1. Not only are the people being forced to supply "voluntary labour" in transforming virgin land to agricultural land in Ra-za-gjou, Chin-su and Hanthawaddy in Sagaing Division, Kalaymyo Township and for construction of a railway crossing road in Yaymyinni-Pakhokku, but through force and coercion by the authorities the residents in Kalaymyo township are being divested of agricultural land inherited from their forefathers who were the first to clear and cultivate these lands.

2. Our information is that though the term used is "transformation of virgin land" what is actually happening is the confiscation of lands originally cleared and cultivated by the forefathers of the residents.

3. With reference to the Hantharwaddy camp, what happened is

(1) In April 1998, the authorities confiscated over three thousand acres of land where beans and pulses were originally and for many years cultivated.
(2) About one thousand cultivators from eight townships viz. Monywa, Chaung-oo, Ayadaw, Depaeyin, Butalin, Yinmarbin, Salingyi, and Palei were conscripted and brought to the camp where they had to labour without payment of wages, inadequate food and medicines from 7:00 a.m to 5:00 p.m. without any rest periods. Because of this and harsh climatic conditions, seventeen died of malaria at the camp.
(3) One Maung Tin, age 32, from Than-bin-kan village, Chaung-oo township, committed suicide by hanging because though he was suffering intensely from malaria, he was not replaced and was never allowed to rest. Permission to return to Chaung-oo for medical treatment was refused, nor was he given any medical attention at the camp. He was left to starve.
(4) Our information is that when Major Khin Aung Aye, Secretary of Monywa District SPDC, who arrogantly exercised authority at the camp was afflicted with malaria, he was immediately dispatched to Mingalardon military hospital for treatment.

4. Over three thousand acres of land that had been originally cleared and cultivated by the ethnic Chins were confiscated and at the Chin-su camp, service personnel from Kalaymyo and the Chin State were brought to the camp for the purpose of transforming virgin to agricultural land. These service personnel had no knowledge or expertise in the use of the harrow, plough, carts and cows or paddy seed and found it impossible to
perform so the original cultivators were made to sign bonds undertaking production at the rate of thirty baskets paddy per acre. This is a deliberate act of bullying and brow beating to the detriment of the original cultivators.

5. Another information received is that early in 1999 people were being called up to work on constructing an embankment to capture water from the creeks and streams running out of the Chin State to irrigate the land. Villagers in the Monywa District were declined to go to the Hantharwaddy camp site. Therefore, the power wielding Divisional authorities summoned all the administrators in all the villages and ordered them to go and work at the Hantharwaddy camp site themselves. Failing to comply would result in heavy penalties.

6. Thee-bin-kha-yine district village tract administrators in the township of Butalin were reluctant to conscript the villagers in their locality so they went themselves and worked on the Kalaymyo Hantharwaddy camp site. This tactic of holding the village administrators to ransom was not at all pleasing to the villagers. Fifteen villagers followed up to the site to relieve their village elders. The distance is about 300 miles to the camp site and cost of travel (to and from) is about four thousand kyats. Having to travel at ones own expense with no remuneration for labour was not attractive to prospect for anyone.

7. In assessing the facts stated above it shows the cruel and inconsiderate attitude of the power wielding authorities towards their fellow countrymen and citizens. Forcing people to contribute their labour, abuse of authority and unfair and inhuman practices are very obvious. We have been informed that the residents of the villages in Monywa District are filled with great fear at the prospect of "forced labour" and are suffering great distress and hardship.

8. We adamantly denounce such methods of "forced labour" and demand respect for people's rights and that people be treated with compassion that they deserve.

Central Executive Committee
National League for Democracy

Rangoon
16 March 1999