

## Myanmar Literature Project

မြန်မာစာပေစီမံကိန်း

Hans-Bernd Zöllner (ed.)

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**Material on Their Pe, *Students' Boycott* (Two Volumes)**

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## I INTRODUCTION (Hans-Bernd Zöllner)

### Marginal Research on a Central Issue

This working paper contains material on two books written by Thein Pe which focused on the students' strike of 1936 in Burma. This topic has been and still is one of high relevance and immediacy. The involvement of students in Burmese and Myanmar politics as well as the attempt to prevent or subdue such involvement is a central thread running through modern Burmese history. The country's National Day commemorates the first boycott of the nascent University of Rangoon in 1920. The national character of this day is underlined by the fact that it is the only non-religious public holiday. The date is determined by the Burmese lunar calendar and falls on the tenth day after the full moon in the month of Tazaungmon. It is usually celebrated between mid November and mid December.<sup>1</sup>

From 1920 onwards, the University was a central place of protest, which spread to other colleges and schools and, sometimes, to the whole country. The last time protest spread on a large scale was between March and September in 1988, which led to the abdication of U Ne Win and to the seizure of power by the military, which lasts until today.

The historical importance of the University and students' strikes in the colonial period and the public interest in the Burmese student movement after 1962 in general - and in one of the leaders of the uprising of 1988, Min Ko Naing, in particular - are striking.<sup>2</sup> However, research on the role of University students in Burmese national politics is minimal, it must be said. The book "Voice of Young Burma", which was based on a M.A. thesis submitted in Rangoon in 1963, covered the students' movement in Burma from 1920 to 1940 and was published in 1993 by Cornell University Press.<sup>3</sup> Only recently has a study on Min Ko Naing and his role in the students' uprising of 1988 been written.<sup>4</sup> There are some other works, which touch on the topic<sup>5</sup> and, of course, no work on Burmese modern history and contemporary politics has failed to address this issue. However, there has been no direct<sup>6</sup> and thorough investigation regarding the coherence – or incoherence – of the

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<sup>1</sup> In 1920, the full moon day of this month was November 25 according to the Gregorian Calendar. Therefore, the first day of the strike was December 5, 1920.

<sup>2</sup> The Burmese interest in the students' movement is highlighted

<sup>3</sup> Aye Kyaw (1993) *The Voice of Young Burma*. Ithaca, Cornell University (Southeast Asia Program).

<sup>4</sup> Megan Clymer (2003) "Min Ko Naing, 'Conqueror of Kings': Burma's Student Prisoner", in: *The Journal of Burma Studies* 8: pp.: 33-63.

<sup>5</sup> Joseph Silverstein wrote some articles in the 60s and 70s, for example, "Burmese Students in a Changing Society." In: Seymour M. Lipset and Philip G. Altbachs (eds.) *Students in Revolt*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co. 1969: 334-347; "Burmese and Malaysian Student Politics: A Preliminary Comparative Inquiry." *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 1970, I, 1, pp.: 3-22.

<sup>6</sup> The work of Megan Clymer's on Min Ko Naing in *The Journal of Burma Studies* 8 was preceded by an article on

students' involvement in the country's affairs in the pre-war and–post-war periods of Burma's history.

There may be good reasons to explain this discrepancy - for example, difficulties with access to sources in Burma/Myanmar since 1962 and the obvious relevance of the theme to the present political situation, which may hinder an unbiased approach. Nevertheless, this lack of investigation is remarkable.

This volume does not aim at filling this gap in investigation. However, it does provide a stimulus for further investigation, which will hopefully leads to the presentation of some material useful as a starting point for such inquiry, and some observations for further consideration.<sup>1</sup>

### **Contextualizing two Documentary Novels**

This volume, in the first place, intends to introduce two semi-documentary novels written by Thein Pe. Until now, the novels have not been taken into consideration as a source for shedding light on the students' strike of 1936 as well as the strikes in the "year of strife" in of 1938.<sup>2</sup> Although Thein Pe was in Burma on both occasions, he was not one of the leading activists. From 1936<sup>3</sup> to early 1938 he had been in India, mostly in Calcutta. While pursuing his studies he came into contact with socialist ideas and communist leaders.<sup>4</sup> When he returned from India, the oil-field strike in Upper Burma had begun. The strike could be interpreted as the beginning of a class struggle in Burma. The hero of his novel practiced solidarity with factory workers in the Rangoon township of Kamayut,<sup>5</sup> thus reflecting this later stage of development.

The first part of the novel was published around April 1938.<sup>6</sup> The second part, however, was published in January 1939 right at the peak of the workers and students' strikes in many parts of Burma and the peasants' march towards Rangoon. The "1300 revolution"<sup>7</sup> could be interpreted in

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Aung San, which may be regarded as an indirect reference to the continuity of Burmese attitudes toward young charismatic leaders (communication of the editor with the Journal's production editor).

<sup>1</sup> For further material and information, see Working Papers 4.1 and 11 of this series.

<sup>2</sup> Aye Kyaw did not mention the books in the bibliography of his study. Patricia Milne (1975), *Selected Short Stories of Thein Pe Myint*, Translated, with Introduction and Commentary, by Patricia M. Milne, Rangoon. Sarpay Beikman included the books in her bibliography of works of Thein Pe Myint (p.: 46), but provided no information about the contents, since she obviously concentrated on the author's short stories.

<sup>3</sup> He went to India to cover the meeting of the National Indian Congress in Lucknow (April 1936) for the *Myanma Alin* (New Light of Myanmar) newspaper.

<sup>4</sup> Milne 1975: p.: 14.

<sup>5</sup> Kamayut is a district of Rangoon close to the University with factories producing ropes, sacks and other goods from coconut fibres, and factories producing clothes.

<sup>6</sup> The book was not mentioned in the "Catalogue of Books" kept by the British authorities, but the dates of the forewords indicated that it was published after March 1938.

<sup>7</sup> According to the Burmese calendar, the year 1938 according to the calendar based on the birth of Jesus is the year 1300 of the Burmese calendar.

different ways.<sup>1</sup> Thein Pe presented a specific interpretation, which was very close to contemporary events, and he tried to influence those events through his novel in line with the aims of Nagani. He concentrated on the students' forces while touching on one of the central issues of Burmese politics: the issue of rivalry and fragmentation within leading political associations.

It would be interesting to know, who the models for the characters in both novels really were.<sup>2</sup> Answers to this question might help to decide how the classification of the books as documentary novels has to be accentuated: as documentary novels or documentary novels. That they are documents is underlined by the fact that at least two persons involved in the events of 1936 – Nu and Ba Choe – were mentioned in both books by their real names. Both men were most instrumental in founding Nagani and, maybe, regarded as actors beyond the contending forces exposed by Thein Pe.

### **A Closer Look at Three Burmese Political Theatres in 1938 and 1939**

To know about the turbulent developments at the end of 1938 and the beginning of 1939 can be helpful to understand the intention of the climax of the two books which we find at the end of the whole account of events.

Since the Government of Burma Act of 1935 became effective after the separation of Burma from India and the election of a parliament in April 1937, Burmese politics were performed on three different stages. First, there was the parliament. The rules of the play on this podium were set by the British. Then there was the extra-parliamentary opposition, the *Dobama Asiayone*, which intended to crush the constitution. By ending British rule through the destruction of the rules set by the colonial masters independence was to be attained as soon as possible. Finally, there was the “student theatre”. Since the first student strike of 1920, the beginning of which was - and still is today - remembered as “National Day”, the plays presented here were regarded by a wider public as “model plays” of how a future free and new Burma would look like.

The actors of all three stages interacted, and, sometimes, changed the platform of their performance. Dr. Ba Maw, the first Premier under the New Constitution, had promised to wreck the Constitution from within, the *Dobama* Association founded a party which contested the election and the representatives of the students were wooed by almost all other players.

On each of the three stages, dramatic events could be observed during the time Thein Pe must have conceived the second part of his novel. In parliament, there was an attempt to topple Ba Ma's

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<sup>1</sup> See Robert H. Taylor (1984) *Marxism and Resistance in Burma 1942-1945. Thein Pe Myint's Wartime Traveler*. Athens, Ohio, Ohio University Press: 4.

<sup>2</sup> On this issue, see the contribution of Frankie Tun in this Volume.

government. The events of the 'Year of Strife' helped to achieve this. On February 16, 1939, the government finally fell and Ba Maw was replaced by a new coalition under Pu. This change in premiership was no surprise because no-confidence motions had been in the air from the first meeting of the new constitutional body and the opposition to the newly introduced parliamentary system had argued that the new constitution relied on the selfishness of competing power holders and promoted the longing for individual material benefits at cost of the welfare of the people.

More serious - since unexpected - were the problems of unity with the *Dobama Asiayone*, the organization that claimed to be an alternative to selfish power politics. In the course of the strike of 1938 that should have brought down the old and gave rise to a new and untarnished system, a rift in the *Dobama Asiayone* occurred that developed into a split at the end of the year.<sup>1</sup> Even the respected Thakin Kodaw Hmaing could not reconcile the two rival factions. Thus, at least for an external observer, the *Dobama* Association could no longer claim to be a real alternative to the kind of party politics which were dominated by the British.

Students had contributed to the split. In October 1938, Aung San, Nu and other student leaders left the students' organization and joined the *Dobama Asiayone* where they soon were appointed "organizers". This change of activity fuelled the tensions in the organization and contributed to the final split. The students under their new leadership<sup>2</sup> continued to assist the workers and peasants and fought the Ba Maw government. They achieved a moral victory when student Aung Gyaw died after being hit by the police in a demonstration before the Secretariat Building, the seat of the government, on December 22. Another incident related to the students' boycott which started on January 8, 1939, happened in Mandalay on February 10, 1939. 17 people were shot dead, among them seven monks. Many more were injured.

But after the fall of the Ba Ma government in February, the new Prime Minister managed to bring the students' strike to an end. One of the main arguments for ending the strike was the fear that the students' unions would suffer a split, too.<sup>3</sup>

This short overview clearly demonstrates how tense and complicated the situation in and between different sections of Burmese society was at the time of the publication of Thein Pe's book. It shows, too, that the theme of the books dealt with a basic issue of Burmese politics: the question of the fundamentals of national identity and who would be able to represent them. In a nutshell, Thein Pe writes about the future of independent Burma.

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<sup>1</sup> For a detailed account of the split see Khin Yi pp.: 84-94.

<sup>2</sup> Hla Shwe led the Rangoon University's Student Union (RUSU) and Ba Hein the All Burma Students' Union (ABSU). They replaced Aung San, who previously had occupied both posts.

<sup>3</sup> For details see Khin Yi's account in this volume.



## **The Task of Conceptualising the Role of Students in Burmese Politics**

This observation leads to the question of how the strike of 1936 was assessed by Thein Pe, his readers and later political writers, historians and analysts as well as observers of Burma's and Myanmar's political developments. An investigation into this question may begin by observing the concurrence of continuity and discontinuity with regard to the role of Burmese students in Burmese life, society, and politics. On one hand, their activities in the days of British rule were part of Burma's national heritage whereas the students' protests after independence were disputed very controversially. These disputes, however, took place mostly on the campuses in Burma/Myanmar, then rather violently on the country's streets and places, and finally on various websites of organizations promoting democracy in Burma, but they have not yet served as topics of academic study.

Thein Pe's novels may be useful for conceptualizing this central issue. They were reprinted after independence. The novels connected both periods of Burmese history - a connection which, however, disintegrates if one overly stresses the breaks and new beginnings within this history. In Myanmar, after the events of 1988, Thein Pe's books, as well as the events they dealt with, were and are neutralized. The books are still available there as documents of the past, but they are not recommended as reading material in schools or universities. This neutralization, along with the disregard of students' issues in the academic world, can be regarded as an indication of a strong ambivalence inherent in the students' involvement and role in Burmese politics throughout the 20th century, which is difficult to handle practically and theoretically. Such an ambivalence indicates a high degree of complexity immanent in the topic of investigation. Therefore, it is advisable to start the task of conceptualization from an interdisciplinary perspective. This volume can be seen as an attempt to present some material, which aspires to do so.

### **About this Volume**

The following paragraphs provide a short introduction into the material offered here together with several suggestions for further contributions.

a) Kyaw Hoe's summaries present about bibliographical data regarding the two books, the way they were advertised, and the history of their origins and publication history. Obviously, part 1 of the novel had been written in India prior to Thein Pe's return to Burma. It would be interesting to learn more about Nu's involvement in the book's genesis. As we know from Tun Aye's recollection,<sup>1</sup> Nu and Tun Aye visited Thein Pe in Calcutta prior to the founding of Nagani. One could speculate that

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<sup>1</sup> See Vol. 1 of this series.

the book was planned during Nu's visit in India in 1937. Whereas these deliberations open the door to further insights into the founding period of Nagani, more information regarding its publication history could tell us more about the impact of the books as well as the themes they popularized. To know how often both volumes were reprinted, either as singles or in one volume, would allow us to draw some conclusions on how the "student-strike-theme" was dealt with after Burma gained independence.

b) The first critique of Thein Pe's book deserves special attention. It was written by Nu who played a crucial role in the events described in the book and is one of the characters whose real name is retained in Thein Pe's book. Furthermore, Nu was, in a way, the publisher of the two volumes. Therefore, this critique might shed a light on Nu's "literary personality" as well as his early concept of "leadership" in the context of the discipline of literary criticism as well of political culture in Burma/Myanmar. His assessment was written after the first volume of Thein Pe's book had been published.

c) The book report by Than Mon Htaik gives a detailed summary of the two books' contents and provides some information and material about how to assess the work. The reports of Kyaw Min provide another, shorter summary of the books. More importantly, however, the reviewer was able to cast a glance upon the books' composition from a literary studies point of view. This critical Burmese assessment sheds light on the debate on the country's literary heritage in Myanmar's current institutions of higher learning. Considering the frequent over-politicization of critical Burma studies, this literary approach should be widened and Kyaw Min's categories of assessing the books under review should be compared using other techniques of literary studies. Commentaries on the book reports other than the two printed ones in here are more than very welcome, particularly those from pundits of Burmese literature.

d) The excerpt reproduced here from Aye Kyaw's M.A. thesis of 1963 facilitated an appraisal of what is fact and what is fiction in Thein Pe's novels. Furthermore, it showed how Burmese scholars studied their own history in the critical years of the early 1960s. Obviously, Aye Kyaw concentrated on finding out the "true story" of what had happened and refrained from appraisals. This style heavily contrasted with U Nu's personal reminiscences taken from his autobiography. He wrote about himself in the third person and thus introduced an air of irony into his rather self-centered narrative while dealing with his involvement in events, which contributed greatly to nationalistic fever in Burma.

Along with Frankie Tun's recollection of reading Thein Pe's book in the 1980s, five Burmese perspectives on the student strike of 1936 are reproduced in this volume. They present a narrative

chronicle of the facts (Aye Kyaw), a personal recollection focusing on the personal relations of some of the protagonists involved (Nu), a literary adaptation serving the purpose of advancing the political knowledge and awareness of his readers (Thein Pe), a bibliographic account of Thein Pe's books (Kyaw Hoe) as well as a critical reflection on the contents, style, and composition of the books (Kyaw Min), and finally a personal account by Frankie Tun, who attended Yangon University, but had a chance to read the book only after he came to Germany some years ago. These different perspectives represent different interpretations of the events of 1936 on various levels - literary adaptation, scholarly assessments, personal recollection and emotional reaction. This approach may lead to a multi-faceted-view on the interpretation of the strike in Burma's and Myanmar's course of history.

e) As already mentioned, Thein Pe's second book on the strike appeared in January 1939 at almost the same time as another student strike started following the arrest of the student leaders Ba Hein and Ba Swe, who had supported the striking oilfield workers on their march from Upper Burma to Rangoon.<sup>1</sup> It is a strange coincidence that the date of the beginning of the strike and the publication of the book are the same: January 8, 1939.<sup>2</sup> The strike lasted two months and was called off after consultations with the government. The details of the end of the strike were reproduced here from Khin Yi's work on the *Dobama* movement together with a critical assessment of student leader's Hla Shwe role in the cancellation of the strike. This assessment, written in the 1980s, a long time after the strike, is similar to Thein Pe's critical view of the period from the end of the boycott of 1936 up to before the strike of 1939. A comparison of both assessments may be useful for further discussions about how to appraise the role of students in Burmese society and politics.

f) The reprint of the short text "A Hell Hound at Large" which was published in the Oway Magazine, the Students' Union's mouthpiece, and caused Aung San's expulsion from the University, serves a twofold purpose. First, it reminds us of the lack of documentation with regard to some central events in Burmese history. The text was taken from Aye Kyaw's thesis. The book on the same topic published 30 years later, however, does not contain this text nor the other appendices of the thesis.<sup>3</sup> Another appendix contains the demands of the students. It is reproduced here as well.

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<sup>1</sup> For some more details on these events see Vol. 3 of this series.

<sup>2</sup> See footnote 6 on p.: 5.

<sup>3</sup> The following eight appendices on the student movements between 1920 and 1948 were included in the thesis; copies can be obtained from the editor: I. Boycotters' Memorial (19 December 1920) – II. President's Speech at the Boycotters' Mass Meeting (20 December 1920) – III. University College Union Constitution (1927) – IV. The Constitution of the Rangoon University Students' Union 1931 – V. A Hell Hound At Large – VI. Rangoon University Boycotters' Demands (1936) – VII. Statement by the Rangoon University Boycotters' Council (1936) – VIII. The Constitution of the All Burma Students' Union (1948).

The text from the Oway Magazine, which was mentioned in almost all accounts of the 1936 strike, was commented on by two Western observers and analysts of Burma. It therefore provides a perfect example to compare the Western and the Burmese way of looking at the event under consideration here.

g) John F. Cady witnessed the strike as a member of the staff of Judson College. His “History of Modern Burma” is still the (Western) standard history of colonial and post-colonial Burma up to the end of the 1950s.<sup>1</sup> Cady’s recollection on the strike thus provided some information about his “American perspective” of looking at colonial Burma between the British and the Burmese sides. Whereas Cady wrote in retrospect about his experiences and included some extracts from his diary, Lucian Pye in comparison theoretically analyzed Burma’s difficulties in becoming a nation. Pye’s rendering and interpretation of interviews with Burmans, who, in turn, looked back on the strike is highly interesting because it displayed a cross-cultural “interpretation of interpretations”, which represented in form - the contents may be disputed - the grade of multi-leveled reflection necessary to understand what happens in a the globalised world. Pye’s description of the strike and his conclusions certainly provoke discussion in line with the orientalism debate. It is reprinted here as a call for theoretically demanding approaches to investigations in the relationship of students and society in Burma/Myanmar – and beyond.

h) Finally, the commentaries on the reports on Kyaw Min’s book reports shall be mentioned. They are written by three European scholars of different age and different academic backgrounds. The editor hopes that the points of interests mentioned in the commentaries stimulate responses and further contributions to the issue represented here. They will be included in the next update!

I would like to thank all contributors and all those who helped to edit this paper, particularly Grit Grigoleit and Esther-Rina Urbani.

Hans-Bernd Zöllner

March 2009 (last update)

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<sup>1</sup> The first edition of 1958 covered the period up to the beginning of the 1950s. The second and third edition of 1960 and 1965 respectively included a short supplement of what had happened up to 1960.



Front Page  
Students' Boycott, Vol. 1

## II MATERIAL ON THEIN PE, *STUDENTS' BOYCOTT*

### 1. **Kyaw Hoe, Bibliographical Information, Part 1**

Translated from his Nagani Bibliography, pp.19-20 by Frankie Tun

5. Thein Pe Myint, U: Students' Boycott; Author – Maung Thein Pe; Editor- Maung Nu; Yangon, Nagani, 1938; 322 pages.

First Edition: 1299 – March 7. At the back page of the front cover, it is mentioned under the heading of “Editor of *Myanma Alin*<sup>1</sup> and the students' boycott” along with a letter from U Chit Maung, the editor of *Myanma Alin*, which is dated as 05-03-38. It is mentioned that the novel fully includes the 1936 University Boycott.

At the back of the cover, under the heading of “A letter from a college girl” a letter written by Ma Ma Gyi from Inya (07-03-38) is reproduced together with a letter from Ko Nu who states “Yours is a great novel”.

In the introduction, under the heading of “1936 boycotting events”, the author writes about what was happening inside the boycott at that time. At the end of page 5, line 25, the author signs as Maung Thein Pe, at the Na Landra garden, Calcutta (07-12-37). In the editor's acknowledgement it is mentioned that however Students' Boycott is a novel based on the 1935-36 University Boycott, the author has added the political background of the political movement of the students against the colonial education and the resistance against the colonialists. He did so by just changing the names of the actual persons involved in the events.

Nagani was indirectly revealing who would really work for the country's independence. The book would let the public know that the true independence from the colonialists could not be achieved through political brokers, who were directly jumped to conclusions but through the educated students who could lead the people. Even in the advertisements of the novel it is mentioned that the public should know who was more important.

Thein Pe Myint's novel is a political novel, a novel which was reprinted again and again and one of the best novels discussed and imitated by the students.

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<sup>1</sup> Burmese newspaper “New Light of Myanmar”. Thein Pe was sent to India to report from there for this paper.

## 2. Kyaw Hoe, Bibliographical Information, Part 2

Translated from his Nagani Bibliography, pp.32-33 by Frankie Tun

15. Thein Pe Myint, U: Students' Boycott (Part Two): Author – Thein Pe; Editor – Maung Nu: Yangon- Nagani: 1939 – 302 pages.

Students' Boycott, part two was published as the 13<sup>th</sup> book of Nagani. According to the editor's acknowledgement, the book's editing was limited to discuss and decide on the planning and arranging of the book together with the author. The editor did not get involved in the ideas expressed in the novel. Therefore, the whole thing has been the idea and imagination of the author only.

If there was anything to blame and to criticise, the readers should put the blame on the editor who failed to persuade the author to exclude those passages in the text but if there was something to be praised, they should praise the author who created the whole idea of the book. (Maung Nu, editor dated 12.02.38)

Part two starts with the time of the decision to boycott, includes the story how the students boycotted and finally tells how the boycott ended. It has 32 chapters.

At the end of the book, the contents of part one of the book is summarised on seven pages.

This novel is very interesting since the author, Thein Pe Myint, has mixed his thoughts and ideas with the real events, with real people and has created characters altogether.

It was published on the 8<sup>th</sup> of January, 1939 and about 5,000 copies were published.





4. Strike leaders, 1936; among those identified are THA HLA, AUNG SAN, M. A. RASCHID, U NU, KO OHN, HLA PE, BA SET, BA AYE, and KYAW NYEIN (with striped blazer, second from right).

### Two Photographs from the Students' Strike of 1936



3. Students Strike, 1936; left to right: NYO MYA, U NU (pointing finger to posterity), HTUN TIN, an unidentified student, TUN OHN, BA AYE, KO OHN, an unidentified student, NYO TUN, and sitting facing camera, left to right, KHIN MAUNG GALE, a student, and HLA PE (HO LETYA).



### 3. A critique by Maung Nu of “The Boycotting Student” Authored by Thein Pe<sup>1</sup>

Even though the owner named his much adored dog “Edward,” it would not become a human being. In the same manner, works of satire, fantasy or prophecy, however much their authors claim them to be novels, will not be novels. When a gold-coated object is tested on a touchstone, the coat is scrubbed off. Like wise, the above-mentioned literary woks fail to qualify for the status of novel when they are appraised by the norms of novel. Just as novelists embody God’s creating of the earth and creatures in their novels, the other authors write about the earth and creatures—which they have created by themselves—in their works of satire, fantasy of prophecy.

For instance, though *The World of William Clissold* has been termed a novel, it actually is only a paper of prediction. The earth and creatures mentioned in it are merely those created by H.G.Wells.

Hence, novelists such as H.G. Wells and Bernard Shaw and playwrights have posed an extra piece of work on critics in the West—checking their works whether they fit into the category claimed—in addition to their regular work of appraisal.

The same situation exists in Myanmar literary world. Since Tet Phone Gyi Thein Pe entered the literary world, Myanmar literary critics have been burdened with one more task of genre-check.

At a time when the novel “The Boycotting Student” was to be edited, its author was asked on which side the novel had more weight - novel or prophecy. The answer was “prophecy”. Though other parts of the novel passed the test to be a novel, the prophecies included as stuffing material in the so-called novel failed.

For example, the author wished to create a leader of his own in the novel as he did not like the existing Burmese leaders. Just as the Sakra<sup>2</sup> created a frog-king, and dropped it into the well where the resident frogs craved for a ruler, the author created Nyo Tun into a leader. We (the readers) were first tempted to be Nyo Tun’s followers, But as a Burmese saying goes, “The person who has died once understands the value of timber”<sup>3</sup>, we hesitated to do so. We traced back in to the history of Nyo Tun, with doubts whether he was an opportunist who appeared from nowhere in time to stand for election, whether he was a person who, in public view, pretended to be a saint and

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<sup>1</sup> Nagani News Vol 1, no. 2, pp. 25-30.

<sup>2</sup> The king of deities (translator’s note)

<sup>3</sup> Here, timber means the timber to be made into a coffin (translator’s note).

who, behind our backs, was drinking, playing cards and ruining girls, or whether he was using the monks for his own benefits.

Nyo Tun was outspoken. Let we, who were to become Nyo Tun's followers, might not see his valor, the author made Thaug Pe, younger brother of Thaug Yee, praise Nyo Tun, "Oh, how courageous you are!" Though being outspoken is a mark of a leader's qualities, which deserves praise, making trivial matters important is not proper. It is like creating a storm in a kettle.

The British told Gandhi, who was in England to attend a plenary meeting, that the workers in India were suffering from hardships and were to be pitied because India was using boycotts as a weapon. Gandhi replied outright that India had more pity on the poor. Here, we could not help praising outspoken Gandhi.

Let's suppose, in another episode, that an Indian thrusts a love-letter into the hands of Gandhi's niece. Then, Gandhi would threaten him, "How dare you propose my niece! The next time I hear that you do the same, I'll put you to shame, using all my powers." In this instance, we would not say that Gandhi was candid, and instead, we would only form a low opinion of him.

