longer to collect and allocate fees for the financing of RUSU activities and declared that no political activity would be tolerated. It brought back a reputable Burmese scholar from his post at Oxford University to become the new Rector of the University. In order to supplement inadequate tax funds, moderate fees were assessed for all schooling privileges above the primary level. But the modest gains realized by the Caretaker government did not long survive the return of the politicians to power in 1960. The scholarly Rector was the first casualty, for it was recalled that he had played a cautiously negative role in the 1936 strike. The relaxation of disciplinary standards under Premier Nu relieved im-

---

<sup>11</sup> *New York Times*, April 13, 1964. Mahn Ba Zan's Leftist Karen faction attacked the truce.

mediate tensions and some improvement in student attitudes carried over. Political efforts of the Leftist Student Union Front to foment riotous demonstrations over such extraneous issues as the Irian problem and Khrushchev's fall, enlisted a very meager response. As of early 1962, the average University student was apparently more interested in career prospects and in participation in regional or religious associations than in political partisanship. On the occasion of Ne Win's *coup* in early March, leading student organizations joined the NUF in offering support for the Council's newly proclaimed Socialist program.<sup>12</sup> The storm broke four months later.

Trouble developed in early July, 1962, shortly after the reopening of the University for the summer monsoon session. The immediate occasion was the imposition, on July 7, by the Revolutionary Council of curriculum changes, a required pledge of obedience, and a ten o'clock curfew for residents of the dormitories. The arrest of ten of the protesting Student Union leaders precipitated a riot on the Rangoon campus. A student mob estimated at 2,000 strong wrecked dormitory property, burned faculty cars, and held the Rector of the University captive for a time, until troops arrived to quell the disturbance. Encountering defiance, the troops at first used tear gas and then opened fire on the mob. At least 15 were left dead, and two score were wounded. On the morning following the rioting, an army demolition squad reduced the Student Union building, long symbolic of student freedom, to rubble. Spread of trouble to the Mandalay campus brought the closing of all branches of the University for a month, while special courts were set up to hear cases of alleged insurrection, plus crimes against safety and property, the national economy, and "Burmese culture."<sup>13</sup>

Army violence opened a rift with the students which would not close. Militant resistance came later to center in a Student Rights Protective Committee, formed in late 1962, after the University reopened.<sup>14</sup> In November, 1963, other riots occurred resulting in the complete closing of all branches of the University for almost an entire year, during which time a complete re-orientation of the program was undertaken. Hundreds of pro-

---

<sup>12</sup> *New York Times*, March 6, 1962; Josef Silverstein and Julian Wohl, "University Students and Politics in Burma," *Pacific Affairs*, XXXVII (1964), 50-65.

<sup>13</sup> *New York Times*, July 8, 11, 12, 1962.

<sup>14</sup> Silverstein and Wohl, *op. cit.*, 62-65.

testing students were jailed. Ne Win harangued educators to solve the problem of the irrelevance of the curriculum to Burma's needs, or to see it solved for them. The University senates at Rangoon and Mandalay were abolished.

The new educational program inaugurated in November, 1964, reflected the strong Marxist commitments of the government. The new policy was to assign students to those areas of their special competence which would fulfill the Socialist needs of the country. The nine designated fields of study included medicine, dentistry, and veterinary science, pure science and technology, economics and agriculture, education, and art. The Social sciences were placed in a straight jacket by the exclusion of those Western textbooks which allegedly presented capitalism and colonialism in a favorable light and the substitution of Communist works. The latter included the writings of Marx, Engels, and Lenin, *The Socialist Transformation of the National Economy of China*, plus *Cuba: Anatomy of Revolution*. Political Science courses concerned "Historical Materialism" and "Correlation of Man and his Environment." The High School curriculum was similarly revised in the direction of science and vocational training in agriculture and handicrafts.<sup>15</sup> The Moulmein branch of the University was made a four-year school with increased emphasis on science instruction, while agricultural training would be stressed at Mandalay and Rangoon. Admissions for liberal arts degrees were sharply reduced.

