1. Information has been received about the forced labour demanded by the Township PDC for the excavation of a silted up dry creek (one and a half miles in length) in Pegu Division, Pegu District which runs through Moutala village and connects with Thanatpin creek at Kyone-jou.

2. Cultivators and labourers from the villages of Saing-te, Moutala, Oh-pho, Ka-twin-chan, Shwebo-su, Taungthu-su and Pjun-pauk have had to give forced labour. The ward PDCs demanded that every household complete the digging of 10 pits each since the 30th April 1999.

3. This was how the operation began. The villagers were notified by the respective village PDCs that on the morning of the 30th April at the sound of the beating of an iron bar, villagers would have to assemble with their mattocks, chopping hoes, and baskets at the designated area where their forced labour was required. Penalty for non-compliance was fixed at 200 Kyats per pit which would amount to Kyats 2000/- for 10 pits (half the amount was to be paid in advance). They were warned that consequences for non-compliance or non-payment would be dire meaning that action would be taken against them in accordance with the provisions of the Village Act.

4. This being the commencement of the rainy season, cultivators are busy preparing for the cultivation of their crops. Most of the villagers are daily wage earners having to cope with soaring prices (poorest quality rice costing Kyats 100/- one pyi and Kyats 640/- a viss of oil). Problems and hardships keep mounting on them from day to day.

5. At Oh-pho village, the cost of not supplying labour is Kyats 3000/- per household. Information received is that every household in the town of Pegu had to contribute Kyats 600/- for the construction of a moat and that the last date for such payment was 15 May 99.

6. We strongly urge the authorities holding power to have compassion on people who are facing such physical and mental hardships and to refrain from making such demands on the poverty stricken villagers. We denounce the practice of applying force and threats and the failure to appreciate the surrounding circumstances of a given situation.

Central Executive Committee
National League for Democracy

2 June 1999.