In *The Boycotting Student*, I do not understand why the author has made Nyo Tun a hero by handing a proposal letter to Thaug Yee. The author seems not to notice the fact that he has made Nyo Tun jump backwards, about 100 years back. Though the author stands on the side of freedom of speech, he denounced the freedom of speech practiced by Saya Than Myint. In America, it was prescribed by law that all citizens should enjoy freedom. In practice, the Whites only were confined to enjoying the right while the Blacks were not released from serfdom. Those who enforced the law had forgotten the fact that the Blacks were human beings, too.

Despite the American law enforcement, Nyo Tun should not forget the fact that Saya Than Myint, too, was a fellow human being. Such forgetfulness on the part of the author amounts to being cruel to his character, Nyo Tun. The author is much like the creator who killed the creatures, created by himself, by submerging them. If Nyo Tun were to criticize Saya Ba Hla Thein and his men who staged the play "Tabin Shwehti"<sup>1</sup>, he would certainly deserve our praise.

It is not only the author of the *Boycotting Student*. There are other novelists who have also created leaders who have qualities fitting to be the leaders of Myanmar. A prominent author who

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<sup>1</sup> A monarch in Burmese history (translator's note)..

wrote the novel "The Burmese Hitler"<sup>1</sup> also created a leader. Though I do not remember the details of the character's behavior, what I certainly have in my mind is that I am not satisfied with this leader.

There were no significant actions taken by Nyo Tun in the first part of the novel except that he founded a school in Kamayut and taught in it.

There are three main tasks to be carried out by a leader: (1) to remind the oblivious followers that they are still in slavery; (2) to alarm them of their true life; and (3) to help liberate them from this life. After doing a little of the first task, Nyo Tun spent most of his time quarrelling or disputing with those who were lost in thoughts with some longing, those who courted his girl-students and those who dabbled in music. To keep watch on Nyo Tun, we have to wait for the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> volumes.

However, we cannot help praising the author's penmanship because he could create a character as if it had been created by God. This, we can see clearly if Nyo Tun is not viewed as a leader or a character created by the author.

Nyo Tun was bigoted. He appeared brusque rather than being outspoken. He never gave up his views which he deemed right, and did not believe in others' opinions. He had a higher opinion of himself than what he actually was. Despite himself being a sentimentalist, he hated other sentimentalists. (See from line 12 of page 104 to line 15 of page 105 in the *Boycotting Student*.)

As in an English saying which suggests "No fear for ghosts or men," Nyo Tun had not had any person whom he was afraid of when he told him of things he assumed right. But as things he considered right were diametrically opposed to the majority views, he was never on good terms with the majority.

I am attracted to Nyo Tun more than any other reader because I have a friend of mine who has the character and attitude identical to Nyo Tun. Reading the novel, I felt doubtful that the author might have dealt with my friend.

The posterity might remember this novel. It is actually worth remembering, not because of the author's odd views like "Women must work equally as men do," and "Those who like making music are cowards," but because of his ability to create various sorts of characters, at God's willing, and shape their behavior with words. The sorts included would-be leaders and would be followers,

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<sup>1</sup> The title is not certain (translator's note).

patriots and those who ruined the race, honest ones and crooks, those courting women, silly ones, naïve once fair-weather ones, snobs, ignoramuses, lazybones, abusive ones and honey-tongued ones, pupils who spoiled teachers and teachers who spoiled students, pupils who troubled teachers and teachers who troubled pupils, those who disliked the Whites and those who thought much of the Whites, students who made disturbances, etc.

C.E.M Joad,<sup>1</sup> a writer, mentioned in *The Daily Mirror* that women of England enjoy their right best, and that even then, they are willing to return to their old place, the domestic life. Nobody can deny that women do not have perseverance.

Portia, a character in the play “Julius Caesar,” written by Shakespeare, is a Western beauty. She possesses all virtues - intelligence, wisdom and concentrated mind. However, when her husband, Brutus, tells her that he will kill Caesar, and that she must keep his words secret, she feels restless afterwards because concealing this secret is like having swallowed a of hot iron. Despite the nature of women, I do not mean that every woman should remain at home and every man should go out to work.

In a rare instance, there is a couple, U Tha Byaw and Daw Aye Mya, in my neighborhood. Wife Daw Aye Mya earns money by working as a masseuse in the village, and husband U Tha Byaw prepares meals at home. We dare not tell women-heroines to take care of house chores. It would be narrow-minded to assume that the tasks of women are confined only to house-chores like cooking, and washing. If such notion were to prevail, I myself would take to streets to call on women to liberate themselves from home life.

Women’s tasks - making their children become selfless ones who work for the welfare of the poor and the persecuted; nurturing them to grow into valiant soldiers fighting the capitalists and imperialists; and encouraging their husbands to be ones useful for the country and race—are seemingly not easy ones. In this sense, a woman who goes out to work does not go so far for the benefits of the nation as a woman who manages home affairs.

My own experience may illustrate the power of women. I had a belief that working for the government as a salaried man meant helping perpetuate the rule of foreigners. Even when my school officials told my parents to persuade me to accept positions above my qualifications, I refused them. But when I got married, I tried to get a government job with an inner urge that only a

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<sup>1</sup> Cyril Edwin Mitchinson Joad (August 12, 1891 – April 9, 1953) was an English philosopher and broadcasting personality (editor’s note).

government employee could keep his wife in equal status to others. But I did not become a government official, and my wife, too, did not urge me to do so.

Supposing that my wife had foiled my attempt, saying, "I prefer my husband to work for the wellbeing of the entire country, rather than for my comfort, and desire a husband who helps enhance the prestige of the nation, rather than the prestige of his wife,": I would not have been dared to advance. If I had attempted, ignoring her, I would have been a silly one. In fact, I have made only a little effort for my race. If I had served the imperialist government, this would have obliterated the little contribution I have made. I did not become a government employee, thanks to the Three Sacred Gems - the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha. How powerful women are!

In the Boycotting Students, those who had a hobby in making music accused of being cowards, Minister Myawaddy won a battle against the British. Nawadei was historically reputed to be a military leader. The two great persons were expert music and poetry. There have been such versatile persons in the history of Burma. Mussolini was a good violinist. Hitler liked music like his favorite food. Polish president Paderewski<sup>1</sup> was an expert pianist.

I would like to remind the author of the Boycotting Student not to act both like a novelist and preacher. Preacher H.G. Wells could not do the work of Novelist Thomas Mardi. Man cannot do the work of woman, and vice versa. If novelist Ko Thein Pe attempts to go up to the preacher's podium, he will stumble over the steps and fall, hurting himself, because he goes beyond his limits.

If people say that Shakespeare was great, his greatness was due to his writing about the creatures created by God. He did not create his own creatures. I would like to deeply emphasize this point to Ko Thein Pe.

Maung Nu

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<sup>1</sup>The Polish pianist and composer Ignacy Jan Paderewski( 1860-1941) served as Polish Prime and Foreign Minister in the year 1919.

#### **4. Than Min Htaik, “Tha Beik Hmauk Kyaung Thar (The Boycott Student)”- Two Volumes**

Translation: Aung Kyaw Moe

##### **Contents:**

- Biography of Thein Pe (Myint)
- Synopsis of “The Boycott Student, Vol. 1
- Synopsis of “The Boycott Student, Vol. 2
- Review of the Novel

##### **The Biography of Writer Thein Pe Myint (1914-1978)**

Thein Pe Myint was born on 10th of July (Friday), 1914, in Budalin, Monywa District, Sagaing Division.

His father is U Ba, a Land Surveying Clerk, and his mother is Daw Myint. He was called Maung Mya Maung in his younger days in Budalin, but he was enrolled in an Anglo-Burmese school by the name of Maung Thein Pe.

He had his primary education at U Po Nyan Private School in Budalin, and he studied for his secondary education at Monywa National School and Buddhist School. He studied at Monywa Buddhist High School and passed Matriculation with 2 distinctions in Burmese and Mathematics subjects. He continued his higher education in Mandalay intermediate College (from 1932 to 1933) and he earned a B.A. degree from Rangoon University (1933-1935). He also pursued Law at Calcutta University and got his M.A. (Pali) in 1938.

He held such positions as Rangoon University Day-Students Representative (1933-34), EC member of Student Union( 1934-35), Joint-Secretary of Doh Bamar Asi Ayone (1936-37), EC member of education sub-committee, member of Nagani Book Club (1937-38), the Organizer of Anti-Fascist Forces (1941-42) the Joint-Secretary of Anti-Fascist and People’s Freedom League (1946), People Unity Party (1952), the Delegate of People Unity and National Allied Front (1956-60), the Chairman of Burmese Writers Association (1956-58 and 1962-63), and the Chief Editor and the Managing Director of Botahtaung Newspaper (1958-64).

He travelled through India, China, Egypt, England, Japan, Vietnam, the United States of America,

Russia, East Germany, and Romania as a writer-cum-journalist-cum-politician. His first published article is titled as "*Burmese Language as an Extra Subject should be taught at Mandalay Intermediate College*" appeared in Thuriya Newspaper in January, 1933. A prolific writer, he produced many short stories, long stories, articles, plays, film scripts, travelogues, biographies, political literature and translations. A book called "Over the Ashes" was written in English in 1946. He directed a film named "Yauk Kyar Gon Yi" [Eng; Man's Honor] around 1939-40.

He started to write the novels when he was merely 22 years old. His first novel is "Tet Phone Gyi" [Eng; Modern Monks] (1937) whose intentions are to purify the Buddhist Monastic Community. Even he was nicknamed as "Tet Phone Gyi Thein Pe" after the fame of this novel. His second novel is "Tha Beik Hmauk Kyaung Thar" [eng; The Boycott Student] (1938). This novel's centre of gravity is the Rangoon University Students Boycott. This novel inspired anti-colonialism and nationalism. The third novel is "Tet Khit Nat Soe" [Eng; A Modern Devil] (1940) which aims at the eradication of sexually transmitted diseases.

The other well known books are "Lam Za Paw Bi" [Eng; There is a Way] (1948), "Sit Atwin Khayee The" [Eng; Traveller in War] (1953), "Taw Hlan Yay Karla Naing Ngan Yay Atway Akyone Myar" [Eng; The Political Experiences of Revolution Period] (1956), and "Kyaw Nyein" (1961).

He won the Sarpay Beikman First Prize for his novel in 1958 called "A Shega Naywin Htwat Thi Pamar" [Eng; Like Sun rises at East ], he won the National Literary Award for General literature in 1967 with a book named "Withaytha Tai Thamine Asa" [Eng; An Introductory History of The Special Region], and he won the third prize in the National Literary Award for Novels in 1968 by a novel titled "Thidar Pyone".

He is also a good short story writer. His first short story, "Khin Myo Chit" appeared by a pen name "Wanay Nga Pe" in Dagon Magazine published in September 1933. "Nga Lin Ne Nga Ngwe" [Eng; My Husband and My Money] (1934), "Mun Tai Bin" [Eng; A Royal Consultant] (1935), "Sit Thi Daw" [Eng; The Warrior] (1935) are also included in the list of his short stories. He published his collected Short Stories three times in 1937, 1952, and 1966 respectively. He was the first writer who published his collected short stories in Burmese.

His pen names are such as "Dagaung Kywat", "Tetkatho Akyawt", "Tet Phone Gyi Maung Thein Pe", "Maung Tun", "Tet Phone Gyi Thakhin Thein Pe", "Tet Phone Gyi Thein Pe", "Maung Thein Pe", "Maung Thein Pe (B.A.)", "Ye Baw Kyauk Lone", "Wanay Nga Pe", "Wanay Nga Pe-Tetkatho", "Thein Nay Nwe", "Thein Pe", "Thein Bay", "Thein Pe Myint", "U Kyauk Lone", and

“U Kyauk Lone (Budalin)“.

He passed away on 15th of January, 1978.

## **Synopsis Volume One**

### **Chapter (1)**

Nyo Tun's parents, U Bo Mya and Daw Kan Mè arrives to the railway station by a bullock cart and U Htwe the bachelor, Ko Ba Nyunt the school teacher and Ma Me Thwin accompany them. Although it is only five minutes to the train's departure, Nyo Tun does not show up. So everybody is anxiously waiting for him. Going with a bicycle, he may bid farewell to all his friends and then he will come to the railway station. The three students from National High School and Aung Sein, a Newspaper Rep, are also present at the station.

A few minutes later, Nyo Tun appears and bids farewell to everybody. U Htwe the bachelor sends some regards to his friend living in Rangoon. Ko Ba Nyunt requests Nyo Tun to buy him some good books. Nyo Tun instructs three High School students to do regular physical exercises, to read books to the old ladies in Payargi compound every Sabbath day, and to read the books he has suggested them to read. He encourages Aung Sein not to abandon the Newspaper selling job because Newspapers are the only opportunity for the villagers to practice reading.

Then he pays homage to his parents. His father U Po Mya warns him not to join up Thakhin Association (Doh BamarAsi Ayone) and reminds him to send two letters per month, to study hard for the ICS<sup>1</sup> exam, and to befriend with the teachers. His mother Daw Kan Mè just requests him not to find a wife. Everybody waves their hands (to bid farewell) when the train departs. His mother is gazing the train until it disappears from her sight.

### **Chapter (2)**

Nyo Tun has to change the train when he arrives at Mandalay Central Railway Station. He takes two more seats for his friends from Mandalay, Thaug Pe, and Thaug Pe's sister who will accompany him in his trip to Rangoon. Nyo Tun and Thaug Pe are close friends when they are



attending I.A.<sup>1</sup> classes in Mandalay College. They passed the exam for I.A. last year, so they go to Rangoon to continue studying for B.A. degree.

Nyo Tun has never seen Thaung Yee, the sister of Thaung Pe. Thaung Yee passed her Matriculation exam from ABM Convent School and she will study at Rangoon University College for her higher education. A moment later, Thaung Pe and his sister arrive with their father, U Thar Hla, their mother Daw Tin Oo, and their uncle U Nyunt Maung who are about to bid farewell to them.

Nyo Tun is surprised that Thaung Yee is a typical Burmese girl who is not flirtatious like other female students.

Daw Tin Oo implores Nyo Tun to take care of Thaung Yee, and U Tha Hla requests Nyo Tun to inform him via mail if Thaung Pe is not studying hard.

Daw Tin Oo is gazing the departing train until its red tail-light disappears.

### **Chapter (3)**

On the train, Thaung Yee is reading the Dagon magazine. Thaung Pe asks Nyo Tun whether he was studying the texts during these holidays and Nyo Tun tells him that he reads only extra-curricular books. He also gives advice to Thaung Yee who enjoys reading novels that it is better to read international classics written in English than cheap Burmese pulp fictions. He directs her to study the works of Thakhin Kodaw Hmine and Saya U Maung Gyi in order to have a good command of Burmese language. Thaung Yee passed her Matriculation with distinctions in Mathematics and Geography. And she is enthusiastic to be smart not only in Burmese language but also in the knowledge about the international affairs. She asks Nyo Tun about which subject she should choose, so Nyo Tun advises her that it is better to read extra-curricular books at home because in the University she cannot learn about the political issues. He points out disappointedly that the University only teaches those useless, romantic, and sluggish literatures. Therefore he suggests Thaung Yee to combine the easy Burmese Language with Geography and Mathematics of which she is so brilliant for her studying at the University.

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<sup>1</sup> Indian Civil Service [editor's note].

#### **Chapter (4)**

Maung Than Myint is both a teacher and a student at the same time. In this year, he is appointed as a Tutor in Burmese Language Department and he is responsible for teaching and Hall-tutorship. On the other hand, he is a senior M.A. student.

He can appreciate the poetic beauties of Burmese literature and he enjoys to measure rhymes and rhythms of his voice with the music of the poems. He used to play a Burmese Harp when his friends pay visit to him. Even lonely he is singing the songs and playing his Harp and he seems to be a recluse who vows to absorb deeply in his own music by neglecting the whole outside world.

#### **Chapter (5)**

At 11 p.m. in Aye Ko's room situated at the ground floor of Thaton Hall, Tun Aye, Pe Khin, Thein Pe and Khin Saw are playing cards. Just coming back from home, everybody's wallet is full.

#### **Chapter (6)**

In a room of Pinya Hall, Ba Maw, Ba Pe, Chit Hlaing, and Ba Sein are conversing about the girls and are laughing freely. Their conversation leads them to the case of a girl called Khin Myint who comes from Mawlamyaing. Ba Maw relates that this unlucky girl was persuaded and abused by Ko Ba Htwe, a Tutor from Burmese Language Department, who finally gets rid of her to marry another girl by his parents' arrangement when he is promoted to the post of Education Administrator. The poor Khin Myint is left alone and she undergoes an abortion.

#### **Chapter (7)**

The University students are clamouring while they move to and fro among the classes. Ma Nyein Thar, Khin Kinn Than, and Khin Khin Ohn are among the female students who go to the Theatre hall. Ba Maw, Ba Pe, Chit Hlaing, and Ba Sein are following them. Ba Sein and Chit Hlaing are courting Ma Nyein Thar and Ba Pe and Ba Maw are also trying to seek the hands of Khin Khin Ohn and Khin Khin Than respectively. A few moments later, they get to the Theatre hall where English class is about to start.

The play "*Romeo and Juliet*" will be lectured in this class and there are more than 200 students of B.A. upper and lower levels.

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<sup>1</sup> Intermediate Art [editor's note].

The teacher is a man who has a pointed nose, concaved eye sockets, a swollen belly, and a bald head. Before teaching the play, he explains a little bit about Shakespeare and his plays. Some students agree faintly when the teacher acclaims that Shakespeare is a peerless playwright in the history of literature. But Nyo Tun wants to appreciate the value of a piece of literature by the merit of its positive and constructive impact upon the society. At that time, Pe Khin enters into the class and he apologizes to the teacher for his lateness. But the teacher thinks that Pe Khin is making some disturbances and disrespect unto him, so he orders him to leave the class room at once. Nyo Tun discusses about that incident with the nearby students and he criticizes that if the teacher treats Pe Khin as a student, he should warn him softly and politely rather than expelling angrily him out of the class room like a slave. Then the whole class drifts along the flow of play taught by the teacher.

### **Chapter (8)**

After the evening classes, some students spend their times by doing such hobbies as walking, swimming, rowing, tennis and football playing. But Nyo Tun goes to Kamaryut Village where he meets with a group consists of the workers from the Vest Factory and Umbrella Factory, Horse-cart drivers, coolies, and some Kamaryut villagers to exchange views on literature. He shares them some books and magazines and discusses about the books he gave them previous week. They complain that they do not understand some of these novels which contain a lot of Pali words. Nyo Tun explains that some writers alienate themselves from the ordinary readers by using exhibitionistic and difficult words and phrases as if they are high levelled scholars, therefore poor and down-trodden people cannot understand what they really mean in their books. Nyo Tun tells them that there are so many books in English written clearly about the life of poor people. Therefore, everybody agrees that Nyo Tun will read these English books and translates to them. They arrange time and place for next meeting and then the group disperses.

Soon after the University reopens, the chairmen and EC members for the Thahaya Readers Clubs of each and every Halls are elected. These Clubs are formed for the students to be able to read the extra-curricular books and to have a chance to socialize among themselves.

Bagan Hall is crowded with the repeaters and there are many students with different ideologies and different bobbies. Ko Hla Pe, a B.Sc. upper-level student, is elected as the Chairman of Thahaya

Readers Club for Bagan Hall.

He is a man of principle and pure conduct and also a good speaker. He dares to argue against the admin officers for the sake of his fellow students. At this meeting, the students request to sing the song "Doh Bamar"[We the Burmans] but the Hall-Warden does not allow it. However, against the will of Warden, the students sing this song.

### **Chapter (9)**

Maung Than Myint the Tutor is correcting the essays of his students for the whole morning. He peruses the essays of his female students very cautiously and gives them some instructive notes. He does not do for the male students.

Today, he dresses himself up so neat and tidy to go to the class where he is going to teach his female students. Thaug Yee is one of his female students. Thaug Yee complains about the remarks on her essay but the teacher explains her that her choice of words is impolite although they are correct and of good idea. He advises her to think about the elegant words first and then finds the idea matched with these words. Thaug Yee vindicates that Nyo Tun's instructions are not in conformity with the teacher's. In this case, Maung Than Myint the tutor expostulates that he does not like Nyo Tun's style of writing, and Nyo Tun is an expellee from their academic circle. He adds that even Nyo Tun is not an honours student. He recognizes that Thaug Yee is not only active, hut also the most beautiful girl in the class.

### **Chapter (10)**

Before sunrise, Nyo Tun go to Ko Nu's room in Bago Hall. He takes a morning walk with Ko Nu. Ko Nu tells him that their University building is the best in Asia. Then they blame about the University education that even the buildings and premises are really good, the education taught in University is bad and only conducive to the British Colonialism. In their opinion, as if Burmese people are drinking the poison put in a golden bowl which means that they are not critical about the slavish education provided by the British Government. When two friends get on the bank of Inya lake, they enjoy the scenic beauty of the lake. Nyo Tun asks a promise from Ko Nu to eliminate the obsequiousness inculcated by the poisonous colonial education and to accept the Chairman position of the University Students Union. Ko Nu agrees to do so and Nyo Tun guarantees to help Ko Nu to get the Chairmanship.

As they continue walking, they meet with Khin Khin Gyi, Ma Tin Hla, and Ma Htar Myint who are also walking for their health. Ko Nu introduces Khin Khin Gyi to Nyo Tun and Khin Khin Gyi introduces him again to her two friends. On the way back, Nyo Tun chats with Ma Htar Myint who comes from Pathein National High School. Nyo Tun falls in love at first sight with Ma Htar Myint.

### **Chapter (11)**

In his room, Maung Than Myint is playing the harp and remembering Thaug Yee. He wishes to get to Thursday so quickly to see again Thaug Yee who is so bright and responsive in his class. He is looking at the photograph of Theippan Maung Wa and his wife hung on the wall and he trumpets that one day he will also have a beautiful wife.

### **Chapter (12)**

Hla Pe, the Chairman of Bagan Hall's Thaharya Readers Club, and Soe Tun, the Secretary, come out of the classroom to go to the Library. Soe Tun who is a BA student asks Hla Pe, a BSc student to show him Science Labs, so Hla Pe takes him to the Chemistry and Physics Labs where Soe Tun is thrilled by the expensive Lab Apparatuses. Hla Pe tells him that even the Apparatuses are expensive and of high quality, there is no place to apply the scientific education in the outside world, and in his opinion such Arts subjects as History, Political Science, and Economics maybe applicable. But Soe Tun says that these Art subjects are not at the level of full-fledged operability. Therefore, they reach to a conclusion that it is important to overthrow that kind of education as soon as possible.

### **Chapter (13)**

Ma Tin Hin and Ma Htar Myint are at Khin Khin Gyi's room in Inya Hall and they are talking about the election for the Chairman position of the University Student Union. At that time, Thaug Yee appears and says Ma Htar Myint that Nyo Tun has come up and waits for her in the guest room, so she comes down and meets with Nyo Tun. Nyo Tun announces that Ko Nu will be the new Chairman of the University Student Union on 15th of this month and he also requests Ma Htar Myint and one of her friends to participate in the Debate Contest which will be held at that ceremony. When Htar Myint tries to persuade Khin Khin Gyi to join her for the contest, Nyo Tun discusses with Thaug Yee about her lessons. Nyo Tun forbids Thaug Yee from reading the Lyrical Odes (Ratu) of Nutshin Naung as her teacher, Than Myint, instructs her. In his view, these

poems are too delicate and feeble.

Htar Myint comes back and says that Khin Kin Gyi promised her to join in the contest. She also says that she has ever read Nyo Tun's literary pieces and appreciates them highly. Nyo Tun requests Htar Myint to borrow the novel, "Dabain Shwe Htee" to Thaug Yee, and guide her to be well-versed in Burmese Language.

#### **Chapter (14)**

At 7:00 PM, at the Students Union Building, the old Chairman introduces Ko Nu, the new Chairman, to the audience. He also leads the Oath to Ko Nu to be recited in front of the audience. When Ko Nu delivers an address, he proclaims that he does not like Democracy in which each and every issues need majority's consensus and even the judgments will be delayed by an ill-willed man. He says that he prefers Dictatorship in which everything can be done quickly and audaciously without any interference.

After the speech of Ko Nu, Nyo Tun rises and says that he want the new Chairman to be an exemplar and a leader of Thakhin Pyinnyar-vada (Ideology of Intellectual Mastership) and implores that he should do everything by consulting with his comrades rather than doing arbitrarily.

Then the Debate Contest begins. Ma Htar Myint and Khin Khin Gyi represent for Inya Hall and Ma Khin May and Ma Kyu Kyu stand for Teachers' Training College. In this contest, Nyo Tun is quite impressed by the debating skills of Ma Htar Myint.

#### **Chapter (15)**

At 10:00 PM, an alarm clock rings from Ko Sein's room in Bagan Hall. Lun Maung and Tin Oo, the neighbours of Ko Sein, are peeking through the meshes that divide their rooms. Ko Sein has ever asked for a help from Thet Pe for the sake of contacting A-Hla, a girl Ko Sein loves too much. Thet Pe and his friends fabricate a fake love-letter from A-Hla and give it to Ko Sein. Ko Sein learns in the letter that she (A-Hla) used to ruminate about Ko Sein while sitting on her bed, so she wants Ko Sein to think of her at the same time sitting on his bed too. Ko Sein believes what is said in the letter and he follows her instruction every night, so Lun Maung and Tin Oo sneak a look and laugh about that. Now they go to Thet Pe's room and create another fake love-letter for Ko Sein.

Then Maung Tin comes to their room. Maung Tin says that the EC members such as Ko Soe Tun, Ko Tin Maung, Ko Ba Ngwe, Ko Thein Maung, Ko Nyo Tun and Ko Maung Gyi, are brilliant men but Tin Oo cannot accept the point Maung Tin makes. He accuses of these men as imperious and autocratic although he has no sound proof for his accusation.

