

CHANGES IN THE POLITICAL LEADERSHIP OF BURMA

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INTRODUCTION

A QUICK GLANCE AT the modern political history of Burma reveals two linear developments. On the personal level, leadership has passed from the late General Aung San through former Premier U Nu to General Ne Win, while on the organizational level it has evolved from the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League to the Socialist party and finally to the Burmese Army. Active roles, both overt and covert, also were played by politicians such as Thakin Soe, Thakin Than Tun, U Kyaw Nyein, and U Ba Swe, as well as by various illegal political groups such as the Red Flag Communist party, the White Flag Communist party, and the People's Comrades' party. Each of these persons and groups has engaged in violent and persistent struggles ever since the beginning of the fight for independence; their goal, it would seem, has simply been to gain and maintain power. It is this ongoing struggle that will be the focus of this article. We will seek to describe the changes in Burma's political leadership from 1945, immediately following the end of World War II, to 1974, when somewhat unstable civilian rule was restored. Our emphasis will be not on the domestic, foreign, military, and economic policies pursued by those in power but on the personal traits and inter-personal relations evidenced by both the leaders and their rivals. All the sources and footnotes will be omitted to avoid making the article too cumbersome.

I. DO BAMA ASIAYON AND THAKINS

Burma's post-independence statesmen share the features of having: (1) led student movements in the 1930s, (2) participated in Do Bama Asiayon and carried out anti-British movements, (3) promoted anti-Japanese movements toward the end of the Japanese occupation, (4) joined the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League after the war, and (5) engaged in negotiations with the British to achieve independence. With such common backgrounds, such similar political ideas and behavior patterns, they were able quite easily to join hands when necessary in anti-Japanese movements and in negotiating with the British for independence. Once those objectives had been obtained, however, the common background also made them vulnerable to personal antagonisms, factional feuds, and organizational splits. It thus becomes not only interesting but essential to examine the common path taken by all Burmese political leaders in their search for power.

The prewar student movement sprang up and developed mainly at Rangoon University, particularly in the Students Union there, showing its greatest strength

in the student strikes of 1920, 1936, and 1938. The first student strike in 1920 came as a reaction to the University Act promulgated the same year, an act aimed at combining Rangoon and Judson colleges into a single university. The fact that the act would have provided for only one university in all of Rangoon, with a limited number of students all living in dormitories, sparked severe criticism. Many Burmese felt that this would make higher education available only to the children of wealthy families, totally excluding rural residents and poor families from the world of the learned. As a result, on December 5 about four hundred students from Rangoon and Judson colleges boycotted classes, demanding changes in the provisions of the act.

The 1936 strike resulted from an article entitled "A Hell Hound at Large," written by an anonymous person in the *O-way*, a student paper. The article brought to light a scandal on the part of a university board member. When the university authorities' demand for disclosure of the identity of the writer was rejected, both the editor-in-chief, Ko Aung San, and union president, Ko Nu, were expelled, a development which led students to boycott their final examinations on February 25, 1936.

The 1938 strike occurred during a labor offensive by oil field workers. On January 8, workers in Burma's oil wells struck, demanding higher wages and better working conditions. The strike lasted for eleven months, culminating in a demonstration by some two thousand workers on November 30. Among the demonstrators, four students at Rangoon University, including Ko Ba Hein and Ko Ba Swe, made agitation speeches in defiance of official warnings, and as a result were arrested and detained. Other students then marched on government buildings to demand that the four be freed and that suppression of the workers be halted.

The 1920 strike, led by eleven members of a student committee, included such later leaders as Bo Hpo Kun (who became head of the People's Volunteer Organization White Band) and U Hpo Kya (subsequently an educator at a nationalist school). Among the activists in the 1936 strike were Ko Nu (then an executive committee member of the Student Union, national premier following independence), Ko Aung San (later president of AFPFL), Ko Rashid (later a minister in a U Nu cabinet), Ko Thi Han (a minister in a Ne Win cabinet), Ko Kyaw Nyein (later vice-premier), Ko Hla Pe (later Bo Let Ya, vice-premier in one of the U Nu cabinets), and Ko Thein Hpe (later secretary-general of the Communist party). The 1938 strike was led by Ko Ba Hein (later a Central Committee member of the Burma Communist party), Ko Ba Swe (premier in 1956), and Ko Tun Shein (later Bo Yan Nain, son-in-law of Dr. Ba Maw).

Do Bama Asiayon was not so much an anti-British political association in pursuit of independence as a simple nationalist group concerned about being "Burmese." It grew directly out of the clash between the Indians and the Burmese in 1930. On May 7 of that year, Indian dock workers struck for better wages, and while they were on strike, a number of Burmese were employed on a temporary basis. The striking Indians resented the Burmese for accepting these

jobs and when the strike ended, full-fledged fighting broke out between the Indian and Burmese workers. The incident claimed some 250 lives—and left the Burmese with a strong sense of “Do Bama [We the Burmese].”