As of April, 1965, the Revolutionary Council decreed the nationalization of the total assets (premises, lands, vehicles, equipment) of some 130 private schools, including the leading missionary establishments. The government alleged that previously-prescribed registration and curriculum controls had failed to make such schools conform to established socialist standards of "life and morality." No foreign teachers would be retained.<sup>16</sup> The strong emphasis on Socialist indoctrination apparently influenced the Government also to cease granting visas for students to go to Britain and America, where they would make distracting contacts with non-socialist societies and might develop a disinclination to return to Burma, a trend previously thwarted only by the threat of forfeiting their \$10,000 security deposits required on

<sup>15</sup> *New York Times*, November 9, 1964; John Badgley, "Burma's Zealot Wungyis; Maoists or St. Simonists," *Asian Survey* (January, 1965) V, 55-58.

<sup>16</sup> *Far Eastern Economic Review*, July 1, 1965, XLIX, 12.

their departure.<sup>17</sup> The majority of the greatly decreased number of overseas students were now sent to Russia.

The Council's general statement of educational objectives emphasized demonstrating the dignity of labor, technological and scientific training based on individual competence and social need, modernization of agriculture and industry, and the promotion of fraternal relations between Burma's divergent ethnic and religious groups. In furtherance of these ends it was announced in June, 1965, that 1,000 volunteers would be enlisted from University science, engineering, and economics classes, to receive a stipended for vacation work in factories and mills, and a second 1,000 who would study rice cultivation methods. The top 300 students for the year would enjoy a two-months entertainment-study vacation program at a seaside resort concentrating on discussion of Burmese socialist philosophy, the socialist educational program, and the culture and customs of Burma's ethnic minorities. At the conclusion of the program the groups would visit factories and government offices, climaxed by a banquet given by General Ne Win in person.<sup>18</sup> Despite such inducements, few informed observers conceded much chance for reaching an early accomodation between the students and the Revolutionary Council regime.

#### NE WIN'S FOREIGN POLICY

Burma's foreign policy since the Revolutionary Council assumed power in 1962 has followed in general the same neutralist program of Premier Nu, but with significant variations. The army's concern that Burma not again become a battlefield in a world war was reenforced by the fear that possible political disintegration would expose the country to loss of territories to neighboring China or Thailand. Ne Win's awareness of the power of Communist China probably constituted the most important single element in his foreign policy. He was determined, as Nu had been, not to afford China excuse to intervene in Burma, propagandawise or militarily, and his strong socialist emphasis was no doubt calculated to provide added insurance. Rangoon nevertheless did not take sides in such extraneous cold war issues as Laos or Vietnam, China's violation of India's frontier, or Indonesia's confrontation of Malaysia. Nor did Ne Win's correctly friendly relations with China exhibit the rabid partisanship of Sukarno, or the

---

<sup>17</sup> *New York Times*, December 30, 1963.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, June 19, 1965.

obsequiousness of Cambodia's Sihanouk.<sup>19</sup> He continued to fight the Communist rebels in Burma and sharply challenged Red China's publication and broadcast of the Burma Communist Party's anniversary message sent on the occasion of China's National Day in October, 1964, congratulating Peking on the founding of the People's Republic. The published message included allegations that Rangoon's peace negotiations of 1963 had been sabotaged by "imperialism, reaction, and revisionism," and pledge that the new (Communist) Burma would be fully independent both politically and economically. Burma's independence of Peking was demonstrated by its vote in favor of the China-opposed nuclear ban treaty, and by the cancellation of Peking's consulates at Mandalay and Lashio.<sup>20</sup>

In the contest between the pro-Moscow and pro-Peking Communist factions, General Ne Win was most circumspect. He imprisoned the Russian-oriented leadership of the National Unity Front in November, 1963, and outlawed the organization entirely in March, 1964, despite its feigned earlier support of the Revolutionary regime. Rangoon in February, 1963, closed down the two Peking-controlled Chinese banks, which were active in promoting the Anti-Russian trend, along with all other alien and non-governmental financial institutions. The discontinuance of American and British library and language centers in 1964 was done presumably to avoid consenting to the establishment of a comparably Red Chinese "cultural center." Burma accepted China's offer of technical aid and the interest-free loan of eighty-odd million dollars, but proceeded to utilize only a small portion of the sum. Meanwhile Peking refrained from cultivating, at least openly, the allegiance of Burma's Communist movement (itself fragmented and weak), while maintaining good relations with the Socialist Revolutionary authorities in Rangoon.<sup>21</sup> A British observer remarked that "behind the fixed smile that Rangoon forever turns toward Peking, the teeth are often clenched."<sup>22</sup>

Associated with Ne Win's precariously neutralist stance was the presence of a substantial element of traditional Burmese xenophobia. Anti-foreign sentiment contributed to the expulsion in 1962 of such alien agencies as the Ford Foundation, the Asia Foun-

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, December 30, 1963.