### **Chapter (16)**

In Pinya Hall, Nyo Tun pays visit to Tin Aye, Hla Baw and San Maung who are living down-stairs. They admire Nyo Tun as their mentor. Nyo Tun used to advise them to read the good books. Nyo Tun gives them three books he bought from an old-books shop and there is a biography of Sun-Yet Sin, then the President of China among these books. After discussing about books Nyo Tun comes back to his room and he sees Hla Pe and Soe Tun in front of his room. They inform him that a student called Ko Shwe was expelled from the University because he omits the word "Sir" instead of saying "Present Sir" when he responds the daily Roll Call in the class. Nyo Tun is so angry about that incident and he says that their University's situation looks like Russia of last 30 years, quoting Tolstoy's writings. He lambastes the downward movement of University education which is running only for the sake of producing the tools that can be applicable for British Colonial Machine and in his opinion the students think that they will be jobless if the colonial Government does not offer them jobs.

Hla Pe adds discouragingly that their future is like looking toward a wasteland of sand. Hla Pe and Soe Tun request Nyo Tun to come to the Student Union tomorrow to discuss about Ko Shwe's issue and they leave.

### **Chapter (17)**

Thaung Yee receives a letter from Tutor Than Myint in which he proposes her indirectly as if he is explaining her about the meaning of a poem of Nat Shin Naung. Because of his dishonest writings, Thaung Yee shows his letter to Htar Myint. Htar Myint advises her not to reply any letter and treats him stand-offishly. She also suggests that if Than Myint asks her about Nat Shin Naung's poetry, she must tell him that she won't read Nat Shin Naung's poems because her brother forbids her to do so. But next time, Than Myint overtly woos her and gives her his love-letters. Htar Myint counsels her to inform Nyo Tun and Thaung Pe about this situation. She also borrows "Dabin Shwe Htee" novel to Thaung Yee.

### **Chapter (18)**

On a rainy day, Thaung Pe comes to Nyo Tun's room and discusses about the problem Thaung Yee faced. Nyo Tun insists Thaung Pe to come along with him to meet with Than Myint, so Thaung Pe accompanies him shamefully. Than Myint is humming a melody and tuning his Burmese Harp. He is quite surprised when he sees Thaung Pe and Nyo Tun. They argue heatedly about Than Myint's playing Burmese Harp. Nyo Tun disagrees with Than Myint upon the definition of culture and he also gives a definition of genuine culture. Thaung Pe is frustrated because they do not get the main point of their coming to Than Myint. But Nyo Tun says about Thaung Yee's problem directly at point blank to Than Myint. Than Myint tries to deny at first but he falls silent later. Nyo Tun proclaims that Thaung Yee is very young and still in the age of learning education so that she comes to University to learn education only. Nyo Tun makes Than Myint know that the latter is a teacher whose duty is to protect his students and not to seduce them. Nyo Tun warns Than Myint that if he gives love letters to Thaung Yee next time, they will inform the Professor (of Burmese Language Department) and disgrace him publicly. Then they come back from Than Myint's room.

### **Chapter (19)**

The students go back to their native places when the University is closed for a long holidays. The ones who do not go back are also roaming around the city. Therefore, there are only a few students left in the Halls. At lunch, Kyaw Thein, Nyo Tun, Ko Nu, Nyo Mya, Pe Khin, Tun Aye, and Aye Ko get together.

They are making light jokes and laughing when they take their lunch. After lunch time, they have a walk and Kyaw Thein imparts news he heard from a Professor. It is the news about how government is planning to press the University Students Union and put it under the management of the University's Administration. Ko Nu trumpets that he will take a severe action against the government if the latter oppresses the Students Union which cultivates the spirit of decolonization. Nyo Tun also says that the Union is supported by the Students Union Act established by Thakhin Ba Sein, Ko Tun Sein, Ko Kyaw Thein, and Mr. Rashid and it is place for the audacious people, and an organization that can protect the rights of University Students. He confirms that he will not accept any kind of amendment to the Student Union Act done by the government. Ko Nu requests Nyo Tun and Kyaw Thein to attend the National Day Ceremony when he goes back to his native



town.

### **Chapter (20)**

Nyo Tun, Kyaw Thein, Hla Pe, and Ba Ngwe open an evening class at a Monastery in Kamaryut village. At first, there were only 6 students but it increases up to 15 students now. In this class, the students are taught not only reading and writing skills, but also such mind-opening literatures concerned with politics, economies, industry, and health. The students learn so enthusiastically.

Nyo Tun, Kyaw Thein and Hla Pe get to this class before 7 PM. Kyaw Thein finishes his translation of Maxim Gorki's "Decadence" and continues to teach the novel "The Mother". Hla Pe comes after when Kyaw Thein finishes his lecture. They discuss about the Education in Burmese and in the rest of the world.

### **Chapter (21)**

Nyo Tun is sitting on an Easy-Chair and contemplating the beauty of natural environment which is likened to his coolie students. They are hospitable, charming, and sincere.

Compared with the student-teacher relationship in the University, there is mutual love and respect between teacher and the students in their evening class. The University students are so narrow-minded that they care about just how to pass the examination and how to spend money to indulge themselves. These University students never think of the outside world beyond the wall of university and their own future. They do not care about the Independence of Burmese and the fate of poor people and villagers, of the oppressed workers and the ones who are deeply in debts. When he is thinking dishearteningly about these issues, an Indian postman arrives and gives him 2 letters. One of these letters is from Htar Myint, sent from Pathein, and she asks him where she can buy George Bernard Shaw's book, "*Intelligent Women's Guide to Socialism and Capitalism*". Another letter is an Invitation for a meeting about the National Day, sent by U Po Kyar and U Soe Win.

At that time, Kyaw Thein and Nyo Mya turn up. The three of them think about the Agenda for the National Day Ceremony. For this year, they decide not to allow U Maung Gyi to talk because he will repeat again and again what he had talked previous years. The other agenda they agree to do are to sing Doh Bamar song at first, to appoint Sayar Lunas the Master of Ceremony, to kindle

lights at the Student Union building, and to formulate the National Day Slogans.

### **Chapter (22)**

When the University reopens, all students are present. This morning at 4 a.m., the students wake up one another and prepare to go to the National Day Ceremony. When the buses start to move, they sing the songs “Ye Zarni“ and “Doh Bamar“. They get to the foot of Shwe Dagon Pagoda where the Ceremony will be held and they see a big crowd and a motorcade. U Po Kyar announces that the ceremony begins. Then the song of Royal Drum appears and the audience are remembering the old glorious days of Burmese Kingdom before British Colonization. They hoist a big National Flag and YMB Saya Tin sings “Doh Bamar“ song. The three persons deliver speeches and the crowd is led by Thakhin Kodaw Hmaing to march toward Sule Pagoda. Khin Khin Gyi and a group of female students refuse to accept the advice given by Ko Nu who says that women are forbidden to take part in the march by the National Day Committee. They follow the rally carrying the slogan sign-posts. The students are swarming with the ones who recite Antiphonies and the ones who dance. All of them are very happy. Nyo Tun is so encouraged by the sight of united strength of Burmese people if there is an urgent common cause.

### **Chapter (23)**

At night, Tin Aye and Kyaw Pe are getting angry about the holiday announcement put on the Notice Board of Pinya Hall because in this announcement “the National Day“ is miscalled as “the Good Will Day“. It shows that the teachers and the head masters do not recognize the National Day. The other sheet on the Notice Board announces that there is a National Day Talk which will commence at 8 p.m. They go immediately to the place but they are late by half an hour. It is held in the open-air space at the side of the Student Union. Ko Nu the Chairman gives a speech and he talks about U Ottama’s ignorance of politics and his dishonesty. Then Thakhin Ba Sein and U Chit Hlaing talk one after another. At the end of the talk, Ko Nu denies the points made by Thakhin Ba Sein that the students are slavish minded, coward, and ignoring the political affairs.

### **Chapter (24)**

Saya Ba Hla Thein and Saya Kyaw Myint come to Inya Hall in Khin Maung Lat’s car. They come to fetch Khin Ma Ma and Ma San Thin for a picnic at 8 Miles. They rent a room at a hotel sponsored by Khin Maung Lat. When they get to the hotel, three of them make the two girls drunk

and sexually abuse the girls.

### **Chapter (25)**

Ko Nu becomes very famous as a Chairman of the Student Union since under his leadership, the Union can accomplish some remarkable students' movements. Such famous leaders as the world-renowned extraordinary Negro, Galone U Saw who is back from Japan, and U Ottama the monk had stood on the stage of the Students Union as its leaders. The students are interested in the activities of the Union which has been mentioned in the local newspapers and magazines. The Union also receives some letters of encouragement and suggestions. Ko Nu also receives both letters of approval and letters of disagreement. Anyway, Ko Nu is now very prominent. The head-on confrontation between the awakened students and the oppressive government is about to happen.

### **Chapter (26)**

By the end of December, 1935, there is a workers' strike from a Cotton Factory situated in Kamaryut due to the such mischief as the reduction of wages, heightening the fines, the women workers being raped by the Factory Manager, Foreman, and Mechanic who are foreigners, seduction by money for sexual purposes, expulsion of the workers who argue against their supervisors or who ask for the salary increase. Four hundred workers join in the strike. Nyo Tun, Hla Pe, and Ba Ngwe go and enquire at Kamaryut about the happening. They also give some good advises to the workers. Next day, in the evening, a political congregation is organized by the strikers in which Nyo Tun, Tin Maung, Hla Pe and Htar Myint deliver the speeches. The workers like Htar Myint's speech most.

### **Chapter (27)**

Nyo Tun, Hla Pe, Ba Ngwe and Kyaw Thein go to Bagan Hall, Thahton Hall, Ava Hall, and Sagaing Hall to deliver speeches and to raise funding for the workers. In the same way, Htar Myint collects some donations by motivating each and every student in Inya Hall.

### **Chapter (28)**

The story of Saya Ba Hla Thein, Saya Kyaw Myint, Khin Maung Latt, Khin Ma Ma, and Ma San Thin happened at 8 miles hotel spreads out among the students because of Khin Maung Latt's chatty and loose-tongued nature. Nyo Tun is amazed and deeply moved by that news. He also

informs Htar Myint with a letter. He concerns that if the parents of female students hear about that incident, they will not allow their daughters to study at the University, so everybody is responsible to uncover the culprits to protect the face of other teachers and students. He also suggests her to strongly protest such kind of repulsive and horrible occurrence.

Nyo Tun is summoned by the Principal who warns him not to participate in the political activity. He will be expelled from the University if he fails to follow the instruction. Nyo Tun declares that he cannot follow the instruction, so the Principal threatens him to expel him right now. But Nyo Tun says that he does not care about any punishment and he comes back stout-heartedly.

### **Chapter (29)**

The news about some students who are not allowed to sit the examination on account of their low level of qualification emerges in Mandalay College and Rangoon University. Therefore the Students Unions from Mandalay and Rangoon become more united. Rangoon students do not hesitate to take action for the grievances of Mandalay students. At the last meeting of the Students Union, Ko Nu criticizes about the slave-minded students and the teachers who are enslaving them. The Principal demands Ko Nu an explanation for that criticism but he reply that he is innocent.

An article that insinuates Ba Hla Thein's notoriety appears in O-Way Magazine which makes the students offended about their teachers. But the teachers are not happy about this article and they try to expel Soe Tun , the Editor.

Ko Nu receives a letter of dismissal on 21st of February. He does not want to make any trouble to the students so he wants to hide the letter. But Nyo Tun and Ba Ngwe tell Ko Nu that if the leader is not brave enough, the students will look down upon him, so they push him to take an action about that letter. All students inspire him that they are ready to follow his leadership.

At night, on 24th of February, every student finds a pamphlet named "Nat O Gwe" in their rooms. Nobody knows who writes it and who distributes it stealthily. In this pamphlet, the existing colonial education is severely criticized and the students begin to hate their educational system. In next day's newspaper, Ko Nu reply letter to the Principal is printed. Ko Nu gives back his B.A. degree and he is more esteemed by the students.

### **Chapter (30)**

At 4:30 p.m. on 24th of February, there is a meeting held at the room of the chairman of the Student Union. Ko Nu the Chairman, Ko Mya the Vice-Chairman, Mr. D.P. Bemargie, Nyo Tun, Soe Tun, Tin Maung, Ba Ngwe, Ko Thein Maung and Ko Maung Gyi discuss about the news about a plan to expel Ko Nu, Nyo Tun and Soe Tun. The different opinions op up but there is no agreement. Ko Nu goes out of the room because he does not want to participate in the process of deciding about his own case. Finally Ko Tin Maung proposes an idea of boycotting by CEC members who won't sit the exam. Ba Ngwe agrees that idea. Nyo Tun also likes it but he keeps silent because he is one of the would-be expellees. Ko Mya is thinking about his imploring to the Principal to get the Hall Tutor position and his trying so hard to get to B.L. higher level. He is worrying that he may not be able to reap what he has sowed if this "students boycott" will break out Mr. Bemagies says that he accepts what other people decide and he requests to leave to go for an appointment. Then Nyo Tun confirms that this "students boycott" is the best way which will express the unity of students. He also assures that the people might feel sympathy upon them and this boycott will inspire other students to sacrifice themselves for everybody's sake. Nyo Tun asks whether there is someone who disagree or not, hut none is against the idea so the meeting is ended at last.

### **Synopsis Volume Two**

#### **Chapter (1)**

Ko Nu asks the Committee members who comes out of the meeting room about what they decided. Ko Nu is encouraged when he learns about the decision to boycott. Ko Mya, the Vice-Chairman, makes an excuse and goes back. The rest of members discuss about the students boycott in the library, with all lights turned off. They divide up among themselves such jobs as to organize the students, to distribute the pamphlet "Nat O Gwe", to rent some buses.

When the meeting finishes, Nyo Tun comes out of the Students Union and he sees that Kyaw Thein and Ba Chit are waiting for him. They ask him about the final decision of the meeting. They are getting cold feet when they are informed about the students boycott. Nyo Tun goes to downtown to rent buses and to put an instigating ad in the newspaper. Kyaw Thein and Ba Chit feel sad since they are about to renounce the education they struggle so ambitiously to achieve. So they are

holding each other and crying, even though they want to participate in the boycott. They are also patriotic students who want to destroy the notorious system of colonial education. Therefore, they go back to their Hall to organize other students.

## **Chapter (2)**

In the evening of the 25<sup>th</sup> of February, the students are swarming around the Students Union Building. In the backyard of the building, the Detectives are watching the movements of students. Ko Nu does not take the Chairman's seat in the ceremony because this boycott is based on his case of expulsion from the University. Mr. Bemagie is the one who takes the Chairman's seat. He stands up and explains about the boycott and the committee's decision to boycott the examination. The students are unanimously shouting and yelling to confirm that they will take part in this boycott.

Ko Hla Pe, the President of Bagan Hall's Thahaya Readers Club, Pe Tin, Kyaw Thein, Nyo Tun, and Ko Nu deliver their organizing talks one by one.

When the rental buses arrive, the students take seats on these buses, including eight female students who come from the Halls. Ba Ngwe, Nyo Mya, and other three students go to Inya Hall to organize the female students. Some female students come along with them whereas some are hiding in the Hall. Then the motorcade moves to the Shwe Dagon Pagoda and the students sing the song "Doh Bamar" simultaneously and harmoniously.

## **Chapter (3)**

The parents from all over the country are worrying about the news of unrest at Rangoon University which may hinder their children's education.

When the motorcade of boycott students, who are shouting the slogans and singing the songs, gets into the downtown of Rangoon, the people come out of their houses and take a look at the motorcade boisterously. The motorcade goes around Rangoon and finally settles at the foot of Shwe Dagon Pagoda. The students climb up through the Southern Stairway to the Pagoda and congregate at 'Rahu Daunt' (North-Western Corner of the Pagoda). Ko Nu goes up and stands on a big tank and talks. Nyo Tun distributes some exercise books to the Presidents of Thahaya Clubs to take a list of the students who are willing to participate in the boycott. Kyaw Thein discuss with Ba Ngwe to watch cautiously some students who are not really serious about the boycott. One after another, the

students stand on the tank and give their talks. They are so happy that even they do not have their proper dinner at that night.

#### **Chapter (4)**

On account of Deedok U Ba Cho's kind help, the students have a chance to take a rest on the rough mats without covers. They suffer from the cold wind because their garments are so thin. They put their heads on the wooden blocks as if they are sleeping on the pillows. Some students sleep on the arms of other students. When they go to sleep, the students are recalling the happenings of the whole day. They realize that they have already denounced their education and their families are now concerned about their condition. But they try to forget everything with a resolution that they will not give up if their demands are not properly answered.

The rich women from the town offer the girls to come and sleep at their homes. But the girls refuse this offer because they want to be with the other students through thick and thin of their boycott. These girls just stay in the Mawlamyaing Zayat (a Public Resthouse) on the platform of Shwe Dagon Pagoda. Daw Thet Su, a nationalist (Wunthamu) woman and her group come and stay with the girls for their security. They sleep under a carpet which is full of dust. Before falling asleep, Thaug Yee tells Htar Myint that she is shameful of her brother Thaug Pe who did not participate in this boycott. Then they sleep as the night becomes so dark. At that time, some students cannot sleep. Kyaw Thein and his friends follow and detect some students who do not sleep and go down from the Pagoda. Ko Tin Maung and his group prepare tea for the students for their breakfast. Nyo Tun goes to a Newspaper Press to put a letter of appeal for the people to help the students in the newspaper. He signs underneath as "the Boycott student".

#### **Chapter (5)**

Tin Maung and Than Tin have already made tea before the students wake up. When the female students get up, their heads are white with the dust from the carpet they slept with. For washing their faces, Htar Myint is cleaning the water pots with the ashes from stove because these pots were stained with the smell of Sardine Fish curry they ate last night. Thaug Yee helps her by giving the clean water for washing. Dorothy and Nyunt Nyunt ask for the permission from Ko Nu to go to their relatives' houses to get some longyis for the sake of changing their dirty clothes.

The male students are vociferous as some are reading newspaper, some are going to the tea shop, and some others are taking bath. The senior students are planning to block the Science students who have a Practical Exam today. Ko Nu is visiting each and every Zayat (Resthouse) and asks everybody whether they have a sound sleep last night or whether they are healthy and happy.

### **Chapter (6)**

The University Officials think that the expulsion of Ko Nu is the main cause of this boycott. They do not know that every student has something to resent deeply about their education system. They are surprised and agitated because some female students are also part of this boycott. The Principal and some teachers go hastily to Inya Hall for listing the female students who go with this boycott. Then they inform their parents by sending telegraphic messages. The Principal calls Wardens and Deputy Wardens from each and every Halls and instructs them to make a list of students who participate in the boycott and a list of students who stay away from it. They try to persuade the students who are left behind not to join with the students boycott. The University authorities plant some loyal sycophants among the boycott students.

Than Myint thinks that now he is much freer to play his Harp and to read the poems because the Hall is empty of students. He hates this boycott only for one thing, i.e., one of the leaders of students boycott is Nyo Tun who has disgraced him, who discourages the girl he loves and takes her away from his class. There are so many Tutors like Than Myint who ignore about that boycott whereas there are some others who are watching it with full of enjoyment.

At the top floor of Pinya Hall, Thaung Pe is moping about his situation sorrowfully. He faces a dilemma that he wants to pass the exam as his parents desire and at the same time he wants to join with Nyo Tun and the boycott students. He is ashamed of his cowardice since his sister plays apart in the boycott. He thinks that he needs to spend some amount of expenses if he joins in the boycott and he feels depressed because he does not have enough money. He is hiding from the students who come back to take their things from the Hall because he is so shameful of himself.

### **Chapter (7)**

The students congregate at U Kha's front Pavilion situated at the Rahu Corner of Shwe Dagon Pagoda. In this meeting Ko Nu praises the perseverance of the boycott students and he also instructs



them to be well disciplined and persistent. Then they form a Boycotters Council in which two persons from every Hall must partake. To encourage the new corners, Kyaw Thein, Pe Khin, Hla Pe, and Aung Myint do not join in the Council but they help it so diligently. After the meeting, the female students write letters to their parents for not to be worry about them, and Nyo Tun help sending these letters via mail.

### **Chapter (8)**

The parents of such students as Nyo Tun, Tin Maung, and Pe Khin are unhappy about their Sons who participate in the boycott. The parents of the female students are also worried so much about their daughters when they receive telegrams from the Principal. They feel displeased about the initiators of this boycott and so anxious about their daughters to be without protection.

### **Chapter (9)**

The Boycotter Council's meeting is held at the ground floor of Mawlamyaing Zayat. In this meeting, the students unanimously reach to the nine resolutions of demand which include such asseverations as 'to amend the University Act', 'to allow the students from private schools to sit the exam', 'to reduce the tuition fees', 'to recognize the Students Union', 'not to authorize the Principals to exercise the power of expelling the students from the University', and 'not to abolish Mandalay College'. Mr. Bernagie writes these demands in English and Nyo Tun translates them into Burmese after the meeting. Htar Myint helps him in writing in Burmese. Because of so many sleepless nights, all of a sudden, Nyo Tun feels dizzy and about to fall to the ground. But he goes with Ko Mya and Kyaw Thein on a rickshaw to the Newspaper Presses for putting their demands in the newspapers.

### **Charter (10)**

Next day, the people see the news and photos of the Boycotter Council in the daily newspapers. In the early morning, the students hustle to read the newspapers. One student reads it aloud and the others are listening. At that time, Nyo Tun who is in untidy clothing, with the undressed hair, red eyes and the oily face, comes back from such Newspaper Presses as Thuriya and Myanma Alin to writes articles about the boycott.

In the Mawlamyaing Zayat, Htar Myint reads aloud Nyo Tun's articles and other girls are listening

to her. Htar Myint continues reading even when Dorothy requests everybody to go with her to her uncle's house to take a bath. So Htar Myint's friends tease her that she attaches to the writer of the article rather than the article itself, but she secretly enjoys their joke.

### **Chapter (12)**

Nyo Tun disguises himself in the trousers, with shoes and Shan bag, and goes to the Railway Station. As soon as he arrives there, he goes on a train which will go to Mandalay and there he prepares a place with newspaper sheets to sit down. Before the train departs, the detectives are flocking around in the Railway Station, so Nyo Tun covers his face by pretending to read a newspaper. When the train departs, he changes his trousers with a longyi and reads a book named "The Burmese Days". Due to the long time sleeplessness, his eyes are hurting and irritating, and he becomes drowsy. A lady of age around 30 invites him to sleep on her carpet, therefore Nyo Tun feels comfortable to do so. Responding the lady's enquiry, he tells her that he is now going to Mandalay for the cause of their boycott. The lady asks him more about why they started this boycott, and Nyo Tun reads her some dialogues of the protagonist from the English novel he is reading. What is expressed in these dialogues are how the colonial education can teach Burmese students how to play football and how to drink Whisky and the existing education system is only a clerk-producing factory. Nyo Tun says her that the British Government will never teach Burmese people about the industrial technology and even they destroy what has already existed. These are the major causes, he tells her, why the students started a boycott. Then he continues explaining her about how the colonial education system creates a large numbers of stupid and foolish sycophants.

After a while, Nyo Tun falls asleep.

### **Chapter (13)**

The Boycotter Council makes a meeting at the Zayat where it opens an office. Ko Nu presides as the Chairman of this meeting. They try to find ways to request the students not to sit the exam. Htar Myint's idea is only 15 students to go to the examination place rather than everyone and to lie down in the way of the students who come to sit the exam. This idea is unanimously approved. After the meeting, Htar Myint asks Tin Maung where is Nyo Tun now. Then only she knows that he went to Mandalay for the cause of boycott. Thaug Yee kids her whether she is missing Nyo Tun, but Htar Myint tells her that she is missing him because he is one of her comrades.

## **Chapter (14)**

On 28<sup>th</sup> of February, at 4 a.m., round about 300 students from different Halls dress up in the warm clothing and go down to the foot of Shwe Dagon Pagoda. Most of them are wearing Pin-Ni shirts and blouses. They go to the University in the cars to start "Protest by Petition" and Mr. Bernagie is their leader. When they arrive in front of the Student Union Building, Mr. Bernagie instructs them to stand in a row and briefs them. He emphasizes 3 points to take care of. The first point is to carry out their boycott activity in a peaceful and non-violent way. It also means to tolerate any kind of teasing or kidding. The second point is to avoid any form of jesting or joking. The third one is not to argue about the boycott and not to quarrel with each other about who is right and who is wrong. If there is someone who want to know more about this boycott, Mr. Bemagie instructs the students to invite that person to come to the Boycotter Council at Shwe Dagon. Then they form themselves into different groups and divide the places of duty at Judson College, the Gates of Inya Hall and Innwa Hall. They block the way of the students who come from their respective Halls, and they do not argue against anything but remain silent. In the same way, they lie down in the way of the Day-students who come to sit their exam. Some students traverse them discourteously. But some students go back because they feel shamefulness or they are afraid of something or they sympathize upon the boycott students. Thaug Yee is thinking that she will lie down to block her brother if he comes to sit the exam since she believes that her brother really loves her and never make her hurt and disappointed. But Thaug Pe has already determined to join with the boycott students because yesterday he received money sent by his parents. He is too motivated whenever he reads the newspapers. He is missing his friend Nyo Tun and his sister, Thaug Yee. He is anxious about her whether she is not okay or she is running short of money. Therefore, in this morning, he packs up his things, calls a Taxi by phone and goes out of the Hall.

In the afternoon, the sun is scorching, so the students take of their warm clothes and put them on their heads to protect the heat.