The actual Do Bama movement, started by a youth group led by Thakin Ba Thauung and Thakin Hla Baw, possessed neither clear political ideology nor strong organization at first. Nevertheless, it gradually gained in popularity, particularly after Thakin Ba Thauung ran successfully for the Parliament from the Shwebo District in 1933. And despite its meager beginning, the very nationalism that made it at first seem so narrow would transform Do Bama soon into a major anti-British, anti-colonial organization. Indeed, already in 1933 it took on a more solidly established nature, becoming the Do Bama Asiayon (Organization of We the Burmese). And in the years that followed, its Executive Committee came to include leaders of the first rank, such men as Thakin Ba Thauung, Thakin Thein Maung, Thakin Lay Maung, Thakin Ba Sein, and Thakin Tun Ok. It also became increasingly left-wing as it grew stronger, counting among its leaders such former Rangoon University Student Union leaders as Thakin Nu, Thakin Aung San, Thakin Kyaw Nyein, Thakin Thein Hpe, Thakin Ba Hein, Thakin Ba Swe, and Thakin Hla Pe, as well as such Communists as Thakin Than Tun, Thakin Soe, and Thakin Kyaw Sein. Its objective became the achievement of quick and unconditional independence for Burma.

Nationalism may have been the cement that bound Do Bama Asiayon together, but organizationally the group included all kinds of people—Royalists, Socialists, and Communists. The result was that as it expanded, internal feuds surfaced, particularly during the movement's third convention in 1937. While Thakin Ba Sein supported Thakin Nyi for the presidency at that convention, Thakin Mya backed Thakin Thein Maung, and the result was a split into two factions, one led by Thakin Kodawhmaing and Thakin Mya, the other by Thakin Ba Sein and Thakin Tun Ok. The objectives of the two factions remained identical, however; so both groups sent youth to Japan as World War II approached. Among the so-called Thirty Comrades who formed the core of the Burma Independence Army, twenty-one (including men like Bo Aung San, Bo Let Ya [Thakin Hla Pe], Bo Yan Naing, and Bo La Yaung) were of the Kodawhmaing group, while nine (including Thakin Tun Ok and Bo Ne Win) were of the Ba Sein faction.

II. THAKIN SOE AND THE BURMA COMMUNIST PARTY

It was in August 1939 that the first Communists' meeting was held in Burma. It was attended by six persons: Thakin Aung San, Thakin Soe, Thakin Ba Tin (Goshal), Thakin Hla Pe, Ko Ba Hein, and Mr. Nath. Thakin Thein Hpe, Thakin Than Tun, and Thakin Kyaw Sein also were Communists but did not attend this first meeting. Since the Burma Communist party was a secret society, however, a full-fledged program was not developed at first, in fact the organization quietly disappeared within a year of its inception. One reason for the short longevity was the arrests of the Thakins in 1940 under the Burma Defense Act. Included among those apprehended were such Communist leaders as Thakin

Soe, Than Tun, Goshal, Ba Hein, and Kyaw Sein, as well as other Thakins such as Nu, Ba Swe, Lay Maung, and Ba Sein. A warrant was issued for the arrest of Aung San too, but he managed to escape abroad under a disguise. The arrests did not fully stop Communist activities, however, for Soe, Than Tun, and Nu continued propaganda efforts among political criminals in the prison. Many of the leading Red Flag Communists in later years, men like Thakin Tin Mya and Thakin Hpe Htay, were strongly influenced by Soe at this time.

The Thakins merged with Dr. Ba Maw's Sinyetha party in October 1939 to form the Freedom Bloc. All members supported the anti-British struggle until the start of the Russo-German battle, but at that time they split over the issue of whether to side with the Axis or the Allies. Realists such as Ba Sein, Tun Ok, Lay Maung, and Nu (all nationalists), as well as Mya, Kyaw Nyein, and Chit (members of the Peoples' Revolutionary group) called for ties with Japan in order to throw off British rule. Communists such as Soe, Ba Hein, Than Tun, and Kyaw Sein, on the other hand, advocated temporary cooperation with Great Britain so as to first crush Fascist powers. The latter group's position was heavily influenced by the *Insein Paper* written by Thakin Soe, a document which characterized World War II roughly as follows: The three Axis powers (Japan, Germany, and Italy) are Fascist nations, while the Allies (Great Britain, the United States, and France) are capitalist countries. The first phase of the war thus involved primarily a struggle between the fascist and capitalist nations. But with German's attack on the Soviet Union on July 21, 1941, the war turned into a struggle between the fascist and a capitalist-socialist alliance. The Chinese Communist party under Mao Tse-tung had been fighting the Chiang Kai-shek forces (puppets of the United States) at first, but it too had ceased the civil war in order to confront the common enemy, Japan. Thus, the Freedom Bloc's policy of fighting Great Britain had become outdated. The new enemy was Fascist Japan. Burma must cooperate with Great Britain in support of the Allies who were friends of the Soviet Union.