<sup>20</sup> Badgley, "Burma's Zealot Wungyis," *Asian Survey* V, 60-61.

<sup>21</sup> P.H.M. Jones, "Peking's Southern Allies," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, XLVIII (April 29, 1965), 245-246.

<sup>22</sup> Dennis Bloodworth in *The London Observer*.

dition, the Rockefeller Museum project, the anti-malarial team of the World Health Organization, the British Council, and most of the Colombo Plan personnel. The reasons had little to do with opposition to what these friendly agencies were doing (vocational training was, in fact, a pet idea of the Ford group); the action stemmed rather from a feeling that the very presence of foreigners was objectionable. Simultaneously, restrictions were placed on the movements of all foreigners within Burma coupled with the prohibition of direct contacts between foreign diplomatic personnel and government employees.<sup>23</sup> The Fulbright Foundation was not abolished, but virtually no grants were made from its still-ample funds. Foreign visitors were discouraged by long delays in the granting of visas and by limiting the duration of the usual transit visa to 24 hours only. The Revolutionary Council obviously did not want foreigners around.

Another expression of Burmese xenophobia centered on the deliberate harrassment and expulsion of several hundred thousand Indian residents. Few of the long-time resident Indians were aware of their legal right to opt for Burmese citizenship and still fewer could afford the court costs of exercising that option. The cost of citizenship applications was estimated at some \$50, plus bribes. Without formal naturalization, Indian aliens were made liable, on pain of expulsion, to the payment of an annual fee of 50 Kyats (\$10) per adult, whereas the total family income seldom reached above \$120.<sup>24</sup> To these punitive financial exactions were added in 1963 the economic pressures exerted by the government's nationalization of all private shops and trading establishments and by preferential treatment accorded to indigenous applicants for jobs in all government-operated enterprises. In order to cancel the value of hoarded and expatriated Burmese currency, the Council, in May, 1964, declared valueless all outstanding currency notes above the ten-Kyat (\$2) denomination unless it was promptly exchanged at government banks for promised new currency. The move entailed unfortunate repercussions throughout the entire Burmese economic community, since few persons holding substantial amounts of money fully trusted the government's intentions.<sup>25</sup> Meanwhile Indian departees were forbidden to take out valuables on

---

<sup>23</sup> *New York Times*, April 21, 1962.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, November 21, 1962.

<sup>25</sup> *Far Eastern Economic Review*, June 3, 1965. The new currency issued in April 1965, included no notes above the 20 Kyat denomination, and indicated no signature or promise to pay in silver.

their persons; stomachs were ex-rayed as an enforcement measure. Among the 300,000 to 400,000 exiled Indians of 1963-1964 were professional men (lawyers, doctors, and educators) of reputable standing. There appears to have occurred no comparable expulsion of Chinese residents, except in the case of recent illegal entrants across Burma's northern borders.

The expulsion of Indian residents from Burma reflected the deep-seated popular hostility to their continued presence *per se*, supported in this instance by the alleged determination of the Revolutionary Council to eliminate all surviving remnants of colonial rule. The substantial injury suffered by the Burmese economy as a result of xenophobic policies was completely overshadowed by sentimental considerations connected with the reassertion of ethnic pride. The Indian Government lodged no vigorous protest, and even the hesitant initial complaints regarding confiscation of the properties of departees were never pressed. During a full two-year period, no Indian ambassador was actually resident in Rangoon. With the elimination of the close personal relations between U Nu and Pandit Nehru, Burma-Indian relations became considerably less than cordial.

The Revolutionary Council did not cancel all foreign aid as such. For a time, in 1964, American assistance was revived in the construction of the Rangoon-Pegu highway and agreement was reached in June, 1965, for American aid to construct an electrically-powered teak mill.<sup>26</sup> Japanese reparations were continued, mainly in the form of hydro-electric installations; Soviet and Yugoslav experts assisted in irrigation projects, along with some Colombo Plan aid. Israeli aid tapered off, although Burma's traditional friendly relations with Israel were maintained.<sup>27</sup> Presumably in order to avoid military dependence on the Communist bloc, Burma purchased its arms needs from NATO countries, particularly from West Germany. Burma's 100,000 man army was neither organized nor equipped to counter any massive Chinese invasion, but Burma's policy was designed to avoid any such risk. If Chinese pressure should increase, Ne Win would probably have recourse to appeal to United Nations action, backed up by the presence of American naval forces in the Indian Ocean, to which he has raised no objection.<sup>28</sup>

---

<sup>26</sup> *Far Eastern Economic Review*, XLIX (July 8, 1965), 99. The road project was discontinued in May, 1964.