## **Chapter (15)**

It is still dark when Nyo Tun arrives at Shan Zu Station. As he is chilling and very hungry, he enters into a gourd flitter shop. He eats gourd fritters and warms himself at a fire there. As he is drinking plain tea, he asks the shop owner lady about the situation of Mandalay students' boycott. He is

surprised when the old lady counter-questions him “what is a boycott?”. After he warms himself, he goes to Maha Myat Muni Temple and pay homage to the Lord Buddha. He prays that Mandalay College students’ boycott will happen soon. It is too early to go to his friend’s house, so he rests at a Zayat until the daybreak. When the sun rises, he goes to his friend Ko Ohn Maung’s house. He learns that Mandalay College students’ boycott begins so he goes to the Thakyathiha Pagoda where the students make their boycott centre. At 10 a.m., Nyo Tun talks about the causes of boycott and the defectiveness of current education system. He explains about the demands of Rangoon University students and the Mandalay College students agree with all these demands. Finally, Nyo Tun warns that there are many female students take part in the boycott, so it is the duty of male students to be disciplined in their conduct and to protect the girls as their own sisters.

### **Chapter (16)**

Thaung Pe gets to Shwe Dagon boycott centre. As he knows by reading newspaper that there is a Zayat reserved for the boycott students, he is searching for Pinya Zayat. When he comes into the Zayat with his luggage, his friends are teasing him in a tantalizing manner. At the outset, Thaung Pe is feeling guilty, now he is overwhelmed by the feeling of humiliation when his friends are teasing him. He goes to Mawlamyaing Zayat after half an hour and he donates 10 Kyat at the fund raising committee in front of the Zayat. He meets with his sister, Thaung Yee in the Zayat and both of them have a chance to smile and laugh and talk about each other.

### **Chapter (17)**

Ko Hla Pe receives a letter from a girl dated 29-2-1936 and signed in her pseudonym “Aswe Daw“. She explains in her letter that she is interested in the boycott but there are some difficulties that deter her to join in the boycott, and she is trying to organize other female students although the University’s Admin officers are watching her activities. She insists Ko Hla Pe to come and meet her as soon as possible. Hla Pe decides to go and meet her. But he also discusses with Soe Tun to initiate a campaign throughout the rural areas.

Outside of Rangoon, only Ko Nu, Ko Mya, and Bernagie are famous and well-known. They are the most popular preachers and organizers in the rural areas. But these three leaders cannot cover all the demand of campaign at large. Another point is that if one of them deviates from the primary objectives of boycott, the people will be misled by their wrong interpretations since the people know and admire only them. If there is a schism among the boycott students, the people will follow

and support the ones they know well. To protect from that sort of danger, Hla Pe and Soe Tun think that it is important to request the Boycotter Council to allow the other student leaders to go to the rural area for the sake of political campaign. They prepare to collect facts and ideas if their turns come to them.

Kyaw Thein meets with them and informs that the Mandalay College's boycott actually happens and some high schools in Rangoon also want to join in the boycott. He tells that Ko Mya is trying to deter this high school boycott. Three of them agree on the points such as "a general students' boycott all over Burma should happen", "to revolutionize the whole education system rather than to revise it superficially", and "to reform every level of education as well as all students must participate in the student boycott". In contradicting the idea of Ko Nu, Ko Mya, and Bemagie, they secretly plan to persuade the high school students to take part in the University students' boycott.

### **Chapter (18)**

The 10th standard students from the High Schools of Rangoon enter into the boycott. They join up with the university students at the platform of Shwe Dagon Pagoda. Ko Nu, Ko Mya, and Bemagie are not very happy because the youngsters are difficult to control, but Nyo Tun, Hla Pe, Tin Maung, Pe Khin and Kyaw Thein encourage the young students. They believe that the authorities will listen to their demands and change their mind if the students of all stripes fully participate in the boycott. Pe Khin is an ex-student of Rangoon High School, Kushin High School, and Myoma High School, so he knows very well about the nature of these high schools. He is a very sociable guy and he has so many friends in these schools. When the high School students arrive, they are led by Pe Khin who delivers a speech at an introductory meeting. The young students acclaim Pe Khin's speech and applaud loudly. Pe Khin is able to preach about the shortcomings of education system in an entertaining way.

### **Chapter (19)**

On the 14th day of waxing of moon of Dabaung, the Pagoda is too much crowded. In this crowd, there are some people who just come to enjoy the Dabaung Festival and some others who are curious about the boycott students. At the night time, the crowds disperse gradually. The students entertain their audience by performing marionette play of rugged cloth, the group dancing, and the operas played in different Zayats. Everyone except Ko Nu, Ko Mya, and Mr. Bemagie were forced

to sing and dance. In Mawlamyaing Zayat, the girls are cracking up by making some jokes. As they are happy, they are trying to be dutiful for the causes of their boycott.

### **Chapter (20)**

Until tonight, Thaung Pe has no chance to talk with Nyo Tun since he came to the boycott centre. He wants to explain Nyo Tun the reason why he could not join in the boycott. He is anxious about Nyo Tun misunderstands him. Two days after he gets to the boycott centre, he sees Nyo Tun but he has only a chance to greet him because a student takes Nyo Tun away. Thaung Pe thinks that Nyo Tun is not so friendly upon him. At the same time, the other students are suspicious of him. Moreover, there is a photograph hung in front of Pinya Zayat. That is a photo of a group of students on which ten students including Thaung Pe were marked with the red circles and noted below as “the traitors“. Thaung Pe is really shameful and feels angry about it. Thaung Pe hears the sounds of students singing and dancing in the Zayats, but he keeps himself in the room because he feels himself inexcusable. He is overwhelmed by loneliness, sadness, and shamefulness.

### **Chapter (21)**

Thaung Yee receives a letter from her family. She lets Nyo Tun to read this letter at the ground floor of Mawlamyaing Zayat. In the letter, Thaung Yee's father congratulates Thaung Yee who took part in the boycott. He also writes that Thaung Yee's mother is dissatisfied with Nyo Tun who came to Mandalay but failed to meet them there. In the letter, Thaung Yee's mother accuses Nyo Tun that he did not greet them at the railway station when they sent Thaung Yee. Nyo Tun explains that he could not greet them when he was in Mandalay, because he was so occupied and his trip to Mandalay is done secretly.

Tin Maung and Ba Sein arrive when they are chatting. They are informed that Thaung Pe is not normal mentally, so they immediately go to him. When they see Thaung Pe, he is sleeping under a blanket. He hides his head in the blanket and he is afraid of everyone who comes to him as if they are going to kill him, including Thaung Yee. She cannot do anything except crying.

### **Chapter (22)**

Tin Maung has to send Thaung Yee and her brother back to their home. Nyo Tun requests Tin Maung to do the job because he is sincere and he is one of the boycott students' leaders. Tin Maung accepts that duty happily. Nyo Tun, Kyaw Thein, Ba Ngwe, Htar Myint, Ma Tin Hla, Dorothy and

Thein Pe are bidding farewell to Thaug Pe and his sister at the railway station. Thaug Pe is sleeping on the train. Tin Maung tells Thaug Yee that two students were gone mad even it is not still certain for their boycott to win. Another student is Ko Shwe who was expelled from the University because he refused to response the daily roll call with the word "Sir". Later he was allowed to sit the examination on account of the students boycott, but he was not satisfied with his case. He participated in the students boycott. He used to speak with his fist raised in enthusiastic anger and he is the one who always encourage his friends not to give up their boycott. He speaks disagreeably to the students who are not good followers and suspicious of being the traitors. Ko Mya tried to control him and warns him not to give speeches. Ko Mya forces him to vow to keep silent in front of Shwe Dagon Pagoda by drinking a cup of consecrated water. Ko Shwe becomes worse and abnormal gradually since he has no chance of emotional outlet, and finally he was gone mad. When Tin Maung relates Ko Shwe's story to Thaug Yee, she starts to understand the problems and situation of her brother's mental illness.

After they send Thaug Yee and her brother to Kenyan railway station, Nyo Tun and his friends go to Theingyizay Market by locomotive. Kyaw Thein is cracking jokes on the way while Nyo Tun and Htar Myint are discussing sorrowfully about Thaug Yee and her brother. Nyo Tun is still remembering

Thaug Yee's jesting words on Htar Myint and him as lovers.

### **Chapter (23)**

U Po Mya is reading a Myanmar Alin newspaper and Daw Kan Me is listening to him. The first thing he reads is Ko Nu's speech. When he turns to the next page, he sees an extract from a speech, " We don't like an Education which increases unemployment Rate", delivered by Nyo Tun. He also catches sight of a photograph in which their son Nyo Tun is raising his fist in great anger. U Po Mya calls Daw Kan Me and shows her the photo of their son in the newspaper so proudly and Daw Kan Me feels a great delight at the sight of her son. She requests U Po Mya to read the extract out aloud and U Po Mya does as she demands so joyfully. In this extract, Nyo Tun explains why there are so many unemployed people and the government is boosting up the situation instead of reducing it down, and that is why the students started a boycott against this colonial education system. Daw Kan Me is so excited when she learns about the facts in her son's speech and she

seems to hear the voice of their son. Although both of them were so angry with their son when they heard that he is participating in the boycott, now they go around their neighbourhoods and proudly show them their son's photo.

#### **Chapter (24)**

The exam is postponed because of the powerful boycott. One after another, the schools from all over Burma enter into the general students boycott. At that time, the students from Shwe Dagon Pagoda have nothing special to do since there is no student to be forbidden to sit the exam and most of the works related to the boycott were taken by the senior students as their responsibility. Therefore, the younger students have nothing to do except indulge themselves in sensual pleasures. They are actually fed up with the daily speeches and there are a lot of expenses for them to be in the Shwe Dagon Pagoda's boycott centre.

So the Boycotter Council decides to send all students except the leaders back to their homes. These students must promise to come back when the Boycotter Council needs them, even against their parents' will. They promise not to enrol absolutely in the University and they go back to their homes around the end of the second week of March. They take a group photo and write something memorable in each other's autographs before they depart.

Nyo Tun and Htar Myint also write something memorable in each other's autographs. Nyo Tun wants to hide his love for Htar Myint as long as their boycott is going on. When Ma Soe Myint, Ma Thein Kyi and Htar Myint go back to their homes by the Boat to Pathein, there are so many students including Nyo Mya, Ba Ngwe, Tin Maung, Kyaw Thein, and Nyo Tun accompany them to the jetty. Nyo Tun and his group also bid farewell to the students who go back to their home by Pyay Express Train, Mandalay Express Train, and Mawlamyaing Express Train respectively. On their way back, Nyo Tun and his friends discuss about publishing a booklet called "The Boycotter". Nyo Tun decides to be its 'Managing Editor'.

#### **Chapter (25)**

Pe Khin reads aloud a news from Thuriya newspaper entitled "An Affair of Pyay Boycott Students" to Kyaw Thein, Ba Ngwe, Nyo Tun, and Ba Chit. The news tells them that the Principal and the Police Inspector arrest the students who lie down in front of the Main Gate of Pyay College in order



to deter the other students who come to sit the exam, and if a batch of boycott students are arrested, another batch of students replace them and finally 18 boycott students are detained. They are really satisfied with this news.

When they finish their lunch, Tin Maung and Hla Pe come back from Pyay. Nyo Tun reads out aloud a report from the Pyay students to them. The report informs about how the Police Inspector rides over the bodies of boycott students with a bicycle several times, how the Principal tries to demolish the boycott forces with the help of 12 Police Constables armed with truncheons, how the city elders come and help the students who are about to be attacked by the Polices, and how the Polices drag the students by their hands and legs as if they were animals. Nyo Tun and friends are deeply moved by the perseverance, courage, and sacrifice of these young students from Pyay. He decides to put this news in their 'Boycotter Booklet'.

### **Chapter (26)**

Nyo Tun becomes so thin and exhausted because he has average 3 hours sleep everyday without regular meals and working without any rest since the boycott started. Therefore, he cannot go to the rural areas for political campaigns and he has to work at the Zayat. He is so occupied with such tasks as to communicate with the boycott students from other towns, to write articles for the newspaper, and to publish their twice weekly 'Boycotter Booklet' in which he writes editorials and articles. Soe Tun takes the responsibility of editing News and Nyo Mya the distribution of Booklets to the rural areas. Everybody participates in Proof Reading.

### **Chapter (27)**

Kyaw Thein receives a letter from his uncle who blames him for his involvement with the students boycott. His uncle said in the letter that he will no longer provide him the financial support, so Kyaw Thein needs to pawn his Diamond ring at a Pawn-Shop. Since he is a generous fellow, his wallet becomes empty again as soon as he gets the money. Kyaw Thein is pondering about his life that he may study so hard if he did not join up with the students boycott. And if he passes the exam in First Class Honours, he will be appointed as an ICS and he can support his family very well.

Similarly, Ba Chit is worrying about his family. If he fails his exam, there will be no way-out for his family, so he wishes this boycott may ends up with their demands achieved. Soe Tun is a

patriotic guy but he still wants to earn his B.A. degree and he also wants to get a B.L. degree to become a lawyer, so he also wants this boycott to be ended. Ko Mya and Bernagie are the ones who want to choose the way that is less risky and less trouble, so they also want to finish their boycott. Without understanding his comrades' minds, Ko Nu is just counting his rosary, reciting a mantra to be lucky for their boycott. He is so compassionate about the suffering of the boycott students.

### **Chapter (28)**

Htar Myint receives 20 booklets of boycott to be distributed. She is alert when she sees news titled "About Serious Illness of Our Editor". In this news she learns that since March 22 Nyo Tun was totally exhausted and got stuck in the bed and now he is resting according to the doctor's prescriptions. Other students take his Editorial responsibility, the news informs

This booklet contains an article, "On National Education", written by Nyo Tun before he was ill. After reading that article, Htar Myint admires him more and more.

### **Chapter (29)**

The Doctor advises Nyo Tun to move from Shwe Dagon to some place to take a complete rest, so he is relocated at one of Pe Khin's friends' house. Nyo Tun cannot walk without the help of attendants and he has a fatigue even when he is lying down in his bed. He is mentally restless because he always thinks of the students boycott. Daw Pan Khet, Ma Shein, and Ko Kywe who are workers from Karnaryut Vest Factory come and look after him continuously.

Tin Maung and Pe Khin receive a letter about the condition of Nyo Tun from Htar Myint, so they come to Nyo Tun. They suggest him to take a rest without any worry for the boycott and to eat a healthy balanced diet. Pe Khin tells him that Ko Mya and Mr. Bernagie are coordinating with the Minister of Education and they are planning to give up the boycott. Tin Maung shows him an Announcement of the Boycotter Council dated 16-04-1936. Nyo Tun is absolutely dissatisfied by all these happenings. He dislikes that his comrades are trying to appeal The Government and he totally disagree to surrender their boycott because they did not get what they have demanded. He is also very unhappy about his present condition of illness.

### **Chapter (30)**

As a good speaker, Mr. Bernagie is able to organize each and every student leader. He explains that there are only 150 students who are hard-liners and rests of the other students prepare to sit the exam so the stubborn ones will be the only losers. Such Boycotter Council CEC members as Kyaw Thein, Soe Tun, Ba Chit, Aung Myint, Ba Maw, Ba Pe and Thein Maung become confused by his words but Ba Ngwe, Hla Pe and Pe Khin do not accept what he says. Ko Mya and Bernagie sent Ko Nu to his home and Nyo Tun is seriously ill, so there is none who can forbid their plan to surrender.

### **Chapter (31)**

Some students come back from their rural homes. Htar Myint, Dorothy Thein Pe and Nyunt come straight to Nyo Tun as soon as they arrive in Rangoon. Pe Khin, Ba Ngwe and Hla Pe accompany with the girls to come to him. Nyo Tun himself thinks that he could attend the Conference, but his Doctor cannot allow him to do so. He becomes intolerable when he learns that Bemagie is organizing students to give up the boycott by explaining about losing their education and future employment opportunities. Amazingly he asks that why the same persons who decide to reform the prevailing education System are now trying to get jobs by means of the education they despised so much. Pe Khin, Ba Ngwe and Hla Pe brief Nyo Tun about everything Ko Mya and Bernagie said and Nyo Tun rebuts each and every point they made. But he cannot argue with them face to face, so he is really disappointed. He warns his friends not to be tempted by their words and he says angrily that he will fight against any attempt to stop the boycott even at the cost of his own life. Then he is coughing heavily so his friends feel sorrowful about him.

### **Chapter (32)**

The members of Boycotter Council make a meeting at Mawlamyaing Zayat. It started since 11 a.m. but still going on until 2 p.m. More than 100 College students and many High School students are eagerly waiting for the results of that meeting. In the meeting, Kyaw Thein is on the side of ending the boycott. When he is talking, Ko Nu protests at his words like “the followers are not competent enough“. Tin Maung also declines furiously this accusation and he falls down. Soe Tun is also on the side of ending the boycott. The audience spurns him when he stands up to speak, so he is forced to keep silent and sits down. The meeting cannot get to a final resolution until 5 p.m., so they break the meeting for a while and take their dinner.

Nyo Tun wants to know about the decision of this meeting and he is waiting for someone who will come and inform him about the final decision, but there is none who shows up until the evening, therefore he ventures to go there.

The meeting restarts at 7 p.m. Ba Maw talks for the ending of the boycott and Hla Pe talks for continuing of it. Ba Ngwe becomes dumb because he is so annoyed by the shouting and yelling of the students combined with his fearful mind. Pe Khin senses that their side is going to lose, so he tries to call Nyo Tun. Htar Myint, Ajar, Ma Aye and Chit Sein are confused by the debates and they do not know what to say. Ko Nu is only bowing his head low. Mr. Bernagie announces that he prefers to end this boycott and he won't be its leader if the other students want to carry on with it.

Then they cast votes for and against the boycott. There are only 6 votes for the boycott but the majority vote for the ending of the boycott. At that time Nyo Tun arrives and all students are surprised by his sudden arrival. Ba Ngwe and Htar Myint are so happy to see Nyo Tun. Ba Ngwe carries him and put him in the middle of students. Kyaw Thein comes near Nyo Tun and apologizes him for not being able to pay visit because he is not free. Nyo Tun accuses Kyaw Thein that he is not free since he is so busy with trying to end up the boycott. Then Kyaw Thein pleads him with a voice choked with emotion, but Nyo Tun says that he understands and forgives everything. He exemplifies Kyaw Thein's attitude and action as that of a fox with a tail amputated is trying to cut the tails of its fellow foxes. At that point, Mr. Bernagie explains him about the situation of their boycott. Bernagie says that Nyo Tun does not know the actual situation because he is ill and there are only 150 students who return to the boycott center while the other students are not really committed to the boycott and just stay at their home.

Nyo Tun does not accept the explanation of Bernagie and he argues that what Bernagie tells is showing that he does not know the real spirit of Burmese people who are good followers if there is a strong and competent leadership, and for him, the important point is to persevere to go on despite of meagre following. It is betraying, he affirms, the cause of the boycott by organizing young students to surrender, so he determined to protect it at the expense of his life. Then he suddenly collapses and everybody is so worry about him. But there are voices that sound "We win".

## **A Review on the Novel “The Boycott Student”**

I would like to review the novel “Thabeik Hmauk Kyaung Thar” (The Boycott Student) in five parts.

1. Background of the Novel in Summary
2. About the Author
3. About the Novel
4. About the Characters
5. About the Publishing House

### **1. Background of the Novel in Summary**

The Novel “Thabeik Hmauk Kyaung Thar” is a historical novel that reflects the Rangoon University Boycott, an anti-colonial movement happened in 1936.

After the 1920’s first University Students boycott, 1935 and 1936 were the years in which the activities of the Students Union took accelerations. The Nationalist Movement started to regenerate in the whole Burma.

At that time, “Doh Bamar Asi Ayone” was more involved with the Rangoon University. The University Students with Thakhin-spirit who did not appreciate the colonial education were more and more abounded in the University. At the same time, the oppression of the University Administration and the Political Authorities were more and more tightened.

The students’ activities led by Ko Nu, Ko Aung San, Ko Tun Ohn, Ko Hla Pe, and Ko Thi Han became stronger. In a short time, the University Administration took a wrong move by expelling Ko Nu and many other students unlawfully. So the anti-colonial education students’ uprising broke out and a University Boycott appeared. These are the historical facts outside of this novel.

## 2. About the Author

Min Yu Wai remarks about Thein Pe Myint, the author of “Thabeik Hmauk Kyaung Thar”, as follows:

“The novelist Thein Pe Myint is not only a writer, but also a top-level political leader who took part in Burma’s struggle for her Independence. Thakhin Kodaw Hmine records his political activities in a verse that runs *“Tet Phone Gyi Talkr Thein Pe was chosen unwaveringly and unfalteringly”*“

In this way, Thein Pe Myint, a writer-cum-politician, writes the novel “Thabeik Hmauk Kyaung Thar” based on 1936 Rangoon University Students Boycott. Thein Pe is the pen name he used to write that novel. He is not the one who participated in the top-level leadership of that boycott, but he was a member of the Student Union and he used to give some good advices to the student leaders.

The “Nat O Gwe Pamphlet” in the novel was actually fabricated by Thein Pe Myint. The educational activity for the workers in Kamaryut village of Nyo Tun, the main character of the novel, and his friends was an activity Thein Pe Myint also got involved in. He stood for the cause of the Boycott so he blamed the students who let the Boycott aborted.

Therefore, in the novel he criticizes the students who fizzled out the students’ boycott. Pe wrote this novel when he was studying for his M.A. and B.L. degree at Calcutta University, in India.

## 3. About the Novel

The novel “Thabeik Hmauk Kyaung Thar” was published in 1938 in two volumes, edited by Maung Nu. This novel is the first of its kind that based on an actual political happening. Although it is called a novel, it looks like a retold record. Zawana said at a Literature Forum held in YMCA Rangoon on 21-7-74 that:

“Most of the novels in our younger days were plot-dominated ones. Thein Pe Myint’s “Thabeik Hmauk Kyaung Thar“ is the only novel with a high level of characterization in Pre-war period (i.e. before 1939). Even this seems to be a record.”

As par with the above-mentioned remark, “Thabeik Hmauk Kyaung Thar” is a novel with a high level of characterization but there is no clear-cut and well defined plot in it. So it becomes a target

for some critics who believe that a novel must have a plot. But it can be said that it is a new type of novel although the author confessed that he did not intend it to be so.

Thein Pe Myint said:

“This “Thabeik Hmauk Kyaung Thar“ may have no plot if it is meant to be read as a novel. It is just a new type. I created it unwittingly, without any technical manipulations.

“But now I heard that this is the most modern type of novel. I did not intend to write it like that. For me I wanted to write about the Students Boycott, so I simply wrote it. I did not care about the plot when I wrote it, but there are full of genuine characters in it.”<sup>1</sup>

In this novel, there is something unacceptable and blameful to the traditional critics. This is that there are so many episodes of the novel in which the characters preach and propagate the political ideologies.

Tetkatho Win Mon comments in page-264 of “*A History of Myanmar Novel*”<sup>2</sup> that:

“Thabeik Hmauk Kyaung Thar“ is a novel which records in great detail about the second students' boycott of 1936. It can paint very thoroughly about the habits and characters of Rangoon University's students and teachers, the cause, aim, and objectives of this students' boycott, and the behaviours of the boycott students during the boycott period. It is quite different from the traditional historical novels and the plot-dominated novels since it is based on the 1936 University Students' Boycott. But it is highly appreciated by the Burmese readers and it becomes prominent among the novels of the Pre-War period.”

#### **4. About the Characters**

Although the writer does not depend on a well-defined plot in writing this novel, he tries hard to portray the characters' habits and behaviours.

In this novel, Nyo Tun is the ideal Protagonist with a fixed characterization. He is the pre-eminent character in the novel. From the start to the end of the novel, Nyo Tun is honest, straightforward and resolute in ideas. He speaks frankly whatever he likes or dislikes. He is not happy with the

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<sup>1</sup> Reviewer's note: see Thein Pe Myint (1969), “*My Characters in My Novels*“, Nant Thar Publications, Yangon, p.: 34.

<sup>2</sup> Win Mon, Tetkatho (1981), “*A History of Myanmar Novel*“, Collected Papers on Novel Second Volume, Sarpay Beikman.

prematurely aborted boycott due to cheap bargain. The majority wants to put the boycott to an end but he refuses this idea. Thein Pe Myint himself speaks of Nyo Tun's character in Maung Thein Pe's novel (actually it is another pen name of Thein Pe Myint) as follows:

“Is there any real person like Nyo Tun in the real world? There are a lot of them. There were some students leaders of 1936 Students' Boycott similar to Nyo Tun. So Nyo Tun's character is clear and distinct and I like it”<sup>1</sup>

The author tries to render Ma Htar Myint and Ma Thaug Yee but their characters are not as picturesque as Nyo Tun's. Kyaw Thein and Ko Mya are painted in their true colours. But the characterization of such important characters as Ko Nu and Bemagie are not vivid and colourful enough.

Thaug Pe is represented as a shy and wavering guy. In the novel, Than Myint is illustrated as an extremely egotistic music-intoxicated man who does not care for other people. Saya Ba Hla Thein and Saya Kyaw Myint play the roles of notorious teachers who are never reluctant to abuse their own female students.

The author draws the sketches of students in such different images as the gambler, the teaser, the jolly man who always talks about women, the deluded one who is contented with the colonial education, the indifferent one who care only about himself, the altruist, the political enthusiast, the Thakhin Ideologist, the religious one, the female students who enjoy to be called by the Christian names, the Nationalist, and the debauchers.

Some of these characters are real whereas some others are purely imaginative.

Of these real characters, some are represented with their true-life names when some others are named arbitrarily. Some real characters with their true-life names are depicted in their authentic characters, no more or no less, but some of them are characterized as par with the author's creative imagination.

Thein Pe Myint himself confessed about that:

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<sup>1</sup> See Thein Pe Myint (1981), “*Varieties of my Literary Life*”, Sabei Oo Publication.



“(in the novel) some characters are created with their true name and true character of their real life, but some characters are real, even their dresses are unaltered, but their names are changed. Some characters are half-true and half-imagined, a real life character added with artistic creation or modified by artistic reduction.”<sup>1</sup>

For example, Ko Nu's character is the real-life copy of a real person (who became a Prime Minister of Independent Burma) and the author portrays his image authentically in the novel.