The imprisoned Thakins were freed in May 1942, when the Japanese occupied Burma. Nu and Kyaw Nyein, who favored cooperation with Japan, left for Rangoon, while Thein Pe, who advocated resistance against Japan, left for India to seek contacts with the Allies. Goshal and Nath also went back to India, and Soe and Kyaw Sein remained in Burma to engage in anti-Japanese activities. Kyaw Sein and Soe, both Communists, did, however, exhibit several differences in their policies. While members of the Kyaw Sein faction carried out overt, organized activities and were consequently arrested by the Japanese military police, the Soe faction was exceedingly cautious. It was the Soe faction, moreover, which secretly re-established the Communist party as the promotor of anti-Japanese activities in August 1942. Most Thakins at this time were cooperating with the Ba Maw regime, which was set up by the occupying Japanese forces with Mya as deputy prime minister, Aung San as defense minister, Nu as minister for foreign affairs, and Kyaw Nyein as secretary to the premier. In fact, even some Communists cooperated; Than Tun was named minister of agriculture, Tin Tun, secretary to the home minister, Ba Hein, secretary to foreign minister,

and Ba Thein Tin the police chief of Thayet District. Not until late in the war did these people begin taking part in the anti-Japanese movements of the Burma Communist party—Than Tun at the end of 1943, and Ba Hein and Ba Thein Tin during mid-1944.

When Japan was defeated in May 1945, the Burma Communist party became a fully-developed organization. As the organization grew, however, internal strife intensified, particularly in the form of a challenge by Than Tun to the party's Secretary General Soe. At the party convention in July 1945, Soe's practice of bigamy became a major issue. Separated from his legal wife, Ma Khin Si, he had allegedly begun living with Ma Hnin May before a legal divorce had been obtained. This revelation sent shock waves through the rank and file of the party, and Soe was accordingly relieved of his duties as secretary general, dropped from the Central Committee, and suspended from the party itself. Than Tun selected Thein Hpe, who was still in India at the time, as the new secretary general, and further consolidated his position by seeing to it that many of his own men were named to the Central Committee. The party then adopted as its general plan a peaceful approach based on Browderism, rejecting suggestions of armed struggle as leftist adventurism. Soe, favoring a tougher line, demanded a Central Committee meeting, and when it was held in February 1946, he criticized Browderism as being opportunistic and branded its supporters as compromisers with imperialism. The party now generally accepted Soe's criticism as valid, reinstated him and selected him again as its secretary general. But the selection of members to the politburo now brought the feud fully into the open. While a majority faction led by Thein Hpe and Than Tun proposed a four-person politburo (made up of themselves, Soe, and Ba Hein), Soe vehemently opposed the appointment of Thein Hpe on the grounds that he was the one responsible for introducing Browderism into the party. The Thein Hpe faction countered with the suggestion that Ba Thein Tin and Than Pe be selected as the remaining members of the politburo, but Soe's allies on the Central Committee again balked. The Thein Hpe faction, enjoying a majority of the twenty-one-member Central Committee then took the bold and unilateral action of holding a Central Committee meeting at Than Tun's house and expelling seven of its members (Tin Mya, Htoon Than, Htoon Yin, Thein Lin, Thet Tin, San Nyunt, and Saw Mya)—all of them Soe supporters who had participated in the anti-Japanese movement from the very beginning and rendered a great deal of service in strengthening the party. Faced now with the difficult decision of whether to continue as secretary general of a Central Committee soundly opposed to his policy line or to join the seven who had been expelled, Soe decided to resign from the party. The result was the creation of the Red Flag Communist party. The majority faction, led by Thein Hpe and Than Tun, came to be called, by contrast, the White Flag Communist party. From his words and deeds Soe has often been called a Trotskyite, a dogmatist who brooks no compromise. In truth, it can be said that his simple and straight-forward personality cost him not only the party he had so painstakingly nurtured through its early years but also a chance to exercise power in postwar Burma.

III. CONFLICT BETWEEN THE PEOPLE'S REVOLUTIONARY PARTY AND THE COMMUNIST PARTY

While most Communists had advocated cooperation with Great Britain and resistance to Japan from the very beginning of the war, some of the Thakins sought Burma's independence through resistance against Great Britain and cooperation with Japan. The latter group called themselves the People's Revolutionary party. Their principal leader was Saya Chit (Thakin Chit); besides there were such influential figures as Thakin Mya, Saya Tun Shwe, Thakin Kyaw Nyein, Thakin Ba Swe, and Thakin Hla Maung—as well as some significant party members who also belonged to the Communist party, men like Ko Ba Hein and Thakin Thein Hpe. The basic strategy of the People's Revolutionary party was to first drive out the British with the help of Japan and then to declare independence. Social democrats, such as Kyaw Nyein, were less powerful in the party than were the Marxists such as Ko Ba Hein. Thus it became a quasi-Communist party in nature. The party did, however, contain certain elements that were incompatible with the Communist party itself, not so much because of ideological differences as due to personal antagonisms and feuds. The People's Revolutionary party also cooperated with Japan in both word and deed, so much so that the Thirty Comrades, a group which became the core of the Burma Independence Army (Thakin Aung San, Bo Yan Naing, Bo Ne Win among others), were selected and sent out by such leaders of this party as Thakin Mya, Thakin Chit, and Saya Tun Shwe.