<sup>27</sup> Badgley, *op. cit.*, *Asian Survey* V, 60-61.

<sup>28</sup> *New York Times*, December 30, 1963.

## THE SURVIVAL PROSPECTS OF BURMA'S REVOLUTIONARY COUNCIL

The relative stability of Ne Win's Revolutionary regime under present circumstances can be attributed in large measure to the absence of any feasible alternative. All political rivals of the regime are under police custody, and their respective party organizations have been outlawed. No public criticism of the actions or policies of the Council is permitted, and the mails are also kept under police surveillance. Despite the tenuous cooperation established between three of the ethnic rebel groups, Karens, Shans, and Kachins, there exists little semblance of cohesion between the nine discreet rebel movements, three of them Communist. No apparent combination of openly rebel elements could threaten the authority of the army-backed Council, although there appeared equally little prospect that the central authority could consolidate its control over all Shan and Kachin regions in particular.<sup>29</sup> General Ne Win made substantial efforts to identify his regime with the interests of the peasant population, from which the majority of his officer corps is drawn. His xenophobic approach was supported by a deep-seated anti-foreign popular response, and the exercise of arbitrary authority, however distasteful at any given moment, was more consonant with Burmese tradition than had been Premier Nu's faltering attempts to apply democracy.

General popular acquiescence in the authority of the army's Council did not indicate, of course, that Ne Win had attracted the positive support which he had tried to enlist. Confusion and tension were particularly widespread in the maladministration of the multitude of peasant loan accounts, a lending function handled prior to the war by the professional efficiency of the Chettyar moneylender caste. Difficulties of collection of loans and the many defalcations (more than one quarter) aggravated the tensions which inevitably developed between the cultivator-borrower and the official-lender. Collection difficulties forced the reduction of agricultural loans from 700 millions during 1962-1963, to 400 millions for the 1963-1964 season, while no price incentive was held out to encourage increased output. Resulting diminished production was accompanied by a corresponding loss of state revenue from its mo-

---

<sup>29</sup> The *New York Times* for August 22, 1965, carried a Reuter's dispatch from Rangoon mentioning nine rebel organizations, one each for the Karens, Kachins, Arakanese, Mons, and Chins, two for the Shans and three Communist groups. Kachin home guards were allegedly being armed with bows and arrows to repel attacks

nopoly of grain exports. Substantial production declines were experienced in oil-seed, sugar, and cotton output.<sup>30</sup>

Government-sponsored peasant seminars in 1964 exhorting cultivators to greater production efforts<sup>31</sup> served only to underscore the problem. Unless price incentives were offered to the cultivators, the only feasible way to enhance agricultural output would be the dangerous expedient of collectivization of family plots. An aggrieved peasantry denied a reasonable price for its produce and threatened with the loss of family-plot acreage could pose a challenge to any Burma government, especially if villagers could find cohesive leadership from politically-minded monks harboring their own grudges against the same regime.<sup>32</sup>

A less potent source of opposition to the Revolutionary Council would be the educated elite, the business and professional classes, ex-civil servants, Buddhist lay leaders and pagoda trustees, plus all persons aware of the importance of Burma's maintaining cultural and political contacts with the outside world. Cooperation between the elite and the displaced civilian politicians would be difficult to arrange, and elite collaboration with disgruntled peasants or with monastic traditionalists would be virtually impossible. If a substantial rift should develop within the army itself, all opposition forces might be able to coalesce for a time in challenging Ne Win's authority. Civil strife would nevertheless divide the Burman majority and do nothing to resolve the ethnic and ideological rebellions currently in progress. Some element of the army would probably continue in control whatever the political outcome.

Another criterion of the survival prospects of Burma's military regime concerns the success it can attain with respect to the economic development of the country. The outlook is far from promising. Production figures available for 1964, as compared to 1963, indicate that the favored public sector of the economy has not been able to hold its own and that the private sector, denied banking support and raw material allocations, registered a sharp 13.6% decline. Major losses were registered in sugar and cigarette production, in silk manufacture, and in salt output, along with a sharp decline in private building construction. Despite

<sup>30</sup> *Far Eastern Economic Review*, no. 114 (March 4, 1965), XLVIII, 363-364.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, Colonel Thaung Kyi, Minister of Agriculture, addressed one four-day seminar in February, 1965.