“Among all characters, I delineate only Ko Nu as the exact replica of his real life characters”, Thein Pe Myint said on p.: 54 his “My Characters in My Novels”.

He paints the original picture of Ko Nu in terms of his speech-giving style, his voice, his conduct and character, and his authoritarianism. Thein Pe Myint relates in this book that since Ko Nu and the author were like brothers, Ko Nu allowed him to write as he like by telling him “You can write as you like and I won't omit anything”, although Ko Nu was the editor of this novel.

Ma Ma Gyi, Ma Ohn, and Ma Amar are the real persons. Ko Mya, Kyaw Thein and Bernagie are also real-life persons but their names are altered. Thaug Pe is an artistic modification of a real person.

Some characters like Nyo Mya, Htar Myint, and Thaug Yee are the pure creations of the author.

Maung Htin comments on the characters of Thein Pe Myint's novels in his paper, “The Myanmar Realist Novels”, page-230 as follows:

“Thein Pe Myint's “*Thabeik Hmauk Kyaung Thar* “(1938) is a novel which describes the activities of politically enthusiastic youths. It is capable of depicting the different characters so explicitly.”<sup>2</sup>

## 5. About the Publisher

The Publisher of the novel “*Thabeik Hrnauk Kyaung Thar*” is the Nagani Book Club. Nagani Book Club was established by the young Thakhins of Doh Bamar Asi Ayone and some politically

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<sup>1</sup> See Thein Pe Myint (1969), “*My Characters in My Novels*”, Nant Thar Publications, Yangon, p.:24-25.

<sup>2</sup> See Htin, Maung, (1981), “*77w Myanmar Realist Novels*”, Collected Papers on Novel-Second Volume, Yangon, Sarpap Beikrnan.

progressive persons in 1937. This publishing house printed and distributed such books as books on Political Ideology books on Anti-colonialism, books on Anti-Fascism, Biographies, Novels, and Plays, and some translations from foreign languages. The first book published by Nagani Book Club is Thein Pe Myint "A Biography of Saya Lun" (1937). Thein Pe Myint became a member of Nagani Book Club's Educational Executive Committee in 1937-38. By 1939, Nagani Journal was started to appear. Nagani Book Club contributed political knowledge and world's literature to Myanmar literary world.

## 5.1 Commentary by Esther-Rina Urbani

Dear Than Min Htaik,

First of all let me thank you for an interesting book report. I thoroughly enjoyed reading it and it gave me a good description of the book. The book and your report provided me with an interesting insight into the Myanmar of the thirties and taught me a lot about the boycott and its main characters. I also liked your review and agreed on many aspects. Just like you, I found the characters slightly flat and the critique on the lack of plot of the book of no importance. I would have liked it though to find out what you think of the boycott and what impact it had on your life. Moreover I would have appreciated more information on the social context in which the boycott took place. In other words, what was Myanmar like in 1936 and what did the rest of the population think of this student boycott? Nevertheless your report is extremely meticulous and it initiated many questions and remarks with me. Most of which will be discussed by other commentators but some I would like to consider here.

One of the things that I found very interesting is the position of the female students in the book and in the boycott. The role of female students seemed indispensable and it pleased me to read that the women in the Myanmar of 1936 were already an important part of the academic and political field. On the other hand it struck me as odd that sexual harassment against these women has been mentioned more than once and I haven't been able to find out why this was mentioned. Was this a big issue then or does the writer have another reason for mentioning this so frequently? Or could it be that it makes the book more readable just like the love stories he has entwined?

The same could be asked for the mentioning of mental illness in the book. Why do the students become mentally ill or go mad and why does the writer use these story lines in his book? Is this to explain that the whole boycott was strenuous and that students regularly go mad in Myanmar or is it to spice things up?

What struck me most must have been the many ways in which the British colonial education system is being criticized. Maybe it struck me because I had no idea that it was that bad or maybe it struck me because I am not used to such strong Burmese critique. Either way, the negative comments like

“slavery favoured education” or “clerk-producing factory” gave me a sense of inevitability of the boycott and the whole book left me with an urge to start revolutionising myself. Moreover, strong contrasts are made in the book between the bad and the good characters and it becomes very clear that the Burmese should follow a good leader and take a political stance even if it puts their future at stake. Some students worry about their financial situation and the effects of their participation in the boycott on their families and this seems to me an understandable dilemma. In the book however there is little room for compassion towards these students, it actually becomes quite clear that there should be no excuses when we are talking about justice and sovereignty. What follows from this is that I wonder if these feelings can have an impact on the Burmese society these days. Do you think that Burmese people would feel instigated to become more active in political affairs after reading this book? And do you think that Burmese students nowadays would agree or even recognise themselves in this book?

All in all I think that the book is a strong political statement, written in a time when these statements were necessary and perhaps this book could still have an impact today.

Best regards,

Esther-Rina Urbani

## 5.1 Reply to the Commentary

Dear Esther-Rina Urbani

Thank you very much for your comments on my review of the novel, and I'm pleased to answer your questions.

In the novel, the author mentions more than once sexual harassment experienced by lady-students despite their crucial role in the educational and political arenas of Myanmar in 1936.

You have queries as to whether it was a big issue in that period, whether the author had any other reason to mention it repeatedly and whether he wanted the novel to be attractively romantic.

1. In my opinion, the novel is based on real-life events in history.
2. The author views things from all angles, and so, possesses advantages in portraying human character and nature.
3. The repeated mentioning may indicate the fact that this behaviors (sexual harassment) was contrary to Myanmar culture and causes distaste and shock during that period.

The author also may have some reasons:

1. He might not wish to leave out a well-known event that actually took place at that time.
2. He might wish to keep a balance between the good and the bad to be able to fully present human character and nature, and
3. He might wish to blame this on the colonial administrative system that could not protect young women against abusive acts.

Your second question concerns the mental illness suffered by two students. This was also a real episode, which is meant, in my opinion, not for giving an idea or for giving a lesson. The author has included this episode seemingly to create a tragic feeling or to highlight exhaustion and stress from staging the boycott.

Viewed from the modern era, criticisms on the colonial education system seem to have gone too far. But it can be imagined that the Myanmar under servitude might feel hurt by the fact that the colonial education was not the "Education for All" and it provided opportunity only to the people in

the high strata. The criticisms might have spring from the fact that the educated class, born of the colonial education system, stood on the side of the rulers, not to let bad impacts fall on their positions and ranks, without considering the oppressed. “They might have poured out their criticisms as they had witnesses change in the character of the educated persons. The phrases like “slavery favoured education” and “clerk-producing factory” became sobriquets of the colonial education.

Concerning the third question whether Myanmar had been motivated by reading the book, I would say, “Yes.” But, there is an exception: it would not instigate people who were politically not awakened. It is not the kind of rags-to-riches story, and instead, represents tendencies in real life. It would create political outlook in and provide lessons for the youths involved in the boycott. It brought up the issues of the lack of leadership, and the weak political consciousness of the entire mass around 1930. This novel still reflects the objective conditions in the present era.

There may be some weaknesses in my conceptions, but I’ve tried my best to answer your questions.

With best regards,

Than Min Htike

## 6. Book Report on Thein Pe, *Students' Boycott*, Vol. 1

Written by U Kyaw Min (Translation: Frankie Tun, Hamburg).<sup>1</sup>

### **Biography of the Author, Thein Pe Myint**

Thein Pe Myint was born on the 10th of July, 1914 at Butalin Town.

His parents were U Ba and Daw Myint and his father was a clerk from land surveying department.

He finished his primary education from U Pho Nyan Primary School and his secondary education from National School of Monywa and a Buddhist school. He then got his I.A. from Mandalay College in 1932-33 and in 1933-35 he finished his B.A from Yangon University.

In 1933, he entered into the journalism era by the name of "Wa Nay Nga Pe". He became a delegate of Yangon University day time Students' Union and he also acted as the University member, and a member of *Dobama* organization.

From 1935-36, after finishing the school, he worked as a journalist and author. In 1936, when the University boycott occurred, he helped from outside. In April 1936, he attended the India National Congress which was held in Lattanong as a journalist for Myanmar's Light newspaper.

While he was attending there, he observed and learned the constituency of India national's colleges. He also met and interviewed many Indian political leaders and he later wrote about this in Myanmar's Light newspaper. After the Congress, he went to Calcutta and he studied law. He took the responsibility of foreign relations and communications for the Bengal state's students' league.

In 1937, he gathered some of his short stories and named it as "Min Tine Pin" and produced as a book.<sup>2</sup> His author's name was changed to "Thein Nay Nwe" from "Wa Nay Nga Pe" and later he took the name of Thein Pe. When his famous novel called "Tet Phone Gyi" came out, he became well known as "Tetphongyi Thein Pe". Only in 1949, he then changed his name to Thein Pe Myint.

He was all the time either participating in the political parties or working as a journalist. So he was always living in the two worlds of journalistic and politics. From 1934 to 1935, he was an active member of Yangon University Students' Union, from 1936 to 1937 co-secretary of Dobama organization, from 1937 to 1938 educational group member in the Nagani Book Club, from 1941- to 1942 recruiting in charge of Anti-Japan forces. From 1945 to 1946, he became the general secretary of Burmese Communist Party and Pha-Sa-Pa-La (Anti Fascist People's Liberation<sup>3</sup>) league co-secretary. Until 1948, he was the central committee core member of Burmese Communist Party. He was arrested one time in 1938 and another time in 1948.

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<sup>1</sup> Footnotes were added by the translator and the editor.

<sup>2</sup> See Vol. 2 of this series.

He also had worked for World Peace Congress and Sino-Burmese friendship society.

He also was the vice president and then the president of the Burma Journalists' Association.

In 1958, he founded the Bo Ta Htaung newspaper and he was the chief editor and administrative director.

In 1936, he went to India once and in 1942, he travelled to China and India during the war. He went to attend the Asia Pacific Peace Conference preparation committee in China in 1952. In 1956, he went to China to attend the Liu Shon Anniversary and he also went to India (New Delhi) as president of Burmese Journalists' Association for the Asian Journalists Conference which was held in New Delhi. In 1957, he went to Cairo for the meeting of Asian Peoples' Unity movement. He went to England for learning about Parliament and in 1961 he went to Japan, Vietnam and China to attend the Asian Writers Conference and in 1962, as a journalist he went to Soviet Russia, the German Democratic Republic and Romania.

Thein Pe Myint had also entered the film industry and he had directed a film called "Yaut kyar gon yee". He also was a screen writer for many films. After the war, he directed "Shwe Moe Ngwe Moe", "Belleray" and "Sein Yaung So" Theatres.

The books that were written by Thein Pe Myint were, Biography of Saya Lun (1937), Tet Phone Gyi (1937), The Conflicts of ethnic Indians and Burmese, Tat Khit Nat Soe (1940), U Saw went to England (opera written by the name of Ta Kaung Kywet), Lan Sa Paw Pyi; The teachings of Maw Si Tone; Chit Ywe Khaw Yar (1949); Zat Sa Yar U Phoe Sein; Nay Yit Taw Khit Haung (1952); The Traveller during the War (Sit Ah Twin Kha Yee Thel - 1956); As the Sun dawn from the East (1958); Kyaw Nyein (1961); Chit Kyi Yay Kha Yee Thel (The Friendship Traveller); Walk to the West and Look to the East (1962); University Introduction (1965); Collection of short stories (1966); The Early History of Wi Thay Tha Division (1967); Maw Si Tone, China and Myanmar's Sovereignty (1967); Mails of the Battles (1968); Thi Dar Pyone (1968) and My First Love.

### ***Students' Boycott* ( First Part )**

The book "Students' Boycott" written by Thein Pe Myint is a story based on the colonial era of Yangon University. During the colonised period, Yangon University was a main place for the occupying British to teach their slavery favoured education. At that time rich people only; the bureaucrats and their children and the children of the officials, could afford to attend the university education. A few were sons and daughters of middle class families.

Many who were studying at the university, were aiming to work for the British government by

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<sup>3</sup> English name: "Anti-Fascist Peoples' Freedom League".



serving as officers. They do not really know that the education they were receiving was specially designed for the colonialism. However, many of the students, influenced by the outside nationalistic politics and by studying the developing political knowledge, came to know and believed that these were colonist favoured education and therefore must strive against such an education for the liberation of enslavement.

In 1920, the beginning of a national movement from the University boycott had given a push to the politics in the University. Because of the 1920 boycott, many students became more active in 1930-31 and 1934-35. By the year of 1935 to 1936, the movement of the University Students' Union was greatly renewed and throughout the country a national political movement could be said of being more united.

After the 1930 Saya San and the farmers' uprising, many political movements followed. There was more relationship between the University and the Dobama Association. Many students became more nationalistic and wanted to go against the slave education system. At the same time, University administrations and officials of the government had become more oppressive.

The movement of the students became stronger under the leadership of Ko Nu, Ko Aung San, Ko Tun Ohn, Ko Hla Pe, Ko Thi Han. At that time, the administration of the university had unjustly ousted the president of the University Students' Union, Ko Nu and many student leaders. Then the students who were opposing the colonial education had turned this into a students' boycott.

The author, Thein Pe Myint has recorded this historic event in his book, "Boycotting Student". We could say that the author had written this book with the intention of attacking the colonial education system and stressing the need of Independence. However, in his forward, he wrote:

"The boycott of the students in early 1936 has entered into the history and that is why by returning to the pages of history studying them we surely can get many advantages. We can also find the guides for our path. This knowledge will lead our Burmese peoples' future works. For this hope I have written the history of boycott and the Boycotting Student novel....."

His intentions were to look at the past history and to learn lessons for the future, to fill up the needy and weak spots, to correct the errors and to encourage the beginnings of the movement for national liberation so that it will not go astray.

The following is the story of the book. Nyo Tun is a university student who has the desire to work for the national liberation and also has a forward orientated political vision. His parents were U Bo Mya and Daw Kan Me, who were the middle class people. Nyo Tun had already passed I.A. from

Mandalay College and was continuing his studies at Yangon University. During the school holidays he returned to his native place and whenever he came back, he always encouraged and pushed others to have more educational and political knowledge. When he went back from his native village to enter the final year's B.A. exam, he met with Thaug Pe and his sister at the Mandalay central train station.

Thaug Pe was a classmate from Nyo Tun and his sister, Thaug Yee, had just passed the tenth standard and was going to attend the University. Brother and sister travelled together with Nyo Tun on the train to Yangon. Thaug Yee loved and relied on Nyo Tun as her own brother. Thaug Yee is interested in Burmese literature and politics. She wants to master the Burmese language very well to write expertly. She also wants to understand the contemporary political situation. That's why Nyo Tun had given her advice and taught her concerning politics and helped her studying the Burmese language. That is why Thaug Yee trusts and loves him.

University is a place where many people from different classes and situations and different mentalities come together. There are many students who are trying to be the teachers' special disciples with the hope of becoming big officials in the British government. There are also many rich students who are just studying at the University for fun and who do not care about education but seeking fun such as drinking, playing poker and so on. But then, there are many students who really are nationalistic, who really love the country, who ponder the country's present situation, accept the advanced political knowledge and want to eradicate the colonial education.

Among those students, Tun Aye, Pe Khin, Thein Pe, Aye Ko and Khin Saw are the students from Thaton hostel who always are playing poker and thus are poker addicts. When they just came back from their homes at the beginning of the school days, with plenty of money in their hands, they played poker at night in Tun Aye's room.

Ba Maw, Ba Pe and Ba Sein from Pinya students' hostel are the ones who are intending to work for the British government as high ranking officials after their graduation. They are making tea with an electrical water heater secretly and talking about how to answer the exams of I.C.S, I.F.S. and I.P.S.<sup>4</sup> respectively. Other students such as Ba Sein, Chit Hlaing and Ba Maw are the womanizers. They always talk about the student girls, gossiping about them and wasting time.

Some of the students are the ones who would like to play harps and banjo and like singing songs and let their minds wander. They are soft hearted and passive type people. Their leader is a Burmese tutor called Ko Than Myint. Finally, some of the students want to eradicate the colonial

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<sup>4</sup> Indian Civil Service, Indian Foreign Service, Indian Police Service.

education and embracing a progressive political attitude. They are nationalistic minded. Those are the students like Nyo Tun , Kyaw Thein , Hla Pe , Nyo Mya , Soe Tun etc.

There are too different types of student girls. Some of them are only interested in beauty and fun, some are politically well motivated and developed. The latter are students such as Khin Khin Gyi, Ma Htar Myint, Ma Tin Hla. Thaug Yee, the sister of Thaug Pe who has later joined this group of girls.

As there are different types of students, there too are different types of teachers and lecturers. British teachers treat the Burmese students as coming from lower classes and are oppressive towards them. At one time Pe Khin was late for the class and a British teacher who is teaching English shouted at him, used abusive words against him and asked him to get out of his class room. Pe Khin did not keep quiet but talked back to him daringly and later did not come to school. Nyo Tun and his group praised him. They were not satisfied and were angry because they argue that the teacher did not treat his student as a student but rather as a slave.

Among the Burmese tutors too, some even tricked the girl students and tried to get some dirty opportunities. Some tutors are sinking and floating in the colonial education. School authorities always try to oppress the students.

Not so long after the school reopened, there was an election of the persons in charge for the students' hostel leisure reading club. Nyo Tun and his friends tried to get his group elected.

In Pagan hostel, Hla Pe entered the election against another student called Ba Than and he won. In that meeting, after he had won, they sang together the "Dobama Song". The hostel chief prohibited them singing that song. They opposed this prohibition and continued singing that song. So Nyo Tun and his group began their movement against the authorities.

Nyo Tun went to the workers from Kamayut and taught them. He opened their political eyes by giving them political knowledge. On the other hand he met with the girl students who have mature political ideas and he became friendly with Ma Htar Myint. He fell in love for her.

Among the girl students who are studying in tutor Maung Than Myint's class, Ma Thaug Yee is one of them. Burmese tutor Maung Than Myint had his eyes on Thaug Yee. He is a poetic and soft hearted wanderer, a very ancient and backward minded person. Thaug Yee is very open minded, a straight forward and modern type. That is why Maung Than Myint did not like the ideas and answers from Thaug Yee in the Burmese class. Actually, it was Nyo Tun who taught her to write in a straight forward way. Than Myint who knew about it became more unsatisfied. He also did not

like the Nyo Tun's idea of Burmese literature, however, he liked Thaung Yee. So he favoured Thaung Yee while teaching her. Later, he gave her a love letter. When Thaung Yee's brother and Nyo Tun came to know about it, they were very angry with him. They went to him and reprimanded him by giving him a warning.

When the election of the University Students' Union was held, Nyo Tun and his group were elected. Ko Nu was elected as the President, Ko Mya as vice-president, Nyo Tun was elected as the secretary and Banagyi as the treasurer. During the University holidays, Nyo Tun, Nyo Mya and Kyaw Thein together went to Kamayut<sup>5</sup> to teach the workers. When the schools were reopened, they celebrated the National Day. Many students participated. On that day Union's President Ko Nu made a speech. Ko Nu became well known because of that speech.

As a consequence of this speech, the workers from a wool factory in Kamayut started a strike. Nyo Tun's group helped in that with heart and soul. Nyo Tun and Htar Myint gave speeches at the gathering of the striking workers. They made collections for the workers in the students' hostels. Therefore the principal summoned Nyo Tun and warned him not to get involved in politics but Nyo Tun did not obey the order. Later the news came out that Nyo Tun would not be allowed to sit exam. The same news came out at Mandalay College. Then the students' movements and activities were getting stronger. Mandalay College's Students' Union and Yangon university Students' Union became more united and increased their activities against the oppression from the University authorities.

At the same time, on a Sunday, tutor Ba Hla Thein, tutor Kyaw Myint and a student called Khin Maung Lat took two girl students from Inya hostel, Khin Ma Ma and Ma San Thin, with their car to go for a picnic. They went to a hotel outside Yangon, took a separate room and ate and drank together. They made the two girls drunk and destroyed their dignity. That news spread out like a wild fire in the forest at the whole University. An article covering that came out in Oway Magazine. Therefore, the University authorities were getting more shocked and pressing on the students. They planned to expel Soe Tun who was the editor of the Oway magazine from the University. At the meeting of the Students' Union, Ko Nu gave a speech, attacking the authorities of the University. Because of that speech, the Union's president, Ko Nu, was expelled from the University.

After that Ko Nu also returned his B.A. to the university. Many students were deeply unsatisfied because their Union's president was expelled. The expulsion of Students' Union's president is

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<sup>5</sup> Kamayut is a district of Rangoon close to the University with factories producing ropes, sacks and other goods from

considered as an insult to the whole student community. So they called a special Union's meeting and decided to boycott the University. At this the story of the first part ended.

### **Critique**

Boycotting Student book is based on the 1935-36 University events. Since it uses the historical facts as the skeleton to write the book, we could say that it is a historically based novel. Many of such books are normally based on past history which is rather far from the present period and, therefore, it has to rely on some books and documents and is distant from the present era.

Those historical based novels, because they had to use historical facts, are not like the drama the author has created in this book. In other words, in creating a historical novel of the usual kind, the main story is not from the author. When a book is written basing on historical facts, and the author was writing about the past that is very far from him, he cannot describe the characters of the book very vividly and clearly. However, the "Boycotting Student", written by Thein Pe Myint, though it is a book based on a historical event, described a past that was so near and dear to the author since he himself was involved. In another way, the author himself had experienced the historical event he was writing about. Therefore it is more of a true story book rather than a novel.

Thein Pe Myint's boycotting student, in the same way as other historical books, was based on a historical event but that historical event is a past within the reach of the author. That's why it does not need to rely on books and documents for information. Thein Pe Myint's book is based on self-experienced facts. It is a historical based novel which came out not on the writer's table but from among the experiences of the people.

Since the book's skeleton is taken from the events in which the author was involved and is based on the place and time he lived in, the characters of the book are very vividly visualized. The characters of the book are the persons the author once had known himself and had relations to. They still existed actually at that time. So the author could describe their characters very well.

Many of the historical based novels are mainly based on the story line and give preference to the story line but his book did not give preference to the story and not to the characters of the book but rather it gave main attention to the historical facts of the University boycott which happened in 1936. And therefore it gives preference to this documentation of the historical facts. The author himself confessed in his preface that by looking at the past events and meditating on them, he is hoping to give encouragement for the future work.

He wrote "Because it is written about the truth straightforwardly, it might affect somebody and I

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coconut fibres and factories producing clothes.

will not apologise and ask to forgive me. When one apologises, the truth will have less value".

Therefore, the author had written about the historical events without hiding the truth. Since he gave preference to the historical facts, the book could be called a „background essential narrative“.

The author, while trying to re-create the historical true event as a novel, did not give preference to the story line, but tried to express and decorate the main characters vividly and clearly and thus putting forward his intentions.

The author is presenting the battle of an organization, a group and a force. So he tries to present the character of a group more clearly than of a single person and his mental character. In his novel, each of his character creation is sometimes clear, sometimes not, but in any occasion the response of a group to the respective matter was very attractively presented. Particularly, the author has very finely presented the habits and practices of the University students in those days and, therefore, we can say that he clearly and vividly characterised the class structure of the University.

Even though the author has written about the battle of an organization and a force, he wrote with special attention in describing the main character of his book. His main character is Nyo Tun and throughout the story the most vividly conceived character. Nyo Tun is an exemplary in his book, too clean and too much of a hero. That is why he does not look like a normal person but like a puppet created by the author. Even though the author has written about the students' boycott, no one is as outstanding as the main character, Nyo Tun. That is the book's main weakness. The author has created the main character as a flat and a model character.

From a story teller's point of view, the author has presented the story from a perspective that is known by everybody. He has written as though we know everything about the body, heart and mind of all the persons. That is why it makes the reader more interested since the reader not only understand the words and activities of the characters but can also sympathize with the feelings of them.

Since it is not a story based novel, the story could be seen as very thin and weaver. As an attraction of the story, the love affairs of Nyo Tun and Ma Htar Myint, and of Maung Than Myint and Thaug Yee are merely inserted. There is no aiming at a personal happy ending and a presentation of the ups and downs of the characters as to the general reader's satisfaction. There are no tricks and surprises, no attractions and turns since the story is too shallow. However, contention of different forces can be seen. Since the book is about the historical events in the time of anti-colonialism and the colonial education system, on one side are the University authorities and on the other side are

students who are going against the oppression. Both are presented as two forces and attract the reader's attention very well.

Because it is a “background essential narrative”, it is well written with regard to the different groups of background. As for the time background, it is placed in the period of 1935 to 1936, and as for the background place, it is the Yangon University. It was an exactly solid background. Since the story of novel actually happened at that time and at that place, it is very clear that the novel is based on a true background.

When looked as the humanity background, the novel is based on the society of educated University students and their surroundings. As for the political background, a period of national liberation and fighting against the occupation of foreigners is described. Therefore, the story of the book displays solid and logical features.

The story is the actual historical fact drama and the people involved in the story are also the living characters. However, since it was created as a novel, there could be some characters that are created by the author.

Actually, the book reveals the big zeal of the author to enlighten his readers and therefore the author's view point should be included here. Many novelists used to reveal their opinion very softly and beautifully. It is rare to find authors who expressed their views so openly by choosing the characters' words.

In this novel, however, the author has preached and expressed his view points too much. In some places, the presentation of the author's political opinions is included.

Literature is the mirror of a certain historical period. A mirror always shows what it perceived. Any literature should show the period in which it had been created. When a literature can not reveal an era, it could not be regarded as literature.

A novelist should reveal the period he had gone through by his presentation. To try to reveal an era and its perception is the main duty of an author. A novel should show the people's actual lives and should be like a delegate of the country it comes from. For example, a British novelist should be able to reveal the England and Englanders lives as well as a Burmese novelist should show the lives and the state of the Burmese people and the country. By reading the novel, a country's economy, politics and human communications on which the novel is based should reveal something about them. When it does not, it is an irresponsible novel.