Once the Japanese Army had occupied Burma, the People's Revolutionary party began exerting a great deal of influence in the Burmese Army. The core of the Burmese Army then consisted of the Thirty Comrades, high-ranking officers just back from Japan, most of them Communists or Communist-sympathizers. Among the best known leaders were Bo Aung San, Bo Let Ya (also known as Thakin Hla Pe; both of these two were among the original founders of the Burma Communist party), Bo Yan Aung, Bo Lin Yon, Bo Ta Ya, Bo Ze Ya, Bo Ye Htoot, and Bo Kyaw Zaw. The middle echelon officers who joined the army after it became the Burma Independence Army or the Burma Defense Army were, by contrast, mostly from the People's Revolutionary party, men like Bo Aung Gyi, Bo Maung Maung, Bo Aung Shwe, Bo Kyi Win, and Bo Chit Kaing. And it was these middle echelon officers who formed the Unit Group, a secret anti-Japanese organization within the army led organizationally by Bo Ne Win (one of the Thirty Comrades) and ideologically by the People's Revolutionary party, through Yangon Ba Swe and Kyaw Nyein.

The People's Revolutionary party and the Communist party harbored different hopes and plans for Burma's postwar development. The Communists believed in the possibility of winning Burma's independence through peaceful means, due to their wartime cooperation with the Allies in anti-Japanese activities; thus they advocated disarmament of the Burmese Army and the transfer of their arms to the British. The People's Revolutionary party, on the other hand, cast a sus-

picious eye on the victorious British, fearing that they would return to Burma, and then claiming that it was inconceivable that the British would grant independence to Burma through negotiations. Their approach thus was to oppose handing arms to Great Britain. This divergence of approaches caused some Communists like Thakin Lwin, U Ko Ko Gyi, and Bonbawk Tha Gyaw, men who were skeptical about the Communist party's peaceful approach, to defect and join the People's Revolutionary party.

The People's Revolutionary party, having been formed in 1939, was reorganized as the People's Independence Socialist party on September 1, 1945 by Thakin Mya, U Ba Swe, and U Kyaw Nyein. It was made into a legal organization for two reasons: to enable it to carry out overt activities, and to facilitate organizational expansion in order to meet the Communist challenge. The new party's slogans called for permanent peace and independence for Burma, based on socialism. Its first president was Thakin Mya, the secretary general was U Ba Swe, and the Central Committee consisted of twenty leaders, including Thakin Tin, Thakin Lwin, Thakin Chit Maung, Yangon Ba Swe, Thakin Kyaw Dun, Thakin Lun Baw, Thakin Pan Myaing, and U Ko Ko Gyi—many of these being men who had been active in the student strikes of 1936 and 1938. Despite its lofty goals, however, the Socialist party was unable to pose a viable challenge to the Communists. While the Communist party had successfully organized peasants and urban workers through the creation of the Burma Workers' League (chaired by Thakin Ba Hein) on May 30, 1945 and the Burma Peasant League (chaired by Thakin Than Tun) on July 28, the Socialist party was unable to form any such mass-based organizations. It did become active in trying to organize peasants and workers after July 10, 1945 when Socialist party efforts to merge with the Communist party were rebuffed, exacerbating tensions and rivalry. But those efforts were never as successful as leaders might have hoped. Only after October 1946, when the Socialist party was able to expel the Communist party from the united-front Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League, did the party begin to be able to exert a direct influence on the political situation in Burma.

IV. THE ANTI-FASCIST PEOPLE'S FREEDOM LEAGUE AND GENERAL AUNG SAN

General Aung San, commander-in-chief of the Burma Independence Army and the Burma Defense Army as well as the defense minister under Ba Maw, originally embraced Communist ideology; indeed he was at one point selected the secretary general of the Communist party and in 1944 was chosen along with Thakin Than Tun to be a member of the Central Committee. He has already left the party though by July 1945, when it held its second convention. One of the reasons for his shift was the difficulties members of the Communist party, especially Thakin Soe, caused for the Burmese Army in its anti-Japanese struggles. According to his elder brother Aung Than, Aung San remained sympathetic with the Communist party but developed a feeling of total disdain for Soe. And since Aung San controlled the powerful Burmese Army, he probably felt no need

of depending on any political party for strength. His most pressing problem, in fact, was to avoid possible confusion in the army's command route by preventing the Communists and the People's Revolutionary party from engaging in organizational activities within the army. In other words, one of the principal reasons for Aung San's dissociation from the Communist party was to prevent the army from being unduly influenced by any one political party and to thereby secure the power of command firmly under his own control. He was also able thus to detach himself from both factional feuds within the Communist party and rivalries between the Communists and the People's Revolutionary party. This did not mean, however, that he was unaware of the importance of organizations; his own experience with the Do Bama Asiayon had taught him how important they were. He merely stood aloof from rivalries, even while eagerly preaching integration of the Communist party and the People's Revolutionary party, both of which claimed independence as their objective.