<sup>32</sup> Badgley, *op. cit.*, *Asian Survey* V, 55-58.

continued generous government loans to agriculture, fisheries, and textile production, business activity declined substantially in 1964, and only rigid controls kept prices stable.<sup>33</sup> Exports fell more than 10%, and the necessarily increased importation of sugar, cooking oils, and textiles contributed to the decreased purchase of capital goods. A few new installations were under construction, sugar and paper mills under the Chinese loan, and electrical installations from Japanese reparation funds, but the economy was slowing down.<sup>34</sup> The generally conservative financial policies followed by the Revolutionary Council since 1962, plus the prohibition of the export of Kyats by departing Indians, increased substantially Burma's foreign exchange reserves. The economy was not bankrupt but was generally stagnant.

One informed Burmese observer<sup>35</sup> has questioned whether any successful state-sponsored (socialist) development program can be pursued in Burma without eliminating traditional cultural barriers. Burma's most dedicated and arbitrary devotees of socialization have felt constrained at times to sanction their objectives by reference to traditional values. The Revolutionary Council, for example, justifies the outlawing of private profit-seeking (capitalism) on the basis of Buddhist condemnation of personal greed, the impermanence and unimportance of the material world as compared to the religious and spiritual. Here the Marxian emphasis on the economic interpretation of history simply does not fit. *Burmese Socialism* as defined by the Revolutionary Council relates to no Marxian worker-employer dichotomy and rests even less on the Communist insistence that party dictatorship should stem from a workers' and peasants' revolution. The army's policy is concerned basically with the preservation of Burma's territorial integrity, the elimination of colonial-capitalist elements (largely British and Indian), and the achievement of rapid modernization without undergoing the embarrassing necessity of answering criticisms. Burma's close allignment with China is based more on national security considerations, rather than on any common Marxist orientation.

Numerous contradictions suggest the incompatibility of component elements of the syncretic amalgam involved in the *Burmese*

---

<sup>33</sup> *Far Eastern Economic Review*, no. 118 (April 1, 1965).

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 126 (May 27, 1965) LXVIII.

<sup>35</sup> Mya Maung, "Socialism and Economic Development in Burma," *Asian Survey* IV (December, 1964), 1182-1190.

Road to *Socialism*. Burmans generally place little credence in the government's expressed concern for the popular good. Traditionally, political authority in Burma was one of the evils to be endured rather than an instrument of social welfare. Such skepticism prevails despite the efforts of no less than ten agencies of government ostensibly concerned with meeting peasant needs. In old Burma, social gradations were accepted as resulting from the inexorable operation of Karma (the law of deeds), while life's suffering derived from uncurbed individual desire rather than from the nefarious exploitation of capitalist or landlord. Furthermore, the new emphasis on scientific training is not easily accommodated to universal popular concern with spirit propitiation and astrology. Habits of agricultural production are closely associated with social and religious traditions, which reenforce the innate reluctance of cultivators to accept either advice or discipline.<sup>36</sup> Convinced Marxists such as Brigadier Tin Pe and Ba Nyein may be trying to profit from Russian and Chinese experience, but the Council's program is something other than an automatic and authentic expression of any alleged world Communist conspiracy.

Because the opposition to the Revolutionary Council stems from widely disparate sources and all persons considered to be a threat to the regime are in jail, coalescence within the perimeter of resistance is impossible to achieve. Among the last to be arrested in the spring of 1965 were former Brigadier Aung Gyi, one-time heir-apparent to Ne Win, and U Sein Win, sometime editor of the official newspaper, the *Guardian*. At least one abortive effort was made to enlist outside support for a revolutionary effort. Bo Set Kyaw, a moderate AFPFL Socialist purporting to speak for the educated Burman minority and restive elements of the *Sangha*, visited Washington and Paris in January, 1964. Since he was denounced by General Ne Win at the time as a counter-revolutionary, he was denied an entry visa by London and was accorded no official recognition either at Paris or Washington.<sup>37</sup>

#### RELIGIOUS DISSENT

The strongest potential source of opposition to the Revolutionary Council will probably come from Buddhist partisanship. Ex-Premier Nu cultivated lay Buddhist support as well as that of the *Sangha*, while Aung Gyi also established some rapport with the