Thein Pe Myint's boycotting student's life is the life in which the author himself was involved and

what he has experienced at the time of 1936 University students' boycott. He has created a narrative from the background history. Therefore, it reveals the political situation of Burma during the British colonial time, the education during the colonial era, the lives and situation of the University students at that time, oppressed workers of Kamayut and their situation. Therefore, it is a book which reveals an era and serves this purpose. It has done what a responsible novel should do.

“Boycotting Student” has been presented as a piece of literature which told about the history of Burma's national and independence movement and therefore it is a historical pillar of this independence movement. It will be a support for those who would like to study the history of Burmese independent movement.

The period of 1937-38 in which the boycotting student novel came out is the period when Burmese long novels developed and became stronger. Burmese stories slowly changed into novels and started telling about contemporary happenings and showing signs of improvement in literature. Many Burmese novels are centred on character and the lives of the characters are given preference. Then there were story centralized novels in which the story of the novel is given special attention as well as opinion centralized novels. In this context, Thein Pe Myint wrote this novel in which the historical facts and backgrounds are given preference. And so this background based novel came out. Therefore it is helpful for those who want to study the stream of development of the Burmese novel.

Many University students at the colonial era led all the students in striving for national independence in which they all participated “as a brick or as sand”.<sup>6</sup> They had selflessly made sacrifices for the country. Because of the whole people including the students, Burma had gained her sovereignty. Burmese people had their own independence again. The students' performance had been one force for winning the victory of national independence. This novel sheds its light on that fact.

As we have a saying of "today's young ones are the tomorrow's leaders" the young students are the ones who would create the future. When today's youths came to know the ability of the students of the past history, then today's youths will have self confidence in their own abilities and the spirit of selflessness and sacrifice can be increased and the good attitude of loving and valuing the freedom and justice which had been achieved with blood and sweat that is shown by this novel.

Anyhow, anyway, “Boycotting Student” is a classic novel in Burmese literature in which anti-

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<sup>6</sup> Burmese proverb.



colonialism and the history of national liberation had been recorded. Therefore, Thein Pe Myint's novel has not only literary but also historical value.

## **7. Commentary on the Report on Thein Pe Myint's *Students' Boycott* (Jasmin Lorch)**

Dear U Kyaw Min,

Your book report provides an encompassing abstract and critique of the historical novel "Students' Boycotter". Mostly, it is easily understandable and gives the reader a good insight into both the novel's content and the time and historical setting in which it was written.

What I especially like is that you include a biography of the author and a critique and that you shortly describe the historical and political background against which the story has to be seen. Thus, readers that do not normally have a detailed knowledge about the history of Myanmar can still understand the content of the novel and profit from it.

With regard to the intended publication of the report I have some minor suggestions, which you might want to consider. Right at the beginning you mention the *Dobama* organization or association. As people who are not very familiar with the history of Myanmar are also going to read the report, I would recommend that you shortly explain what kind of association the *Dobama* organisation was and which role it played in the history of Myanmar.

As far as the biography of the author is concerned, it would also be interesting to know what he did after 1962, where he lived, where he died and whether he still worked as a journalist then. (I understand that he was still publishing novels and short stories at that time.)

Before starting to summarize the story you give a short description of the historical setting, in which it is taking place. As I already mentioned, this is very helpful and interesting for readers. Your description focuses mainly on the role of the students' movement in attacking the colonial education system though. Maybe you could also elaborate a little more on the meaning of the students' boycotts for the anti-colonial struggle and the independence movement in general.

Your critique is very interesting and thought-provoking from both a literary and a historical point of view. Furthermore, you are repeatedly pointing out, that the novel does not only have a historical

meaning but that it is also relevant with regard to the present and the future. To give an example, you specifically mention how reading such a novel might contribute to a higher morale of university students today. As you say, the theme of history being important for the present and the future is very interesting and the intent of the author to influence present-day attitudes is worth pointing out. I would find it interesting if you could also elaborate a little more on the meaning that the various major themes of the story might have for people and politics in Myanmar today. For example, I understand that the struggle against foreign domination and the sovereignty of the people of Myanmar are central motifs of the story. The role that students (also female students) can play in this struggle for freedom and sovereignty seem to be central as well. How do these themes become manifest in Myanmar today? Are there fears of foreign domination and is there a struggle for sovereignty? Which roles do the university and the students play in both this struggle for sovereignty and in the society and in politics in general?

Thank you very much for your report! It is very interesting and thought-provoking and it has been a pleasure to comment on it.

Best regards,

*Jasmin Lorch*

## 8. Book Report on Thein Pe, *Students' Boycott*, Vol. 2

Written by Kyaw Min (translated from Burmese by Frankie Tun)<sup>1</sup>

### Biography of the Author

(See Report on the novel's first part, p. 62)

### *Students' Boycott* (Part Two)

The book, *Students' Boycott*, written by Thein Pe Myint is a story based on the colonial era of Yangon University. To say it exactly, it is a historical based novel, which documented and composed the students' boycott of Rangoon University that started in January 1936. To learn the movements of national liberation in the colonial era, the 1936 university students' movement also is an important chapter to be reckoned.

In the colonial era, the college education given by the British government was the education that supported the colonial governing mechanism which was directed towards prolonging Myanmar's life as a servant. Many students who had modern political knowledge came to know that the University education they were receiving was a mere slavery education. Therefore, they automatically understood the need to strive against the British educational slavery system to be freed from that slavery. That's why the whole of University students started their boycott in January 1936.

With regard to the boycott, the starting situations was the plan of the authorities to expel Nyo Tun who was a secretary of the University Students' Union because of his helping the Kamayut workers' strike, the plan to expel Soe Tun, the editor of Oway Magazine and the actual expulsion of the union's chairman, Ko Nu for making a speech against the University authorities at the meeting of the Students' Union.

Therefore, Ko Nu had returned his B.A degree. Most of the students were very unhappy with the expulsion of their union's chairman as they perceived it as an insult to the whole Students' Union. So they called the executive committee members' meeting. At that meeting, the executive members

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<sup>1</sup> Footnotes were added by the translator and the editor.

decided to boycott.

This decision was to be kept secret until the next day where it would be announced at the meeting of the Students' Union meeting. Nyo Tun told the executive members to try to recruit as many students as possible from their hostels for the boycott.

Nyo Tun's friends, Kyaw Thein and Ba Chit are unable to decide whether to participate or not in the boycott. Kyaw Thein had no mother. His father too could not afford to pay for his schooling and he was, therefore, supported by his uncle to attend the university. His goal was to work and care for his family and for his father. Therefore, he was very studious.

Ba Chit too, like Kyaw Thein, tries to study hard in order to take care of his mother, a widow, and his younger sisters and brother. He wanted to finish the I. C. S. examination<sup>2</sup> for the family.

Now they both are facing difficulties. They have love for their nation and want to do more for the good of the poor villagers. They want to eradicate the colonial education. However, if they participate in the boycott, they will have to abandon their goals. Their families' future will be destroyed. Within these difficulties, they don't know which way to follow. After the two had discussions, they made up their minds to sacrifice what is good for them and their families and decided to participate in the boycott. They also took the responsibility to join in the task of recruitment for the boycott. There are many like them among the students with regard to their attitude towards the boycott.

Even though the decision to boycott came from the events such as the expulsion of Ko Nu, the main background is pointed out by the reasons for Nyo Tun and Soe Tun planned expulsions. That is the desire to strive against the slavery education system and against the oppressing University laws. Therefore, among the boycotting students, many who were expecting ranks and offices were also included as well as many students from the families with poor backgrounds. They all participated with self-sacrifice.

In the evening of the 25<sup>th</sup> of February, 1936, the students held a meeting of the Students' Union at the Union Building. Many students, group by group, from different hostels, attended. Students came to the meeting with different opinions and beliefs. Ba Pe, Ba Maw and Ba Sein, from Pinya hostel, came to the meeting with the believe that they had to boycott when others are going to do so, even though they wanted to become tutors in order to easily get the girls from Inya hostel. Hla Maung, Hla Baw and Thi Han, who were from the Pagan hostel, came to the meeting with the desire to know what would be decided in the meeting. Some other students came to listen to the words

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<sup>2</sup> Indian Civil Service.

against the headmaster since Ko Nu was expelled from the school. Some of them came just to satisfy the urge of some students “please come to the meeting for sure” and they just wanted to obey to that. Most of the students came to the meeting with the feeling: We will boycott whether others will do or not. Even the students who neglected the good of the people who are the sycophants of the headmaster are standing outside the meeting hall and are inquiring. And then the meeting started and decided to boycott.

After that, with the buses that were already rented in advance, all left to boycott. Boycotting students also went to the girls' hostels and recruited the girl students and took them along.

Then the boycotting students gathered on the platform of the Shwedagon pagoda and opened up the boycott's camp. On the platform, Ko Nu and some other student leaders preached. Ladies, such as Ma Ma Gyi, Ma Ah Mar, also gave speeches.

Nyo Tun brought exercise books and handed them over to the senior student in charge of the hostel's community. By using those books all the students who came to that night's boycott were listed and were asked to sign that they would not go back. Some went back to the school secretly when no one was watching them. Some were trying to take time to sign. Some signed it because Nyo Tun was urging them.

That night the boycott council prepared for an evening dinner. They prepared the tea in big pots. The bread and the sardine fish cans were opened and deliciously eaten together. On that night, the students got a place to sleep at two o'clock only thanks to Deedok U Ba Cho. They slept in the halls on the southern slope of Shwedagon Pagoda. Although they got a place to sleep, there was only just a roof and nothing to prevent them from getting wet from the fog and to be affected by the earth heat on the floor. Those public resting houses on the pagoda had no walls and they suffered the attacks by the winter wind. When they came out for the boycott, they came with what they were wearing and those clothes could not protect them from the coldness. But they had to fight the cold just with those clothes. There were no blankets to cover and no pillows. They had to use logs as pillows and the slept on the bamboo mattresses. As a consequence, people who had not been friendly to one another before became friends and those who had already established friendly relations deepened their friendship. All became very united.

In every student mind, the feelings and the emotions were hunting them, as they could not sleep well. The thought that they had already thrown away their educational carrier was going on. Sometimes they worried about the parents at home. Oh, my mother would be crying, or my mother

would rebuke me, so on and so forth started their worries. The bodies were left at the boycott's camp but the spirits were going back to the homes and the parents. However, no matter how worried they might be, in their mind and thoughts, this main decision was strongly holding on: "We will not go back if we do not get our demands".

Parents of every part were very worried with the question: "There is unrest in the school, is my son or my daughter away from it?" Some were worried for the sons and daughters because of the University unrest was very close to the examinations and the studies would be interrupted. The parents of the student-leaders were having anxieties in advance for their sons since Ko Nu was expelled from the University and this could happen to others, too. In the past time those parents were happy and proud when their sons were elected as secretaries, accountants, library chiefs of the Students' Union. But now those students leaders would be the first to be arrested, they were very worried, if the British Government would take actions.

Nyo Tun's father, U Bo Mya was very angry with his son when he heard that Nyo Tun was involved in the unrest of the boycott. With what little he had and with his spared savings he had sent him to the school. When U Bo Mya heard the news that by his son's political involvement, the school authorities were going to expel him, he became at the same time worried and angry on his son. Tin Maung's father, U Ba Kon, too, was very angry for what his son had done. Pe Khin's father, U Hla Moe who was a Deputy Commissioner was very angry, too, for his son, Pe Khin. Those angry words were echoed at all the parents' mouths throughout the country.

Boycotting students held their boycott council meeting under the Mawlamyine Hall at Shwedagon Pagoda. The council members were Ko Nu, Mr. D.P Bernaji, Nyo Tun, Tin Maung, Ba Sein, Ba Maw, Aye Ko, Nyo Mya. Others were included as council members. As the delegates of the girls, Ma Aye, Ma Chit Sein and Ma Ma Gyi took part. From that meeting, demands with regard to the students' suffering and sacrifices with regard to their future carriers were made. Those were to amend the university act; to let the outside students to sit in the exams; to discount the school fares; to recognize the Students' Union; not to give the authority to expel to the head-teachers; not to eradicate the Mandalay College; to change the dates of the University and colleges examinations.

Mr. Bernaji wrote those demands in English and Nyo Tun translated them into Burmese. And then, in order to have them in the next day newspapers, they were sent immediately to the press at night. Ma Htar Myint and Ms. Thaug Yee were helping Nyo Tun with the Burmese translation. Nyo Tun

had been working day and night for the boycott programs even before the actual boycott and he was very tired but he still was very active and alert. Therefore, Htar Myint had to urge him to take care of his health.

Nyo Tun went to Mandalay College to persuade the students there to join the boycott. Even before he was there, the students from the Mandalay College had already started the boycott. They had opened the camp inside the compound of Tha Kya Thi Ha pagoda. Nyo Tun visited them and supported them by giving speeches.

While Nyo Tun was traveling for the boycott recruitment, the delegates from the Yangon students boarding halls held a meeting at the Yangon camp's council office. Ko Hla Pe from Pagan hostel and Ma Htar Myint from Inya attended. Ko Nu acted as the chairman of the meeting. The university examinations were going to be started and some students were expected going to take the exams. Therefore, at the meeting was decided to hinder those students to take the exams and thus boycotting the boycott. In practical terms, methods of hindering were prepared.

On the 28<sup>th</sup> of February, around four O'clock in the morning, over 300 students from the different student hostels, got on the buses and went to Yangon University from Shwedagon's platform. They went to the University to appeal and to deter the students who were not participating in the boycott from taking the exams. Mr. Bernaji was leading the group. That group agreed to follow the rules, which were:

- (1) Must not use force but must deter peacefully. Can lie down on the road and hinder them. Must not touch the body of the persons who are to be deterred. Must keep calm when they use abusive words or when they mock.
- (2) Must not mock and joke, must not say unnecessary words.
- (3) Must not discuss right or wrong about the boycott, especially not to argue with the teachers, if anyone wants to discuss about the boycott, invite him or her respectfully to the boycott's camp at Shwedagon Pagoda.

The boycott's deterring group was divided into small groups that were sent to different places to stop the students willing to take the exams. Some went to the Judson College, some went to the Inya's gate, some to the Inwa hostel's gate and some went to the main gates of the University and started doing the appealing and deterring. They tried to stop the students who were going to the exam halls peacefully without using any force. Ma Htar Myint, Ma Thaung Yee and other five girls were responsible to go to Judson College.

Boycott's deterring groups demonstrated silently, sitting or lying face on the ground at the hostels'



gates. The doors of the girls' hostels were closed and therefore the students could not go out. The teachers too, worried that the boycott would affect their students and spread to them, tried to protect them by preventing those remaining in the hostels to join the boycotters. The teachers tried to calm down the patriotic girls not to preach and recruit other girls. The sycophant students of the unpatriotic lecturers were trying to mock and scorn the boycotting students but the boycott's deterring group did not react to them and continued to demonstrate peacefully. They wrapped the papers containing information about the boycott around stones and threw them towards the hostels. The girl students from the hostels could not study, could not stay inside their rooms, could not group and converse together. They were just peeping and looking at the students who came to their hostels to prevent them from taking exams. They started pitying the students who were waiting and endured difficulties. Even some girls who did not understand the spirit of patriotism came over to the boycotting side.

When the Sun went high, the students came for the exams their own cars from the city. The boycotters tried to stop them in groups such as one in Kamayut, one group in front of the Union's building, another at the corner of University Avenue and Inya Road, and another group at the corner of Pyi Road and Convocation Road. They tried to stop the cars from the front by waving their hands and appealing at them respectfully not to take the exams. Sometimes, when they missed any car, they made signals with their handkerchiefs. Then another group would deter them again. Although Burmese students and Chinese students easily turned back, some Indian and Anglo-Burmese students could not be stopped.

In front of the Inwa residence-hall, eight girls were standing hand in hand at the gate. Behind them, over 30 students were blocking the gate as a human wall. Some were sitting, some were standing or in lying positions. Some Indian students, Anglo students and some Burmese students came out to go for the exams. Some students were shouting and mocking from the hostel to the boycotting students. The boycott's deterring group did not move and kept on sitting, standing and lying to stop the exam goers. One professor came and warned not to disturb the examinations. The boycott's deterring group did not say anything and kept on doing their assigned jobs. The professor made a sign with his hand and tried to go over the students who were lying on the ground. The boycotting students did not move away, did not make any objection to his going over them and kept on laying. The students who came for the exams did not follow the professor; instead they were looking at the boycotting students by folding their hands.

Thaung Yee was feeling shameful and sorry because her brother, Thaung Pe, did not participate in

the boycott. She was worried that her brother would come out to take the exams while she was in the boycott deterring group. Thaug Pe's parents were not like other parents. They were angry with Thaug Pe for not entering the boycott even though their daughter Thaug Yee was participating in the boycott. Thaug Pe did not want to take the exams selfishly while his sister herself was in the boycott's deterring group. Therefore he decided to participate in the boycott and came to the Shwedagon camp. However, he felt guilty. Even though he was in the boycott group now he was thinking of not participating from the beginning of the boycott and kept on feeling low and shameful. And he wanted to explain his part to Nyo Tun but he did not have time to talk to him since Nyo Tun was very busy as a member of the boycott council. Then Thaug Pe thought that Nyo Tun would not be friendly with him anymore. When Thaug Pe tried to put some money into the boycott's fund, some students mocked him of paying money to become a boycotter. He could not bear that. Apart from that, he also saw a group photo of all the students from Pinya Hostel in which he and other students who did not enter the boycott were marked with ink and labeled underneath "Traitors". Feeling guilty, shameful, low and frightful, he started to get mentally ill. He did not want to meet anybody, covered himself with a blanket, shouted and even became mad. Therefore, boycott council members decided to send Thaug Pe and Thaug Yee back. They asked Tun Maung to accompany them. Nyo Tun was not free and could not go with them. Tin Maung actually was having affection for Thaug Yee. However, since it was during the boycotting period, he had to keep himself all the love for her to himself. Nyo Tun was very busy writing the articles on the boycott for the newspapers. Through these articles, he informed the county about the idea of bringing up a National University and about exposing the colonial education all the time.

Boycotting forces were gaining momentum and getting more people involved. Some wanted the High School students get into the boycott, too, but some did not. It did not take long, however, until all the students in Yangon joined the boycott. Schools from the districts started to do the same one by one. Since the boycott's strength was getting bigger, the authorities had delayed the exams.

On the hill of the Shwedagon Pagoda, the students at the camp had nothing to do anymore. Most of the time, they were free. There was no need to stop any more exam-goers and there were no students to attend the schools. Only the senior students were working to collect funds and were busy with errands that had to do with the boycott committee. The costs of feeding the boycotting students were very great, too.

It was a big responsibility for the senior students to take care of the younger students and the girl students. Since the students were free, they were going around the city, visiting the fun fairs. Some

were seeking fun by doing feasting at the campsite and at the halls. Every night, speeches had been made one by one and the same things were retold again and again. The listeners became bored. Therefore, the boycott council decided that except the student leaders all other students were asked to go home and stay there. When the council wanted them to come back again, they would be called upon and would have to come back. Even though the parents may persuade them, they would still be participating in the boycott. They were asked to take an oath and prepare to go home.

Even though students had to go back home, they did not want to do so. When they would come home, the parents would scold them, and therefore they wanted to stay away from home until the end of the boycott. Some were happy to stay on the pagoda. Some didn't want to be separated from their friends. Therefore, they still wanted to stay in Yangon.

Nyo Tun came to know that he was falling in love for Htar Myint and he started staying away from her. It would be difficult for him to control his feeling of love for her when she was near and it would be breaking the law of the boycotting camp. As a camp leader, if he was not following the rules, it would be hard for him to govern the other students. So, he stayed away from her for otherwise he would open up his love to her. As for Htar Myint, she thought Nyo Tun was staying away from her since he was very busy.

Among the students who were going back to the parents, Htar Myint was one of them. Nyo Tun accompanied her to the Pa Thein port and greeted her. Htar Myint asked him to write letters and to send news about the boycott and the country's situation.

When the students had all gone back, Nyo Tun's group published the boycotting letters twice a week. From the very beginning of the boycott until now, Nyo Tun had not eaten much and slept enough. The job of corresponding with the camps from the districts, writing articles in the newspapers and distributing the pamphlets about the boycott kept him all the time busy. Because he was working non-stop and had not eaten and slept well, he slowly became weak and got sick in the end. According to the doctor's advice, he should not stay at the boycott's camp, any more. He was asked to stay at the house of Pe Khin's friend which was located at Bahan township on the east of the pagoda.

Meanwhile, Kyaw Thein got a letter from his uncle. In that letter, the uncle rebuked him for participating in the boycott and therefore he would not take the responsibility of keeping Kyaw Thein at the school any more. As a consequence, Kyaw Thein began to lose interest in the boycott. Ba Chit too got a letter from his mother and began to lose his zeal for the boycott. He even prayed that the boycott would come to an end. Soe Tun was a very patriotic person. He wanted to do

anything for the country. However, he still wanted to get the B.A. Therefore, he wanted to finish the boycott.

As for Ko Mya, from the very beginning, he did not want to boycott. Now too, he was drawing one leg to the school. He did not want to sacrifice; he was visualizing only the new shining life if he went back to school. So there were many students who had different excuses to go back to the schools. Mr. Bernaji did not want to do adventures and he was afraid that the government officials would hate him. He felt bad for the education minister who was a friend of his parents. Therefore, he was trying to re-enter the school when some of the demands of the students were met.

Ko Nu did not know really how to read the characters and spirits of his own colleagues. He was not catching the plot of Mr. Bernaji who was trying to avert the boycott by abusing the power he had given him. He just kept on preaching and preaching. And soon, two groups among the student leaders were emerging. One wanted to end the boycott and the other did not. Nyo Tun, Tin Maung, Ba Ngwe, Hla Pe, Pe Khin were the ones who did not want to stop the boycott until all the demands were met.

Mr. Bernaji went on persuading the students who were not sure of ending or not ending the boycott, to come on to his side, which is to put an end to the boycott. Especially the students such as Kyaw Thein, Soe Tun, Ba Chit and Aung Myint who were very upset with the boycott for personal reasons came on his side when he persuaded them to end the boycott.

While Bernaji and Ko Mya were trying to spread the policy to finish the boycott, Mr. Bernaji let Ko Nu to go to his wife for a while. Nyo Tun in bed and, therefore, without any hindrances a termination of the boycott could be organized. When Nyo Tun heard that news, he got very angry and his situation got worse.

After that, Banerji's group called up the student leaders from the districts to decide about ending the boycott or not. Even though Nyo Tun wanted to attend that meeting, he could not attend because the doctor did not allow him to go. He had to wait for the news of the meeting. At that meeting, the finishing-side was gaining strength and the students on the anti-finishing side had no place to talk and argue but sustained their anger, sorrowfulness and an indomitable spirit. Pe Khin's group came to know the situation and went to bring Nyo Tun in. Nyo Tun pulled himself together and tried to bring himself to the meeting to defend the position not to terminate the boycott. While he was talking, he became very weak and fell to the ground. At least, the boycott ending group had won.

Here, the book (*Students' boycott part II*) ends. A short summary of the book was presented above.

## Critique

Students' Boycott novel is a historical background novel with the real history of the 1936 University students' boycott as a backbone of the book. Even though it is said to be a novel (with a historical background), it is found to be more of a documenting book of the historical facts. The author had documented the actual events of the history in which he was very much involved and, therefore, there is not much of his own creation. What is meant by the above statement is that the author's own story creation is very thin. It was not giving preference to the story but to the documentation and therefore one could not find anything like creating a story.

But even though there are no tricks or hidden agendas and hints on the future development of the story can be found, it can attract the readers' attention by using the method of exposing the contention of opposite forces. There is a contention between the students as forces who wanted to eradicate the slavery education of the colonial era and the University authorities as forces that want to make the colonial education stable and stronger. It created the desire to know what happened between the two forces of contention and the end result.

The best part attracting the readers' minds was the ending part of the story. In that part, another opposition of forces of contention were introduced and roused the desire of the readers. That contention was none other than that of contention between the Mr. Bernaji and Ko Mya's group which wanted to avert the boycott and Nyo Tun, Pe Khin and Tin Maung's group who wanted to go on with the strike. The author let them collide head on head in the end at the meeting by letting them contesting for the ideas of finishing or not finishing the boycott. By keeping away Nyo Tun who was the leader of the anti-finishing camp from the meeting, the author's creation increased the readers' nervousness. Only at the end, when there was no winning situation, Pe Khin went to bring Nyo Tun to the meeting and while he was shouting and discussing, he fell down and the story ended there. That most attractive part of the story and the height of the pinnacle at its top it ends with the result of the confrontation. It is the kind of ending which can cause the readers' feeling that there is still something missing and yearned for that needs accomplishment.

The end focuses on the main character, Nyo Tun, in whom the readers were becoming more and more interested. The side wanting to end the strike just won because Nyo Tun fell down at the final meeting while talking in defense of the strike. Here, the author did not tell directly that the other side had won but instead in the ending of the novel he wrote. "At that very pleasant platform of the pagoda, the sound of 'never mind – we won'<sup>3</sup> was echoing and coming around".

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<sup>3</sup> Popular Burmese phrase.

It is a method of letting the readers to think and to come to know the end.

As an enticement or an incentive of the story, the affection between the main character Nyo Tun and Ma Htar Myint, Tin Maung and Ma Yee Thaung love stories were a little bit included. Since it is a book documenting history, it included the love story only just for the sake of demonstration. The author wants to show the sacrifices and sufferings of the students during the boycott. It was shown that they could control their personal feelings no matter how strong they were.

The students' boycott did not keep the story line as the main point since it had given preference to the historical facts. So it did not keep the story line as a main object or the person as the main object. Therefore, after the author created the characters, one cannot find living characters but only still characters. For example, the main character, Nyo Tun is a good person and the boycott's following person throughout the story and he is always an example and the hero. Therefore, he does not look like an actual human person but as a figure created by the writer. That is why the book has its weakness in describing the nature of a human person.

Since the author had presented the patriotic battle of the university students, he tried to stress on the clarity of the character of the University students' group rather than of each of the persons' characters. However, it is well written about the nature and acting of the students at that time. That's why it is a good presentation of the society and the social life of that time.