In truth, the anti-Japanese movement in Burma remained relatively ineffective due to Japan's rigid occupation policy. And efforts in behalf of independence were further hampered by the fact that there existed no adequate mutual interchange between the various anti-Japanese organizations; each tended, unfortunately, to act on its own. To combat this problem, General Aung San met with Soe, Than Tun, and Ba Hein among others during the first week of August 1944 in the barracks of Pégú to discuss how the anti-Japanese movement could be strengthened. After repeated meetings with representatives of both the People's Revolutionary party and the Communist party, he finally succeeded in forging a united-front organization against Japan—a body that came to be known to Indians as the Burma Patriotic Force, to British as the Anti-Fascist Organization, and to Americans as the Anti-Fascist League. Through this group, the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL), Burma at last was able to foment successful anti-Japanese uprisings and to engage in fruitful negotiations with Great Britain for independence.

Great Britain revealed its plans for the future of Burma in a white paper issued on May 17, 1945. The document stipulated that the governor-general would hold all the power for the coming three years, after which the prewar assembly and election system would be restored. The Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League refused, however, to accept these terms, demanding in a convention held on August 19 at the Naythuyein movie theater on the Royal Lake that an interim government be established at once, that an assembly be convened at an early date to promulgate the Constitution, and that full independence be granted. The convention called also for an end to military rule and the transformation of the Burmese Army into a regular army. When Governor-General Dorman Smith returned to Burma on October 16, he asked the AFPFL's cooperation in the formation of the Executive Council to advise the governor-general. But AFPFL refused, demanding instead that an election be held immediately, that Burma be treated just like India and that the AFPFL be allowed to select eleven of the fifteen members of the Executive Council as well as the home minister. Most of these demands were refused, and the AFPFL began

applying more and more political pressure on the governor-general.

Then in September 1946, the police went on strike, demanding higher wages. They were followed by workers on the railways, in the postal service, at the government printing house, and finally by general government employees. And at last, a general strike eventuated on September 23. The new Governor-General Hubert Lance then asked for the AFPFL's cooperation in bringing the strike under control, since it was severely disrupting administrative processes. And this time the AFPFL complied, but only after a new Executive Council was formed on September 27 to include Aung San and five other AFPFL leaders. The general strike was brought to an immediate halt.

AFPFL participation in the Executive Council served, however, to bring about a split in the league itself, as did the continuing rivalry between the Communist party and the Socialist party. The Socialist party had been more cautious to start with regarding the September strike, fearing that the time for such action was not yet ripe, while the Communist party had insisted on moving ahead toward the general strike. It was also the Communist party that decided first to cooperate with the governor-general in forming the new Executive Council. And with the commencement of discussions over how various groups should be represented on the Executive Council, the discord came into the open. While the Communists advocated the selection of two members from the Communist party and two from the Socialist party, along with General Aung San and one neutral member, the Socialist party insisted on one each from the Communist and the Socialist parties. The latter won, and Thakin Mya and Thakin Thein Hpe became members of the Executive Council, representing the Socialist party and the Communist party respectively. After about three weeks, however, the Communist party suddenly changed its stand, giving into criticism from both Thakin Soe's Red Flag Communist party and the Indian Communist party to the effect that their participation in the Executive Council constituted an opportunistic betrayal of the September strike and that they were thereby showing themselves willing to share the fruits of victory with British imperialism. Writing in the Communist party paper, Thakin Than Tun accused General Aung San of destroying the general strike and playing traitor to the revolutionary cause. Thakin Kyaw Nyein of the Socialist party retorted with a charge that Than Tun was merely miffed because he had not been selected to the Executive Council himself. Aung San attempted to settle the feud by securing an apology from the Communist party, but the party refused to give it. The AFPFL then convened an executive committee meeting at the request of several Socialist leaders such as Kyaw Nyein, and decided to expel the Communist party for allegedly trying to split, and thus destroy, the united front. The announcement was made in the name of Thakin Nu, and from that time on, the Communist party began a decline toward oblivion. Rivalry between the Socialist party and the Communist party had turned into a struggle between the Communist party and the AFPFL, with the Socialist party coming out far ahead.

The AFPFL next accelerated its anti-British struggle within the Executive Committee. In December of 1946, British Premier Clement Atlee invited leaders

of the AFPFL, including Aung San, Thakin Mya, and Kyaw Nyein, to Great Britain to discuss Burma's future. Their talks lasted until January 27, 1947, when the Aung San-Atlee Agreement was signed, stipulating that an election would be held in April to materialize the Constituent Assembly, that the Executive Committee would be recognized as the interim government and that Burma would be granted home rule as Dominion. On returning to Burma, Aung San dealt with the problem of integrating the minority group areas in Panglong, Shan State, on February 12, then conducted an election for the Constituent Assembly on April 9. The assembly met on June 16 and began drafting the Constitution. During the cabinet meeting of July 19, however, as preparations were moving into full swing, General Aung San was assassinated, along with Thakin Mya, U Razak, Mahn Ba Khaing, U Ba Win, U Ba Choe, and Sao Sam Htum. The mastermind behind the assassination was determined to have been U Saw, a pre-war premier under British rule and an Executive Committee member who had refused to sign the Aung San-Atlee Agreement on the grounds that it was a sellout to Great Britain. U Saw was executed on May 8, 1948, with some including Aung San's elder brother Aung Than, claiming that he had been but a tool of the colonialists.