---

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> Badgley, *op. cit.*, *Asian Survey* V, 58-61.

monks when he retired to a monastery in the Kachin state for three months following his political demotion in February, 1963. By contrast, General Win's partisans flatly rejected Nu's efforts to use Buddhist culture as a rallying center against Communism and they have ignored Buddhist sensitivities. Completely repudiated are Nu's strenuous efforts to elevate Burma to prestigious leadership in the Theravada Buddhist world by convening the Sixth Buddhist Council and by making Rangoon the headquarters of the New World Federation of Buddhists. Ne Win closed down the Rangoon Secretariat of the Federation in 1963, and the organization became an orphan in 1964 when Cambodian authorities objected to relocating the headquarters at Bangkok.<sup>38</sup> Ne Win refused to grant visas to Burman representatives desiring to attend the Congress of the World Federation which met at sacred Saranath, India, in 1965.<sup>39</sup> Similarly sabotaged was the Buddha Sasana organization, whose highly reputable leader, Chief Justice Chan Tun, was imprisoned as a counter-revolutionary in 1963.

Relations between the Council government and Buddhist elements became increasingly tense in 1964 in connection with Ne Win's efforts in April to force the religious orders to desist from all political activity. The requirement was protested and was accordingly rescinded a month later. Also resisted was the Council Chairman's efforts to force the registration of all monastic schools and their surrender to the government of both educational facilities and function.<sup>40</sup> On December, 1964, at Mandalay, the authorized Court of the *Sangha* moved to defrock a reputedly ultra-orthodox monk, possibly a government stooge, who inserted a newspaper exhortation to keep the *Sangha* undefiled by politics. The reaction of the Revolutionary Council was to cancel the authority of the *Sangha* tribunal and to set up meetings to convene in March and April, 1965, where leading Sayadaws (monastic heads) of Lower Burma would consider the approval of a proposed draft of a new constitution for the Buddhist Sasana Sangha Organization. Members of the new body would be required to carry identification cards.<sup>41</sup>

The resulting nationwide protest against governmental interference with affairs of the religious order took the form of a riot

---

<sup>38</sup> E. Michael Mendelson, "Buddhism and the Burmese Establishment," *Archives de la Sociologie des Religions*, no. 7 (1964), 85-95.

<sup>39</sup> *Far Eastern Economic Review*, nos. 114 and 115, March 4 and 12, 1965.

<sup>40</sup> Mendelson, *op. cit.*

<sup>41</sup> *Far Eastern Economic Review*, no. 128 (July 10, 1965), XLVIII, 499.

at Monywa in Upper Burma near Sagaing), where 150 monks attacked and ransacked the headquarters of the official Burma Socialist Program Party.<sup>42</sup> The protesting agitation then shifted to Rangoon and Mandalay, where the police intervened in late April to arrest a total of some 160 riotous monks. Several of those arrested were found to be ex-politicians in monks garb. The Mandalay District Religious Officer and his Assistant Director of Religious Affairs were also arrested. Four-hundred rounds of rifle ammunition were found in one pagoda premises along with some 70,000 Kyats worth of hoarded textiles.<sup>43</sup>

The surprising absence of any immediate outraged cry of protest against violent police coercion of the wearers of the sacred robe did not mean that the psychological shock was not severe. Such politically-minded groups as the Young Monks Association of Mandalay are not likely to disband in the face of police threats. Popular reverence for the Buddhist monks, even though politically infiltrated as had been the case in the 1920's rests on social traditions too deeply embedded to be casually dismissed. The inherent strength and independence of the *Sangha* derived from the allegiance accorded it by millions of Buddhist donors inhabiting virtually every community of Burma.

It seems highly unlikely that the army's exercise of naked coercion can long survive the alienation of virtually every important non-military element of the population, whether traditional or modernist. The Council's immediate successors may prove to be equally as arbitrary as Ne Win has been, but any permanent regime will have to come to terms with the difficult combination of demands that Burma must escape from its xenophobic shell by again opening its windows to the outside world, while at the same time the authorities must pay proper deference to values and preferences deeply embedded in the Burmese cultural consciousness. Only in such terms can the political situation in Burma be meaningfully understood.

---

<sup>42</sup> *New York Times*, March 6, 1965.

<sup>43</sup> *Far Eastern Economic Review*, no. 128 (June 10, 1965), XLVIII, 499.