When we look at the storyteller's viewpoint, the author had used the everyone-knows-viewpoint as he presented the general features of the lives of all the university students. By using such viewpoint, he can illustrate all three Kan<sup>4</sup> actions (Body, Mind and Soul) of the characters in the novel. That's why the author can write clearly about the feelings and lives of the university students. This shows the ability to choose and present the viewpoint that matches the story.

Since the students' boycott novel documented historical facts, it can be said to be a "background essential novel". In line with this, the background is very solid and very logical. As time and contemporary background, the time is 1936; as for the placement background, Yangon university and Shwedagon Pagoda; as for the society background, an educated society of Yangon university students' background and environment; as for the political background, the era of national liberation and of anti-colonial activities are all composed. The story becomes very vivid and actual because of the strong and accurate backgrounds. Since the students were striving against an

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<sup>4</sup> *Kamma, Karma.*

education system of an era, we could say that there is the contention even between the background and the characters. In other words, even the background itself is the actor. It caused the auspiciousness of the background story. We could say that a good background was the cause of this novel to be prominent.

In writing this novel, Thein Pe Myint had used the actual living persons as his characters of his story. Therefore, this story became sure and accurate, more logical. Even though the author did not as a leading person participate in the boycott, he was very much involved by giving much help as a person who believed in the boycott as a weapon, who supported and welcomed the boycott as a battle. He too was one of the students who would like to make a long boycott and had a strong desire to build a National University, a patriotic University. Therefore, the book is a witness to the author's conviction that, in the highest time of the boycott, even in arguing whether to end or not to end the boycott, he was standing by the side of those who did not want to terminate the boycott and was always against those who proposed this termination. One could say that the author had expressed his own will, his desire and his opinion and believe through his characters of the novel. Even that is the view of the novel itself.

Thein Pe Myint in his novel has bluntly and openly composed and presented his ideas and views through his characters' words as if he was preaching propaganda. Actually, this novel shows the author's generous zeal to educate his readers. Therefore, it is no strange that his characters tried to preach and speak his viewpoints indirectly. One should not regard it as wrong when the author tries to preach his ideas through his novel.

However, in this novel, Thein Pe Myint tries to put in his propaganda preaching whenever he had a chances and that sometimes becomes more than is necessary. Some of the speeches and sermons look like advertisements. However it can still be forgiven since the characters of youths who would like to preach and teach when they are beginners of preaching and political knowledge. Anyhow, I think the author should have balanced the presentation of preaching and showing of the story line. The readers could get bored when they heard the characters' preaching and political views all the time repeatedly. This can be a hindrance to the attractive force of the book. Apart from that weakness, one could say that the students' boycott is a very good, well-composed novel.

Finally, the book, students' boycott, sheds light on the fact that the students participated in the

history of the national liberation movement. At a time when novels in which people met, fell in love, divided and at last came together forever were popular, the author wrote a “background essential novel” without giving preference to the story line.

In my opinion it is a good novel, which shows and points out the modern art of creation by Thein Pe Myint.



## 9. Commentary by Barend Jan Terwiel

Dear U Kyaw Min,

I enjoyed reading your scholarly literary analysis of *Thein Pe* (Student Boycotter). It made me ponder a little on the strong moralistic character of this work. Would you agree with the thought that the novel was to a large extent governed by the following two principles:

- (1) a strong distinction between good and bad
- (2) loyalty to the students should have precedence over loyalty to the family.

As to the first point, I get the idea that *Thein Pe* depicts studious and serious students as GOOD, those who spend their time with other matters, who indulge in laziness or play are BAD. Would you agree that this distinction is sharp and unchanging throughout the work?

As for the battle between the feelings of wishing to do one's duty to the sponsors and parents who have sacrificed much to make possible that one can study at all on the one hand and the moral duty to support one's comrades in protesting against a colonial-style repression, this would seem to me one of the strongest emotional aspects of the novel. It would seem to me that *Thein Pe* takes the position that those who put the anti-colonial as outweighing family loyalty are the true heroes of the story. This attitude is pushed unwaveringly throughout the work.

Would you agree to the idea that this makes the document less of a novel and gives it also the character of a political dogmatic statement?

Connected with all this is my question how the novel has been received by later generations? Is it still read? Is it part of a school curriculum?

I sign off expressing my friendly greetings to you.

Sincerely,

Barend Jan Terwiel

## 10. Aye Kyaw, The 1936 Strike<sup>1</sup>

THE students' strike of 1936, another great landmark in the student movement, originated from the University itself. The two immediate causes of the strike were the expulsion of Ko Nu, President of the Students' Union and the rumoured expulsion of Ko Aung San, Editor of The Oway Magazine. The psychological effect on the students of these expulsions; the lack of contact between members of the teaching staff and students in the University College; the grievances of individual students and groups; the expulsion of Ko Soe Myint and the case of Ko Aung Myint were the underlying causes that brought about the outbreak of the strike. In fact, the academic year 1936-6 had been up to 25 February 1936 a comparatively quiet year. The Executive Committee of the RUSU<sup>2</sup> had done a great deal of work such as organizing the National Day celebrations, the Union anniversary celebrations, weight-lifting competitions, debates, etc.<sup>3</sup> The atmosphere at the University was outwardly pleasant and peaceful.

Ko Nu was expelled from the University on 21 February 1936.<sup>4</sup> The main reason for his expulsion was his strong speech delivered on 30 January 1936 at the Men's' Final Debate, the last meeting of the Union during the academic year 1935-36.<sup>5</sup> In this speech, he criticized Principal D.J. Sloss for his unfair interference in the personal affairs of students and pointed out the inferiority complex widespread among students of the University.<sup>6</sup> Actually, the speech could have been tolerated if there had been a spirit of mutual understanding and co-operation between the RUSU and the University authorities, but a few days later, an editorial of The Rangoon Gazette, one of two English language dailies, vehemently pointed out that such a derogatory speech by a University student should not be tolerated and that some action should be taken against him by the authorities. Thus, Ko Nu was expelled from the University and he wrote a letter to the Principal explaining

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<sup>1</sup> Aye Kyaw (1961) *A History of the Students' Movement in Burma 1920-1940*. Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Arts, University of Rangoon, as part requirement of the degree of M.A. in History in July 1963: 56-78 The original text was scanned. Typing errors were not corrected. - A revised version of the thesis was published 30 years later: Aye Kyaw (1993) *The Voice of Young Burma*. Ithaca, Cornell University, Southeast Asia Program. [footnote of editor; the original footnotes are denoted by [AK]. References to Aye Kyaw's appendices are omitted. - A list of these appendices can be obtained from the editor (see last page of this volume).

<sup>2</sup> Rangoon University Students' Union. [ed.]

<sup>3</sup> Statement submitted by the Rangoon University boycotters' Council to the Special Sub-Committee appointed by His Excellency the Chancellor, at the request of the University Council to enquire into the causes of the University strike of 1936 and the situation arising out of it," The Oway Magazine, VI, i, September 1936, Appendix I, (Hereafter cited as OM) [AK]

<sup>4</sup> D.J.Sloss's to Ko Nu, No. 4230, I.C.P.University College, 21 February 1936, The Sun, 26 February 1936 [AK]

<sup>5</sup> The Sun, 2 February 1936 [AK]

<sup>6</sup> Ko Nu's speech delivered on 30 January 1936, The Sun, 1 February 1936 [AK]

briefly the educational policy of Burma and presenting his B.A. Degree back to the University.<sup>1</sup>

The rumoured expulsion of Ko Aung San followed the expulsion of Ko Nu. He was expelled from the University for an article entitled, "The Hell Hound At Large," by "Yamamin".<sup>2</sup> published in the *Union Magazine*, the first, and as usual the only issue of the academic year under its new name, *Oway* - the voice of the peacock. The article, highly journalistic, referred to the activities of a despicable and undesirable person. The University authorities really knew the identity of the author of the article but their knowledge was unofficial and they could not take action against him directly. Ko Aung San who was responsible for the article as the editor of the magazine was called by the Discipline Committee of the University to reveal the identity of the author. But Ko Aung San, in keeping with journalistic etiquette, refused to do so.<sup>3</sup> Action was therefore taken against him. It was, however, a month after the strike had begun that it became known that he had been expelled for three years.<sup>4</sup>

The psychological effect on the students owing to the two expulsions was spontaneous. With the absence of this factor, a strike of such magnitude would not probably have happened. In fact, the Presidential Chair of the Students' Union had been a coveted honour since its establishment in 1931 and the position of the President as laid down in the Constitution of the Union was of some importance. Moreover the influence of the President varied from year to year in accordance with his personality. Ko Nu was loved and respected as a man of courage. So his expulsion was vehemently resented by the students. In the case of Ko Aung San also, the students felt resentful because he was admired for his courage in refusing to reveal, the identity of his contributor. Both of them were held in great esteem. The RUSU, then, in the academic year 1935-36 was dominated by a strong leadership. For these reasons, the electrical feelings of the student mass should also be noted as important in the outburst of the strike.

The lack of contact between members of the teaching staff and students in the University College was another important underlying cause of the strike. There had developed a gulf between them, there was suspicion on both sides. Individual students and groups had their own grievances. The relation, then, between the professors and the students was of an official nature. The use of sarcastic language, the compulsion of students to say "sir" and flirtations with lady students - these actions on the part of some of the members of the staff had some effect in making up the minds of individuals

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<sup>1</sup> Ko Nu's letter to D.J. Sloss, *The Sun*, 26 February 1936 [AK].

<sup>2</sup> The article is reprinted in this Volume on p.: 52 [ed.].

<sup>3</sup> OM, VI, i, September 1936, p.: 2 [AK].

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.* p.: 3 [AK].

and the groups.<sup>1</sup> In fact, if such points of irritation between students and staff had not appeared in the University, the strike would probably not have happened. Or, if it had happened because of the two immediate causes, without the prevailing grievances of individual students and groups, the strike would not probably have been of such great magnitude.

Early in the term 1935-6, Ko Soe Myint had to leave the College.<sup>2</sup> The practice was that students stood up, when the lecturer came into the class-room and answered "Present, Sir." when rolls were called. At one lecture Ko Soe Myint answered "Present" instead of "Present, Sir." when Mr. Haider, lecturer in Mathematics called out his name during a roll-call. The lecturer repeated his name and he did the same. He was then told to leave the class-room but he failed to obey the lecturer's order. The matter was duly reported to Professor Owen of the Mathematics Department. Thus he was expelled from the University.<sup>3</sup> The incident was really a very minor one but the action taken against him was severe. The RUSU and some influential leaders of the country, likes U Ba L win, U Soe Nyun, Mr Ganga Singh and U Saw, made efforts to obtain a concession.<sup>4</sup> But all the efforts were in vain and he had to leave the University.

Another incident happened in 1935, involving a student, Ko Aung Myint. He had a minor dispute with U Yu Khin, the Assistant Warden of his Hall (Sagaing), and it was duly reported to the Principal. He was then ordered to leave the College. Ko Aung Myint decided to sue the Principal for wrongful expulsion and the Assistant Warden for defamation. The news of the decision of Ko Aung Myint spread over the University among both sections-the student mass and the authorities. He, however, could not take legal action because he had not received a written expulsion order. Therefore, he approached the Principal for a written expulsion order. The Principal immediately withdrew his verbal expulsion and expressed his regret to Ko Aung Myint.<sup>5</sup> In fact, the word, "expulsion" had become a favourite word with the Principal, indicative of his high-handedness. Even a very minor incident which could have been tolerated was quite enough for him to use his power of expulsion.

The Executive Committee of the RUSU had two meetings prior to the student mass meeting of 25 February 1936. The first meeting took place on 23 February in the evening and decided to hold a student mass meeting on 25 February to consider the situation. The Executive Committee was

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<sup>1</sup> *OM*, VI, i, September 1936, p.: 4 [AK].

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, Appendix II [AK].

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, Appendix I [AK].

<sup>4</sup> *OM*, VI, i, September 1936, Appendix II [AK].

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, Appendix II [AK].

summoned again to another meeting on 24 February. At that time it was strongly rumoured that Ko Aung San was going to be expelled from the University and this rumour was confirmed by a person of high standing. The news of the expulsion of Ko Nu, though it was kept secret, leaked out through other channels. So the news of the two expulsions spread out. The members of the Executive Committee unanimously resolved not to sit their forthcoming examinations in 1936 to express their sympathy with Ko Nu and Ko Aung San. This resolution was to be kept a close secret and was to be announced at the mass meeting the next day by the Vice-President, Mr. M.A. Raschid, now becomes President of the Union.<sup>1</sup>

The strike of 1936 unexpectedly took place on 25 February. A student mass meeting, as previously resolved, was held at 4 p.m. that day.<sup>2</sup> An extremely tense atmosphere prevailed over the University campus. The hall representatives carried out their task efficiently and a stream of students from various halls came into the Union Hall even before the appointed hour. No outsiders were allowed to attend the meeting. When Ko Nu entered the Union Hall, he was warmly welcomed by the students with great applause. He took his seat among the students because at that time he was no longer President. Mr Raschid, the Vice-President, took the Presidential Chair and addressed the packed audience in English as usual and announced the resolutions. After his announcement, voices from almost every corner of the Hall were raised asserting that they would follow the leaders. Finally, some 800 students rushed out of the Hall and seated themselves in buses which were standing by at the entrance of the Union Hall.<sup>3</sup> Thus, the strike of 1936 occurred as a sudden outburst of feelings of the student mass.

The strike was not planned and engineered beforehand by the student leadership of the time. In certain quarters even now, the belief is still held that it was well planned and well fomented by the student leadership and that the chief aim of the student leadership in the academic year 1935-6 was to create such a situation. If not, the argument goes, why and how were the buses at the entrance of the Union Hall present to take the students to the Shwedagon Pagoda and why did such a large battalion of the boycotters soon find accommodation? In fact, the Executive Committee of the Union had not discussed the question of a general strike at its previous meetings and the buses were not ordered to take the students from the Union building to the Pagoda- The thought of a general strike, however, seems to have been held by a few individuals. Thus, the buses were ordered and accommodation at the Shwedagon precincts were made. These pre-arrangements were not actually

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<sup>1</sup> OM, VI, i, September 1936, pp.: 2-3 [AK].

<sup>2</sup> The Sun, 27 February 1936 [AK].

<sup>3</sup> OM, VI, i, September 1936, p.:3 [AK].

known to the large majority.

One peculiar allegation was made by a Professor in connection with the procession of the buses from the Union building to the Shwedagon Pagoda.<sup>1</sup> In the academic year 1935-6, there were 1,230 men students and 163 lady students, 240 men students and 92 students and 163 lady students, 240 men students and 92 lady students at Rangoon University College and Judson College respectively.<sup>2</sup> Out of these, some 800 students boycotted. The procession went, around the University estate and took the direction to town via Kemmendine and finally reached the southern sate of the Shwedagon Pagoda.<sup>3</sup> The Professor alleged and maintained that the boycotters had insulted his wife by making unseemly remarks while the buses passed by his house. As soon as some student leaders learnt of the matter, they made an enquiry and came to know that some boycotters called out to a few students who were taking tea with the Professor's wife when they passed by.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, the allegation was mistaken.

Another peculiar feature of-the strike of 1936 was the active participation of lady students. They took no active part in the strike of 1920. This could be explained by the fact that there were very few lady students in 1920 and that they were not as interested in students' activities as those of 1936. In the academic year 1335-36, the lady students of Inya Hall occupied a position of much importance and participated in students' activities hand-in-hand with the men students.<sup>5</sup> Then the student mass meeting was held on 25 February, about twenty lady students came to attend it. But having arrived late, they waited near the Book Club. when the meeting was over, they learnt that a strike had been declared and they joined the other students without hesitation.<sup>6</sup> When the procession passed by Inya Hall, some twenty five lady students came out of the Hall and boarded two buses.<sup>1</sup> In fact, the student movement in 1936 also owed much to the efforts of lady students.

The boycotters encamped themselves at the precincts of the Shwedagon Pagoda. After the strike had been declared, about 800 or more students, including about one hundred students from Judson College, marched up the steps of the Shwedagon Pagoda on that historic night of 25 February 1936. It was a busy night. No one got dinner that night. A meeting was held and strong speeches were made. A few students were sent to buy whatever could be obtained to feed the strikers. It was nearly midnight before some had a few pieces of bread, some a cup or two of tea and some more fortunate

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<sup>1</sup> *OM*, VI, L, September 1 1936, pp.:3-4 [AK].

<sup>2</sup> *RPIB*. [Report on Public Instruction in Burma; [ed.] 1935-6, p.:7 [AK].

<sup>3</sup> *OM*, VI, i, September 1936, p.: 3 [AK].

<sup>4</sup> *OM*, VI, 1, September 1936, p. :4 [AK].

<sup>5</sup> *The Sun*, 16 and 18 December 1935 [AK].

<sup>6</sup> *OM*, VI, i, September 1936, p.: 4 [AK].

ones a little curry also. In fact, the students depicted themselves as united and patriotic intellectuals of the "Oxford of the East." They had the severest trials and faced them bravely without complaining. It was not until 2 a.m. (26 February) that arrangements were made for the opening of zayats in sufficient numbers to accommodate the strikers.<sup>2</sup> The presence of Dee-Dok U Ba Cho, Editor of The Dee-Dok Journal, at the Pagoda was indeed a great blessing to the students.<sup>3</sup>

The lady students were accommodated in the Moulmein zayat. There were altogether nine zayats. The boycotters were accommodated in them all and zayats were variously christened after the names of the University Halls. The Moulmein zayat was named the New Inya Hall and the lady students were put under the kind care of Daw Hnin Mya, M.L.C. and some elderly ladies.<sup>4</sup> The reason held by the student leaders, of why they were accommodated in that particular zayat with good water facilities were that they were charged with the duty of preparing the food for the rest of the strikers and with washing up after eating. Among the lady strikers, Ma Ma Gyi, Ma Khin Mya of Pegu, Ma Yee Yee of Pegu, Margaret Pote of Pyapon and Ma Ohn of Mandalay were the most prominent leaders. The Hall was put under the wardenship of Ko Hla Maung later Burmese Ambassador to England.

The men students were accommodated in the rest of the zayats. The numbers of strikers did not meet squarely with the capacity of the zayats. There were not even enough mats for all to sit upon. The thighs of fellow strikers served as pillows. They were divided into groups - each group consisting entirely of students from the same hall of the Rangoon University Estate. Each group of over seventy strikers, then, occupied a zayat along the western side southern staircase of the Pagoda. Each zayat had two prefects serving as a sort of a Warden and Assistant Warden. Roll calls were taken morning and night in order to keep a check and to know exactly whether the strength was increasing or not. The strikers were well disciplined. It was a remarkable fact that there was not one single case of a valuable article being stolen or being missed during the entire period of nearly three months at the camp. It was also fortunate that no one fell sick.

The strike was a complete success. During the academic year 1935-6, there were 1,393 students of both sexes in attendance at the University College and 332 students of both sexes at Judson College. Of the 1,393 students, about 250 were day-students and the rest were hostel students.<sup>5</sup> On the very first day of the strike, some 800 students joined the strike and some followed later. Thus,

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<sup>1</sup> The Sun, 27 February 1936 [AK].

<sup>2</sup> OM, VI, i, September 1936, p.:5 [AK].

<sup>3</sup> The Sun, 27 February 1936 [AK].

<sup>4</sup> The Sun, 27 February 1936 [AK].

<sup>5</sup> RPIB, Report on Public Instruction in Burma; (ed.) 1935-6, p.:7[AK].

the University campus, since the beginning of the strike seemed derelict. This, however, could be said only of the University College and not of Judson College. Judson College, in those days, was dominated by Karen Christians and the ruling authorities and foreign missionaries alienated them from sentiments, felt by the student body of the University College. But some students of Judson College were active leaders in the strike. The general body of Arakanese students shared the feelings of the strikers any threw in their lot with them.

A Watch and Ward Committee was formed on 26 February 1936.<sup>1</sup> Since the strike was staged, the urgent problem ahead of the student leaders was to accommodate, to feed and to look after all the students. U Ba Cho, U Kyaw Myint, Dr Kyaw Nyein, U Hla Maung, U E Maung and U Ba Khine, etc. who have full support to the strikers until the strike was called off served on the Watch and Ward Committee. A number of ladies also joined the Committee. The main task of the Committee was to make arrangements for the boarding and lodging of the strikers and to look after their health. The Committee worked under a specific provision that its members would not attend any meeting of the boycotters' Council unless they were specially invited to do so, and would not in any way interfere with the formulation of demands and with the general control and direction of the strike. Through out the strike, the Committee adhered to this rule. Besides this main Committee, a Publicity Bureau, a Mess Committee and a Sanitation Committee were formed that day.

A Boycotters' Council was elected at the mass meeting of the strikers held in the forenoon of 26 February 1936 on the Pagoda platform.<sup>1</sup> The Council was vested with supreme authority for the conduct of affairs. It was composed of the nine members of the RUSU Executive Committee and two representatives of each of the twelve Halls. These served as ex-officio members. In addition, some student leaders such as Ko Kyaw Nyein, Ko Thein Tin, Ko Aye Choe, etc were co-opted as members. A smaller body of this main Council, known as the Inner Council, was then constituted and acted as a kind of Executive Committee. Ko Nu, Mr M.A. Raschid and Ko Aung San were elected respectively as President, Vice-President and Secretary of the Boycotters' Council.

Funds for the strikers were collected in various ways. In fact, it was not a small problem to feed and look after such a big body of strikers. But the funds never ran short. A large piece of cloth was spread on the way in front of the strikers' zayats and the pagoda visiting public contributed generously. The strike won public support from the start and a large number of people came to the pagoda with the sole purpose of giving their donations to the strikers' funds. The funds collected in this manner alone amounted to over six hundred rupees daily during the early days of the strike. On

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<sup>1</sup> *OM*, VI, i, September 1936, p.: 6 [AK].



some days, it amounted to nearly a thousand rupees. Besides this daily collection, student groups were sent to commercial houses in the city for the collection of funds. The Boycotters' Council appealed to the public through the press to send donations by post to the strikers.

The early days of the strike were days of extreme anxiety. Excitement ran high. Rumours of arrests and expulsion, were in the air. Every rumour had to be immediately inquired into and repudiated by the Boycotters' Council. The student leaders had to take great care to keep up the morale of the boycotters. A number of inquisitive and suspicious looking outsiders encamped themselves near the boycotters' camp. Members of the C.I.D.<sup>2</sup> frequented the pagoda and noted down every speech delivered and every activity done by the strikers. They followed the student leaders who were on tours to propagate the cause.<sup>3</sup> The leaders, however, spared no pains to carry out the general strike to a successful conclusion.

The strikers had their own secret service and intelligence staff.<sup>4</sup> Ko Kyaw Nyein was given the entire charge of the matter. The organization set up by him comprised a number of highly trusted and sincere strikers. In effect, at the outset of the strike, the student leaders felt that they should protect themselves from spies who would work in the interest of the University authorities. They might have come to the pagoda under three garbs - that of students, that of staff members and that of real government men. The main task of the intelligence organization was to check any stranger, student or otherwise, who visited the strikers' camp efficient and proved to be vary valuable. In a nutshell, it served as a counter- espionage system.

Peaceful picketing was one of the most effective activities of the boycotters. The University authorities expected that the students would return to the University after a few days' "picnic" on the pagoda but the strikers did not do so. They then thought that holding the examinations would attract the students back to the University and they decided to conduct the examinations on the appointed days. On the part of the boycotters, they expected that the examinations would be postponed owing to the strike, but the strikers came to know later that the authorities were determined to carry out the examinations by any means. So the student leaders made careful preparations to effectively stop the examinations by peaceful picketing. About 600 students were instructed to behave as peacefully as possible and sent to the University campus on the appointed day under the leadership of Mr. M. A. Raschid. The picketing was conducted to the entire satisfaction of the leaders and the examinations

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p.: 6 [AK].

<sup>2</sup> Criminal Investigation Department [ed.].

<sup>3</sup> OM, VI, 1, September 1936, p.: 7 [AK].

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* p.: 7 [AK].

were indefinitely postponed.

The Boycotters' Council formulated the strikers' demands. Special care was taken so that the demands were substantial as well as reasonable. Soon after the formation of the Council, there was a serious discussion of the grievances and demands. At last, the Boycotters' Council agreed to put up nine demands before the entire body of the strikers. A mass meeting held on 27. February approved all these demands. Some of these demands were to modify the University Act and Rules so as to give greater powers to the Governing bodies of the constituent Colleges and the University Council; to allow external students to sit for all University examinations; to reduce the tuition and hostel fees; the allow students' representation in the Council; and to re-admit Ko Aung San to his class without further interference.

With the emergence of sympathetic strikes, three more demands were added. The three additions were; (1) to abstain from questioning the strikers on their conduct during the strike; from demanding an apology for their behaviour and from punishing them for participating in the strike; (2) to allow all strikers to go back to their respective schools and Colleges and to re-held all examinations; and (3) to take the High School Final examination as an equivalent of the Matriculation examination. The first nine demands and the three additional ones were printed in the form of a pamphlet and circulated among the students and the public. Besides the twelve demands, the Boycotters' Council also submitted five demands which exclusively concerned the boycotters of Judson College.<sup>1</sup> In fact, the general body of Judson College students did not throw in their lot with the strikers. But some students actively participated in the strike. These demands were not of much importance when compared with the twelve demands and so they did not evidently appear as an issue when the strike was being called off in May. Three of them were: to do away with the compulsory attendance of classes in which Christianity was taught, to stop the collection of Rs 5 or annual sweeping fees and to stop raising the hostel fees by Rs 10. Of course, none of these demands (twelve and five demands) included any clause in connection with the immediate causes of the strike except that of re-admission of Ko Aung San but they were all very real needs of the students and they all served to indicate the underlying causes of the strike.