V. PREMIER U NU AND THE SOCIALIST PARTY

Following the death of General Aung San, the governor-general requested Thakin Nu, then the chairman of the Constituent Assembly, to form a cabinet. The U Nu cabinet had fourteen ministers, including Bo Let Ya as defense minister, Bo Hpo Kun as education minister, Thakin Tin as agricultural minister, and U Kyaw Nyein as home minister. Nu signed the fifteen-article Nu-Atlee Treaty in London on October 17, a document which provided a detailed schedule for independence.

Once the AFPFL government had become firmly established under U Nu, the Communists mounted an attack. They were entirely opposed to the Nu-Atlee Treaty, which provided compensation for requisitioned British properties, permanent stationing of British military advisors, and port-calls by British aircraft and warships. Calling the treaty as a traitorous act of submission to British imperialism, the Communist party began to advocate violent overthrow of the government, and the complete elimination of AFPFL leaders. This new and radical line actually grew out of the Southeast Asian Youth Conference and the Indian Communist Party Convention held in Calcutta, India, from February to the early part of March 1948. It seems to have been influenced by the establishment of Cominform in September of the previous year and by Andrei Zhdanov's advocacy of armed struggle. On March 13, Than Tun called for overthrow of the AFPFL and for armed struggles, in front of 75,000 peasants gathered in Pyinmana for the Second National Convention of the Burmese Peasant League. And in Rangoon, Goshal began leading a strike. Home Minister Kyaw Nyein, determined to avoid a civil war, ordered arrests of principal Communist leaders on March 28, whereupon some of them, including Than Tun and Goshal, went

underground, thus commencing the armed revolution of the Burma Communist party. In truth, however, this tactic only led the party further away from the power center, hindering rather than aiding in its efforts to take control.

After the assassination of Thakin Mya and General Aung San in July 1947, U Ko Ko Gyi was selected president of the Socialist party. His tenure, however, was a stormy one. For, like the Communists, the Socialists had become faction-ridden, especially so after winning the leading position in the AFPFL on September 28, 1946. Internal strife had manifested itself especially in a rivalry between the Union Group and the Commune Group—the former being comprised mainly of former executives in the University Student Union (U Kyaw Nyein and U Ba Swe among others), the latter being made up of Marxist-Leninists, like U Ko Ko Gyi. The rivalry grew so intense that U Ko Ko Gyi was forced to resign on July 1, 1948, allegedly over the embezzlement of 4 million kyats by his undersecretary of Trade and Transportation U Saw Lwin, but more probably because men like Kyaw Nyein feared that U Ko Ko Gyi's group was growing strong enough to form a splinter group and thus persuaded Premier U Nu to effect his downfall.

Internal strife continued even after U Ko Ko Gyi left the party, however, coming into the open with the onset of the Korean War in 1950. Some forty-three leftist members, including Thakin Lwin, Thakin Chit Maung, and Thakin Hla Kywe, supported the cause of the Soviet Union and North Korea; so when other members such as Kyaw Nyein backed the U.N. side, the leftists left the party (December 7, 1950) and formed their own Burma Workers and Peasants party (known also as the Red Flag Socialist party). Kyaw Nyein, after consulting with Nu, immediately expelled them from the AFPFL. The issue did not end there, however; for the formation of the BWPP signaled the emergence of a new element in the assembly critical of the one-party rule of the Socialists. The new element set about trying to consolidate its position sufficiently to reform the prevailing political pattern, which had until then precluded all possibilities of any change in power.

In November 1955 the National United Front (NUF) was formed by ten political groups, including the BWPP (Thakin Lwin, Thakin Chit Maung, U Ba Nyein, and Bo Mya Thwe), the People's United party (U Thein Hpe, who had left the Communist party in opposition to its armed struggle line in 1948), and the Justice party (led by President U Aye Maung). The NUF announced the following objectives: (1) halting the civil war, (2) securing democracy, and (3) achieving national unity. In contrast to the AFPFL, which had suppressed dissent by force, the NUF called for a peaceful approach for attaining internal tranquility through negotiations. This approach appealed to the populace, which by then had grown impatient with the prolonged civil war, and at the second general election held on April 27, 1956, the NUF gained some 1.2 million popular votes. This brought them only forty-eight seats in the assembly, but such a show of popular support startled U Nu. The public, he concluded, had grown critical of the AFPFL due to its long reign and problems with corruption. U Ba Swe and U Kyaw Nyein, on the other hand, interpreted the election results as

a reflection of a drift in the Communist vote toward the opposition front. The difference in these two analyses of the 1956 election would, in time, create a new split in the AFPFL.

The core of the AFPFL was made up of four persons: U Nu, U Ba Swe, U Kyaw Nyein, and Thakin Tin. Although they proved themselves a cohesive unit during the period of political instability and vigorous opposition from 1948 to about 1952, the sense of unity evaporated as external perils and the sense of crisis gradually waned. Personal antagonisms came to the fore, with conflict between U Nu and Thakin Tin on one hand and U Kyaw Nyein and U Ba Swe on the other, growing not so much from ideological or policy differences as from purely personal animosities. The conflict developed finally into a split in 1958, and on June 3 of that year fifteen ministers and twenty-two secretaries of the Ba Swe-Kyaw Nyein faction resigned. U Nu accordingly invited the NUF to talks and sought their cooperation, seeing that the Nu-Tin minority faction would not be strong enough to stay in power without at least some opposition support. A non-confidence motion which U Ba Swe presented to the assembly against the U Nu cabinet on June 9 failed, but the tally was 119 to 127, a difference of only eight votes. The NUF had saved the U Nu regime; yet that body too was less than unified. Ever since discarding its policy of halting the civil war and negotiating with the rebels, the NUF had been plagued by internal disputes—a problem made worse by the fact that it had grown out of various small groups, and had experienced a great deal of internal faction building. When the assembly convened at the end of August to discuss the coming year's budget, U Nu was not at all certain that he would be able to manage the session; for the support of the NUF was faltering. He considered, therefore, the idea of dissolving the assembly, calling a general election, and deciding on the budget through presidential fiat. U Nu had already gone on record during the first week of June, however, to the effect that anti-government organizations would be legalized as long as they handed in their arms and discontinued the armed struggle, and in accordance with the Amnesty Decree promulgated at the end of July, some three thousand rebels of the People's Comrades party (the former White PVO) and one thousand of the Mon People's Front party had surrendered on August 15. All of this made immediate elections problematical. The army was dissatisfied with the decree, feeling that it undermined its long-term efforts at securing law and order. And the now-legal People's Comrade party could be expected to join with other leftist elements which had maintained contact with the underground Communist party in making a conspicuous electoral advance. The army core close to Ba Swe-Kyaw Nyein faction accordingly started an effort to topple the U Nu government, the result being that on September 26, U Nu announced over the radio that he had requested General Ne Win to form a new cabinet which would administer a general election and secure law and order. U Nu thus avoided the imminent coup d'état by the army.

VI. ARMY RULE AND GENERAL NE WIN

On October 28, 1958 the assembly convened and approved the Ne Win cabinet.

The cabinet had only thirteen ministers, none of them professional statesmen. The government was dominated instead by a lot of army officers: Tin Pe, Maung Maung, Aung Gyi, Saw Myint, Kyaw Soe, Chit Myaing, Khin Nyo, and Tun Sein among others. A number of leftist politicians were arrested, including the NUF Secretary General Bo Mya Thwe, and such leading People's Comrades party members as Bo Ohn Tin and Bo Nyun Tin. And as a result anti-government organizations once again began full-fledged military operations. It was estimated that there were 3,000 White Flag rebels, 750 Red Flag, and 4,000 KNDO's at this time. During the first fourteen months of the new military rule 1,872 rebels were killed, 1,959 wounded, 1,238 arrested, and 3,618 forced to surrender. Army power also was used to insure the execution of various policy measures.

In the general election of February 1960, the Pyidaungzu party led by U Nu registered an overwhelming victory, bringing the U Nu regime back to power again. Confusion continued to dominate the political scene, however, particularly over such issues as whether Buddhism should be established as the national religion and whether minority groups demands for greater autonomy should be met. In order to bring the confusion under control, the army carried out a coup d'état under General Ne Win on March 2, 1962. A Revolutionary Council made up entirely of high-ranking military officers was formed, with Ne Win as its chairman. The Parliament was dissolved the next day, and all legislative, administrative, and judicial powers were entrusted to General Ne Win.

The establishment of this Revolutionary Council was a reaction to the problems experienced under parliamentary democracy and party politics since independence. The council's policy therefore was first of all to negate and annul various measures that had been pursued by the earlier cabinets. The first such act was to render ineffective the Constitution, on which parliamentary politics had been based and to dissolve the Parliament where parliamentary practice had been most evident. The Revolutionary Council's stated principles now denied the parliamentary system, advocated the establishment of a social democracy with peasants and workers at its core, and advocated the nationalization of means of production as well as the establishment of a socialist economic order. The Burma Socialist Programme party (BSPP) became the council's political arm, and on March 28, 1964 all other existing political parties were dissolved. Moreover, in order to avoid factional feuds, all professional political figures were denied admittance either to the Revolutionary Council or to government administrative bodies. These groups would henceforth be manned and run only by military personnel. In order to protect independence and avoid the possible dismemberment of the country through secession, all the state councils and governments formed by the minority peoples were replaced by state committees led by district army officers. Many politicians were arrested on the day of the coup too, including President Mahn Win Maung, Premier U Nu, Chairman of the Upper House Sao Hkun Kyi, Lower House Chairman Mahn Ba Saing, and many Parliament members from Shan State. Additional political leaders were arrested and imprisoned later—as soon as they said or did anything suggesting anti-government sentiments. The party to which they belonged made no differ-

ence at all. In 1963 Bohmu Aung of the Pyidaungzu party as well as U Ba Swe, U Kyaw Nyein, and Bo Khin Maung Gale of the AFPFL were arrested.

The most urgent task facing the Revolutionary Council was the restoration of internal peace; and to achieve that they determined to halt the armed struggles by various anti-government organizations—probably the biggest obstacle to post-independence nation-building. The first act in this regard was the Amnesty Decree, freeing some five thousand political prisoners throughout the country. Since the decree was made applicable to all who would surrender by July 1, 1962, many anti-government organizations availed themselves and surrendered. The second act, announced on June 11, 1963, was to call for negotiations among all the dissenting organizations. Groups responding this time included both the Red Flag and White Flag Communist parties, the KNDO of the Karen tribe, the KIA of Kachin tribe, and the SSA of Shan tribe. The negotiation failed with all groups, however, except the Kothulay Revolutionary Council led by Saw Hunter Thahmwe. A third act then followed, namely the launching of actual military attacks on the rebels in order to completely suppress them. The White Flag Communist party, which had established a liberated base in the southeastern area of the Pegu Mountains between 1967 and 1968, lost many of its politburo and the Central Committee members, including Bo Zeya, Nath, Yebaw Aung Gyi, and Thakin Tin Tun, during the siege operation of the 77th and 88th divisions. The party organization was damaged severely. In 1969 other vigorous military operations almost completely broke down the organization of the Communist-oriented Karen KNUP.

The Revolutionary Council also launched a project in 1963 to nationalize important private enterprises and thereby establish a socialist economy. The external trade, banks, collection and sale of rice and timber were nationalized in 1963 and 1964. In 1968 various factories were also nationalized. This economic policy meant, in effect, acquisition of Indian and Chinese interests and Burmanization of the economy. In the agricultural sphere, the Revolutionary Council promulgated a Tenancy Act, transferring authority for tenant selection from landowners to village land committees. A Peasants Rights Protection Act was promulgated too, to forbid both land seizure and agreements calling for fifty-fifty rent-payment in kind.

The personnel policy of the Ne Win regime was characterized by drastic promotions and the giving of appropriate awards and punishments. Military awards were based on the suppression of rebels, civilian awards on loyalty to the army's rule. Seniority was not a factor in making top appointments. Among conspicuous examples of drastic promotions were the cases of Lieutenant Colonel Maung Lwin, promoted from deputy secretary of welfare to the Revolutionary Council in 1963, and Dr. Nyi Nyi, a Rangoon University professor, who became first the director of the Higher Education Department of the Education Ministry, then secretary, and finally deputy minister of that ministry. Punishment for failures was equally severe and dramatic, a situation attested to by the fact that only six of the original sixteen Revolutionary Council members (excepting General Ne Win himself) still held membership on the council at the time of

the July 1971 reshuffling. Exceptional treatment was not even granted to such elevated men as Brigadier Aung Gyi, the deputy army chief of staff, reputed to be second in strength only to General Ne Win himself, and Brigadier Tin Pe, widely regarded as the rival of Aung Gyi. No past achievement, however great, was sufficient to atone for a single failure. All power quite obviously was concentrated in the hand of General Ne Win. The existence of a ready supply of reserve officers made key changes in the personnel of the military government rather easy to carry out. Senior officers were readily replaced by energetic men of the junior class. The source was inexhaustible. And yet the seat of the chairman of the Revolutionary Council remained unshaken, monopolized by General Ne Win. The Burmese Army became, in actual fact, his immense supportive organization.

General Ne Win began preparing for the transfer of power to civilian hands in 1971. The first convention of the Burmese Socialist Programme party, held in June of that year, transformed the body from a party of cadres into one with a democratic membership. Semi-members of the party now were allowed to become full members, and restrictions were relaxed—with a resultant increase in party membership from 859 in July of 1970 to 73,640 a year later. In September 1971, a 97-Members Committee was organized to draft a new Constitution. This committee was divided into fifteen sub-committees, each headed by a member of the Revolutionary Council and each responsible for holding public hearings throughout the country. Then in April 1972, General Ne Win and twenty-one other high-ranking officers (including the members of the Revolutionary Council, as well as the ministers and vice-ministers in the revolutionary cabinet) resigned from their military posts as another step toward the power transfer. To the post of chief of staff of the Burmese National Army, which had been held by General Ne Win for twenty-two years since February 1949, was promoted Brigadier San Yu, the deputy chief of staff of the army.

The drafting of the Constitution also went smoothly. The fourth draft, submitted to a two-week-long national referendum during the second half of February 1973, received the support of over 90 per cent of the eligible voters. Then during the fifteen days from January 27 to February 10, 1974 elections were held for the People's Assembly, and the first session, with 450 newly elected members attending, was convened on March 2. Sovereignty was thus transferred from the Revolutionary Council to the People's Assembly as duly elected representative of the people, bringing the twelve years of military rule to an end. In accordance with the new Constitution, twenty-nine members of the assembly were then chosen to form the new National Council. Ne Win, selected as chairman of the council, became president of the Socialist Republic of the Union of Burma. On March 4, eighteen new ministers were selected with U Sein Win serving as premier and U Lwin as deputy premier.

Thus was the long and eagerly awaited transfer of power to civilian hands accomplished. Yet it is important to note that the National Council, the core group in the new power structure, is in reality very much like the former Revolutionary Council, both in function and composition. Many retired high-ranking

officers remain in the People's Assembly and the cabinet alike. The military elements led by General Ne Win can hardly be said to have abdicated their rule.