The strike won popular support from the time of its outbreak. This was evidently seen as the strikers' fund was obtained largely from the generous contributions of the public especially from those who visited the pagoda with the sole purpose of giving their donations towards the fund. essential things of daily food such as rice, fish, vegetables, etc. were collected at various markets

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<sup>1</sup> The Sun, 8 May 1936 [AK].

and sent to the strikers' camp free of charge. The entire Burmese press was also very active in supporting the student movement. The student leaders toured almost all over Burma to propagate their cause. Almost every school in Burma went on sympathetic strike. The students at the Mandalay intermediate College also boycotted. although public support was overwhelming the strike did not associate itself with any of the political parties. This was considered the right stand because most of the parties were- not political parties in the strict sense but were simply the followers of some popular figures whose interests were limited to becoming ministers of the Government. Unfortunately there were as yet no well-organized peasants and workers organizations. If there had been any, contact with them, might have been of great value. This marked the difference between the strikes of 1936 and that of 1938 which had its fullest co-operation with the oil-field strikers.

The strike was called off at 4 a.m. on 11 May 1936.<sup>1</sup> From 25 February, when it started, until then, it was well conducted by the student leaders and the public support it received contributed to the good behaviour of ail. the strikers. The Boycotters' Council. had forwarded twelve demands to the authorities. A vague reply was made that out of these twelve, about nine could possibly be granted. On the part of the general body of the strikers, signs of demoralization appeared as the strike dragged on from the first and second months to the third and fourth and it was not a small problem for the leaders to keep up the morale in addition to the various problems of feeding and looking after the general welfare of the strikers for quite a long period. The people awaited the approach of 10 May with great concern, wanting to know whether the strike would be called off or continued. The meeting of' the student representatives of the district schools hold that day unanimously resolved to call off the strike. The meeting of the Boycotters' Council held with Ko Nu in the chair also decided to call it off. Thus the whole student body reached the same decision to call off the strike. So far there was no Influence from any of the so-called political parties. That was why the student cause was taken to be a national cause and the people still remember it as one of the milestones on the their march towards national independence which they gained a little over ten years later.

One of the most, important results of the 1936 strike was the establishment of the All Burma Students' Union. An All Burma Students' Conference was held on 8 and 9 May 1936 at the Jubilee Hall under the chairmanship of Ko Nu, the President of the Boycotters' Council.<sup>1</sup>

Students' representatives from thirty five towns, University boycotters and many observers attended

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<sup>1</sup> The Sun, 12 May 1936.

the Conference with enthusiasm. At this Conference a motion for the establishment of Students' Union in schools was moved by Ma Khin Mya of the University and seconded by Ma Thoung Shin of Gyobingauk and Ma Thein Kyi of Bassein and was unanimously passed. The chief aims as stated by Ma Khin Mya in connection with her motion were that the Students' Unions in schools would be the best organizations to safeguard the students' interests and to work in the interest of Burma's progress towards independence. this resolution passed at the instance of a lady student marked a turn in the history of the student movement with girls also taking active part in it. As a sequel to this resolution, the ABSU was established with Mr. M.A. Raschid as the first President. In fact, it was the first of its kind.

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<sup>1</sup> The Sun, 11 May 1936.

## 11. From *Oway Magazine*, 1936 edition

### A HELL HOUND AT LARGE <sup>1</sup>

Escaped from Awizi<sup>2</sup> a devil in the form of a black dog.

Had been, during its brief span on earth a base  
object or universal odium and execration, sentenced to eternal  
damnation for churlishness, treachery, ruffinianism,  
pettifogging, etc. A pimping, knave with avuncular pretensions  
to some cheap wiggling wenches from a well-known hostel, he  
was also a hectic popularity hunter, shamming interest, in  
sports, concerts and other extra-curricular student activities. His  
only distinguishing; marks were buboes and ulcers due to errant whoring.

Will finder please kick him back to Hell.

Yama-Min<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Aye Kyaw 1963: 166. - Aye Kyaw names as his source: "Reproduced in Maung Tla Hla" "The 1936 Rangoon University Strike; Part V", *The New Burma Weekly*, I, x, Saturday, 2 August 1958 p.: 13".

<sup>2</sup> Awizi: The lowest of the hells in Buddhist cosmology.. - Dr. Maung Maung commented upon the style of the article thus: „Thein Tin - who sported the pen name of Nyo Mya – had spent many laborious hours with Roget's Thesaurus to compose a satirical piece aimed at a member of the University staff.“ (Maung Maung (1969) *Burma and General Ne Win*. Rangoon, Religious Affairs Dpt. Press: 45.

<sup>3</sup> *Yama-Min*: Ruler of the Underworld.

## **11. Rangoon University Boycotters' Demands<sup>1</sup>**

I. The University Act and Rules under it should be so modified as to give the Governing Bodies of the constituent Colleges and the University Council greater powers especially in administrative matters and their status. should be raise from that of merely advisory bodies to bodies with real control over the affairs of the Colleges and the University, and for this purpose, and with a view to increasing popular control over the University, the Governing Bodies of the constituent Colleges, the University Council and its Executive Committee should contain a statutory majority of elected and non-official members, the term non-official being here used so as to exclude staff members within its category.

II. Private (non-collegiate) students should be allowed to appear for all University examinations, provided they have passed the last University examinations of the course and without being required to attend classes.

III. (a) The present tuition and hostel (boarding and lodging) fees in all the constituent Colleges should be reduced by at least 25 per cent for all classes.

(b) The present University examination fees should be reduced by at least 50 per cent for all examinations.

IV. (a) The resolution of the Governing Body of University College passed at its 173rd meeting held in January 1935 refusing to receive representations from the Students' Union should be rescinded.

(b) The right of the Students' Union to make representations on behalf of individuals or groups of students to the Constituent Colleges and University should be definitely recognized.

V. If the University has decided to expel Ko Aung San, the editor of the Students! Union Magazine, this decision should be reversed and no such action should be taken against him by the University or by University College and he should be allowed to go up for his examination without further interference with his future career,

VI. Principals of the constituent Colleges of the Rangoon University should be divested of the

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<sup>1</sup> Aye Kyaw 1963, pp. 167-170; originally published in *Oway Magazine* VI, i (September 1936), Appendix III.

power of expulsion and this power should be vested in the Governing Body which (as asked in IV above) should contain a statutory majority of non-officials.

VII. The University and the local Government should give an assurance that the Mandalay Intermediate College will not be abolished in the near future.

VIII. The University and its constituent Colleges should immediately and definitely grant to the students the right to have their examinations answer books re-examined upon payment of nominal fee.

IX. All the examinations conducted by the constituent Colleges and the University at which any of the strikers are to appear should be postponed, and all such examinations which have been held and which any of the strikers have been absent should be re-held, and all these examinations should not be held, unless not less than one month's time has been given from the date of the termination of the strike for preparations to the strikers after the great trial and strain which they are undergoing.

X. Definite assurance should be given by the University and its constituent Colleges, whose students are involved in the strike, that no such student should be in any way formally or informally, directly or indirectly, questioned about his conduct nor shall any apology or regret be demanded, nor shall any one be suspended, fined, expelled or in any way punished in connection with the strike now or at any time in the future.

XI. On the recommendation of the Boycott (sic) Council the University strikers hereby pledge themselves to stand by all the sympathetic strikers (who sign the declaration issued by the Boycott(sic) Council all over Burma, irrespective of class school and hereby specifically demand.

(a) That all sympathetic strikers belonging to the various schools in the country be taken back in their old school at the termination of the strike without penalising them in any form.

(b) That all examinations be postponed and examinations which the strikers have missed be re-held.

XII. That this mass meeting of University and school strikers demands that all those who passed the high School Final examinations be declared eligible for matriculation in the University of Rangoon.

## 12. Nu, Autobiographical Reminiscences<sup>1</sup>

### A Quarrel with Principal Sloss

Shortly before the October holidays the vice-president of the Rangoon University Students' Union (RUSU) left school, necessitating a by-election when the university reopened. The five-man group put up Ko Nu, who was returned unopposed.

Near closing time in December an important notice was issued under Principal Sloss's signature, instituting preliminary examinations. Only those students who passed these could take the regular examinations in March. Obviously the new measure was motivated by Mr. Sloss's desire to improve performance. He wished to improve the standards at the university and the quality of his students. It was already a matter of record that great strides had been made under Principal Sloss's guidance, but he wanted to see Rangoon University universally acknowledged as preeminent in the British Empire.

While designing measures that called for more studying on the part of the students, the principal did not spare himself. All the students, whether they hated or loved Mr. Sloss, would have had to admit that he was an extremely hard worker. However, because of the atmosphere prevailing at the time, everything the white man did was "imperialistic" and suspect. The preliminaries were thus seen as an instrument of oppression.

A demand immediately arose to call an emergency meeting of the student body and this was done in the Union Hall. Condemnatory speeches were made, and as the students became more inflamed they began to talk excitedly about striking. Senior students intervened at this point, and at their suggestion it was decided to send the president of RUSU to the Principal; he was to report back to the student body before the Christmas holidays. The president, not daring enough to go alone, proposed two of his colleagues to be sent along with him. However, the president and two of his colleagues who were deputed to confer with the principal caught cold feet, so by the time the holidays arrived nothing had been done. The mass meeting had assigned no specific task to Vice-President Ko Nu, but when he saw the president and his committee dodge the issue he decided to step in. He sent Ko Kyaw Nyein to the principal and waited in the Mess Hall for the outcome. When Ko Kyaw Nyein returned, it was to report that Mr. Sloss had banged on the table and said he would not be intimidated by groups or individuals. The preliminaries would be held as ordered.

During the meal Ko Nu did some hard thinking, as a result of which he hit upon a plan. Several

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<sup>1</sup>Nu (1975) *Saturday's Son*. Translated by U Law Yone. New Haven and London, Yale University Press: 71-80.



times, before he unfolded it, he made as if to abandon it, because essentially it was dishonest, but in the end he decided to go through with it because it was for the general good. For the sake of the students he would roast in the lowest reaches of hell.

After lunch he called his five-man cabal together and told them the president and his cohorts, like Po Tha Wa's bull,<sup>1</sup> had charged off at a tangent and something would have to be done. He then revealed his secret plan, which was agreed to. Ko Ohn knew an editor at the *Mawriya*; Ko Nu knew someone at the *New Light of Burma*. To these newspapers the cabal repaired and planted stories saying that Principal Sloss had defied all Burmese political parties and their leaders. Ko Nu's group was well aware that Mr. Sloss's statement had been addressed to them and the Students' Union; the distortion was done deliberately for greater effect. The next day the stories appeared under bold headlines and Principal Sloss was moved to protest. But the newspapers concerned would not retract, nor would they print Sloss's letter.

As the next move, Ko Thein Pe was sent north and Ko Nu went south to hold mass meetings. Ko Thein Pe was known only in Monywa and Budalin, just as no one outside of Wakema and Pantanaw knew Ko Nu. As they themselves knew, there was no public interest in the grievance they were about to air, with the result that only a few of their friends came to the meeting. In fact one would have had to take an oath to satisfy the townsfolk after-wards that such a meeting had taken place. Nevertheless, token affairs though they were, telegrams were sent to the waiting Ko Kyaw Nyein and Ko Aung San in Rangoon confirming that "Sloss, Get Out" resolutions had been passed. When the *Mawriya* and the *New Light* got the stories they dressed them up to look like huge mass meetings instead of the cockfight audiences they really had been.

Back in Rangoon Ko Nu and Ko Thein Pe addressed a mass meeting on the slopes of the Shwedagon Pagoda. The colonnade chosen was a venue for large meetings. On some occasions the crowds were so thick they overflowed to nearby covered causeways. But on this occasion, since the public's attention had not been caught, there were some thakins from the Dobama Asi-ayone and perhaps a hundred other persons. Principal Sloss, however, was sufficiently alarmed to send barrister U Soe Nyun,<sup>2</sup> a member of the University Governing Board, and Bursar U Tin to explain his side of the dispute, but the audience consisted of Ko Nu's invitees, and Sloss's men could make no impression. The "Sloss, Get Out" resolution was passed.

The five-man group had planned the Shwedagon meeting as the first stage of the offensive; the next

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(Excerpts). - Nu's footnotes are denoted by [Nu].

<sup>1</sup> This proverbial bull was very good at making bold displays but would run away the minute a fight started.

<sup>2</sup> U Soe Nyun became Burma's first ambassador to the United States.

stage would inevitably be a strike. Fortunately for them, the newspapers gave them good coverage and the university gave in. That evening the Governing Board met in emergency session and the preliminary examinations were cancelled. But Principal Sloss demanded that Ko Nu and Ko Kyaw Nyein be expelled. A member, barrister U Thein Maung,<sup>1</sup> objected, saying the expulsions would touch off student protests. As a compromise Vice-Chancellor Dr. Set was asked to meet with the students and obtain a signed statement from Ko Nu and Ko Kyaw Nyein that they would no longer instigate student unrest. Dr. Set was commissioner of the Rangoon Corporation, and the meeting with him took place in his office. The ringleaders refused to sign, despite the fact they had won their point in regard to the preliminaries. Dr. Set sent them away to reconsider their decision and report back at two in the afternoon. Ko Nu and Ko Kyaw Nyein remained obdurate: expulsion was preferable to the signing of the pledge. Dr. Set shook his head, called them troublesome and ended the interview.

This success did not turn Ko Nu's head. He realised that he had been able to take an unbending attitude and still win because the British were respecters of the law. In the absence of the rule of law other imperialists, whether they be capitalists, socialists, or fascists, would have eaten him alive.

### **Meet the RUSU President**

At the next RUSU elections, Ko Nu was returned unopposed as president. Characteristically, he caused an incident on the very first day. After the election of the RUSU executive committee, the student body had to be invited in for the inauguration. As the meeting convened and the general secretary announced "The President!" everyone rose to his feet. Ko Nu entered and his first words were: "This is all rubbish; in future when I enter nobody stands." Then he removed his *gaungbaung*<sup>2</sup> and threw it on the table. This conduct gave offence to the committee who, following the general meeting, convened an executive session and censured Ko Nu. They pointed out that the procedure of introducing the president by the general secretary, as well as the mode of dress and deportment, were written in the constitution and had been traditionally adhered to since the formation of RUSU. "You have no right to break precedent," they scolded him. "We stand up to honour not you but the presidency."

Ko Nu was unaware of these requirements. During his terms of office as vice-president and then as president, he did not appear to have read the constitution from beginning to end even once. So he

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<sup>1</sup> U Thein Maung later became a chief justice of the Supreme Court in Burma.

<sup>2</sup> Traditional men's headgear.

just sat and grinned while his fellow office-holders passed a resolution commanding him to obey the rules. At the next mass meeting Vice-President Ko Raschid<sup>1</sup> read out the stricture and President Ko Nu entered, wearing his *gaungbaung*.

During his term of office Ko Nu was often on the dais making speeches. What he spoke about he himself does not recall, but, according to one or two sources, out of every five speeches he made, four castigated the practice of saluting the authorities.

A month after Ko Nu was elected president, Principal Sloss went home on leave. In his absence, the acting principal received an application for leave from a Pantanaw student. The application was unusual because it lacked precedent. Day students went home or stayed away at will; boarders usually told assistant wardens or tutors, and Ko Nu himself, whenever he was nostalgic for his wife or his daughter, born in 1934, absented himself. If students wished to keep up attendance they got a friend to answer the roll call.

In the particular instance alluded to, however, the acting principal asked the student why he wished to go home, why the leave application was based on a letter from a sister rather than the parents, and so on. There were no racial overtones, no intention to insult or annoy; the acting principal was merely taking a parental interest in a sixteen-year-old student. But Ko Nu, when he heard about this, immediately jumped to the conclusion that here was white imperialism browbeating a Burman. He dashed off to the acting principal to ask for leave. If he was asked the reason he would say a letter had come from home. The clincher would come when asked to produce the letter: Did the tutors in Oxford and Cambridge dare demand to read such letters? What did happen was slightly different from the mentally rehearsed act. The conversation went:

I'd like to go home. Please give me leave.

What's your reason for wanting leave?

I received a letter from home.

All right, you may go.

Nonplussed, Ko Nu could only gape at the acting principal.

### **A Fiendish Tattoo on Tin Cans**

Before the end of his term of office as RUSU president, Ko Nu had another interesting clash with Principal Sloss. 'With the approach of the March finals, the students took to their books with a vengeance. But in the warden's house outside Sagaing Hall there was the sound of revelry by night, almost every other day. This prompted Ko Kyaw Myint, a Sagaing student, to protest and the

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<sup>1</sup> Raschid served in several capacities in the Cabinet in independent Burma.

warden bawled him out. That very night when the singing and merrymaking at the warden's were at their height, Ko Kyaw Myint collected some friends and beat an acting on a report made by the assistant warden, the principal suspended Ko Kyaw Myint for a year.

Ko Kyaw Myint, thinking to himself that rustication was preferable to expulsion, would not tell Ko Nu. He was packing his bags quietly when Ko Nu, told of the incident by someone else, arrived. Ko Kyaw Myint was extremely reluctant even to discuss the case, but Ko Nu wasted no time. "You're surrendering without a fight," he charged, and, suspension order in hand, he led Ko Kyaw Myint to a barrister in the city. The advice they received was that a direct complaint should be filed in court, demanding damages from the principal for the anguish caused by his unjust order. The next day the principal called Ko Kyaw Myint to say, "Stop the suit and I'll rescind my order."

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### **Expulsion and the Student Strike**

Following the annual general meeting, classes were closed to enable students to prepare for the final examinations. Ko Nu, having spent his time in extracurricular activities, decided he would catch up on his reading and began turning the pages of law books. He savoured the moment of contingent success. The impediments to his first two tries at law had disappeared; now he was within reach of his law degree. Three days went by and a letter arrived from the principal's office. Another offer of an assistant registrar's job, no doubt. To accept this offer would send him floating in the spittle of the students. Ko Nu smirked. He opened the letter. It was not an offer of anything but an expulsion order. He stared at the book open before him. "Miss Law," he said, "I love you, and because I do I've come back to you three times. But it's like the popular refrain:

The two of us, each  
the other desires.  
But the outsider cometh  
and with him ruin.

He closed the manual, saying goodbye. Then he went to bed and slept. When he awoke, his first thought was of the commotion the letter might cause on the eve of finals. He decided he would tell no one. He burnt the paper, changed, and went to the cinema.

The news of course was out. Some students learnt about it from the principal's office, and within twenty-four hours it was known throughout the campus. A delegation of student leaders headed by vice-president Ko Raschid arrived and at once began reproaching Ko Nu. Why had they not been told? they demanded. They brushed aside Ko Nu's excuse that he did not want to disturb the

students so close to the examinations. "This is not a personal matter; it is the concern of the entire union," they asserted. "We're not going to take it lying down."

Ko Nu pleaded with them in vain. They surprised him by saying not only he but Ko Aung San also was getting sacked.

"Whatever for?" Ko Nu inquired.

"In his magazine there is an article entitled, 'Hellhound at Large,' aimed at a member of the faculty. The authorities want to know who wrote it and Ko Aung San won't tell."

So that was that. The RUSU executive committee met and re-solved to boycott the examinations. Then an emergency mass meeting was convened and the resolution of the executive committee was read out. As vice-president Ko Raschid finished reading, the air was rent with shouts of "Strike! We will strike!"

### **Outside the Ivory Tower**

The 1936 University Strike lasted four months. The authorities yielded to the extent of readmitting expellees Ko Nu and Ko Aung San, agreeing to form a University Inquiry Committee to look into the students' complaints, and incorporating suitable provisions in the University Act. The strike was then called off, but Ko Nu and some other students did not return to classes. They chose to leave the university.

With two of his friends, Ko Hla Pe<sup>1</sup> and Ko Tun Ohn,<sup>2</sup> Ko Nu began working on a project to set up a national university. He also apprenticed himself at *the Deedok Journal*, where he wrote a number of articles, and began to concentrate on play writing. Since his long plays were not popular with the reading public, their publication in the *Deedok* would have hurt its prestige. Consequently, Ko Nu produced one-act plays, all of which editor U Ba Choe, with unfailing good humour, published. After a year at the *Deedok Journal* Ko Nu founded the Nagani (Red Dragon) Book Club. A small room was found in the western wing of the Scott Market at a cheap rental, and the bookstall became a busy meeting ground for politicians with ill-digested views, students, and ordinary book buyers.

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<sup>1</sup> U Hla Pe later served as a deputy minister and minister of defence in U Nu's Cabinet after independence.

<sup>2</sup> U Tun Ohn later served as commissioner of the Corporation of Rangoon after independence.

### **13. Frankie Tun, My Point of View after Reading Thein Pe Myint's *Students' Boycott***

I had heard about this book before but I never had seen it or read it in Burma until I came to receive this book from a friend of mine who is working in the Asia-Africa-Institute in Hamburg, Dr. Zöllner. It was a kind of surprise and happiness to have the opportunity to read a book like this at the age of 40, after I left my country for so many years.

Firstly, I would like to express my feeling of reading the book called "Students' Boycott". The book surely took me back to the old days of our famous Rangoon University and with all its unforgettable boarding hostels of the students, such as, Inya, Mar Lar, Inn Wa and Mandalay, etc.

Slowly and surely, it took me completely into the days where students of all classes and all sorts of family backgrounds met and mixed together during the colonial era, how they tried to fight against the education system created by the authorities under the British Rule and how much of sacrifices were made by the students for the liberation of our country.

The main character, Nyo Tun, created by the author represented somebody whom I knew very well since I was young. Slowly and surely, it entered at the back of my mind while I was reading the book that the characteristics of the main person and the events were pointing to the person whom I knew as a hero of my life. He was none other than, Aung San, our national hero of Burmese Independence and the father of our beloved NLD leader, Aung San Suu Kyi.

The author did not say openly that he was writing about the young life of Aung San as a student but the event of Students' Boycott and the leading figure, Nyo Tun, could be simply compared to the one and the only, General Aung San.

For example in the book, Nyo Tun was a secretary. Aung San also had worked as a secretary for the students' organization during the British colony era. He was a very open and direct speaker and so was Nyo Tun in the book. Nyo Tun was a selfless, aggressive and a brave fighter who had ignored even his health. Aung San too was such a person.

Nyo Tun, in the book, was a good public speaker and a good organizer who could stir up the flame of the workers and students by his words both written and spoken. Aung San, our hero, was a good and straight forward speaker and a writer who wrote many political articles when he was an Editor of *Owe Way* journal.

A man who dare to speak out against the British Ruler and compared the British Authority as “Hell Hound Dog on the loose”. I really want to praise the author’s wittiness and ability to mix the real historical events and the created characters in such a way to draw the readers to come to their own conclusions.

And he knew certainly that the readers would come to realize of whom he was writing about. For me, as a person who had seen and experienced the long struggle of our Burmese University students against many types of authorities who were trying to control the freedom of speech and movement, this old student’s book was a kind of a new blood injector which can really arouse a person’s nationalistic spirit.

It’s an old book which was written before I was born but it still can capture my heart and reminded me of our hero, our goal and our path.

Zaw Min Tun ( Frankie )

02.07.06

## 14. Khin Yi on the End of the Student Strike of 1939<sup>1</sup>

*Editor's note:*

*The excerpt reproduced here starts after an account of the demonstration in Mandalay on February 10, 1939, when 13 demonstrators were killed by the police.*

On February 12, an unprecedented mass demonstration took place in Rangoon. The marchers, walking four abreast, stretched for two miles. The demonstration was preceded by a mass rally at the Shwedagon where the following resolutions were passed:

1. The meeting applauded those who had given up their lives and those injured during the February 10 demonstration at Mandalay and proposed a two-minute silence as a mark of respect to them.
2. If the authorities failed to comply with the demands made by the students before nightfall.
  - (a) All students from Government and Government-aided schools were to withdraw themselves,
  - (b) All school teachers were to resign,
  - (c) Private Anglo-Vernacular and Vernacular schools were to be set up without delay,
  - (d) For the implementation of the above aims the Independent Women's League was to take full responsibility.
3. All possible aid was to be given to the students in their future struggle and if necessary to give up their lives for the student cause.

The Dobama seized the opportunity to turn the fury of the embittered people against the coalition government. It was a fortunate coincidence for them that the parliamentary session was scheduled to be held on February 16. They planned a multiphase demonstration.

1. All houses were to fly black flags commencing from 9 a.m.
2. Tin cans were to be beaten from 9 a.m. to 10 a.m. as a means of exorcising the coalition government.
3. While beating the tin cans people were to shout in unison "Down with the coalition government".
4. At 11 a.m. sham coffins marked as the coalition government or the effigies of the coalition

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<sup>1</sup> Khin Yi 1988, pp.: 128-131 (without references).



cabinet members were to be burnt.

5. All shops and all public vehicles were to stop their normal course of work until the fall of the coalition government.
6. After the final exorcising (No. 4) all activities (other than No. 5) were to resume as usual.

The Thakins claimed that the embittered people followed their instructions throughout the country. When the motion of no-confidence was moved in the House of the Representatives, on February 16, 1939, the coalition government fell, with 70 supporting the motion, 37 protesting and 11 abstaining.

The next step of the Dobama was to prevent formation of a new government. A mass rally was held at Rangoon on February 20 at the City Hall with Thakin Soe in the chair and U Khin Maung the secretary of the Kernmendine Bazaar Association as the master of ceremonies. The object of the meeting was to protest the Constitution and to urge that no members of the House of Representatives accept office. On February 21 the central committee of the Dobama issued a directive to all district organizations that they:

- hold mass rallies, public demonstrations, and announce non-acceptance of office;
- condemn those who accept office;
- and that the respective constituents those who accept office and focus who plan to form a new cabinet.

Despite their protests and endeavors, however, U Pu formed a government. The U Pu government's first successful achievement was to break the student strike. On the night of February 26, the president of ABSU, Ko Hla Shwe met with U Pu at the residence of U Thwin and reached an agreement that the students would call off the strike and that the authorities would form an enquiry commission to investigate the Secretariat incident. The government agreed that no action would be taken against the student leaders and the oilfield strike marchers. The date for the examination of the University and High Schools was set for three months from when the strike was called off. The announcement appeared in the newspapers the following day, greatly surprising the entire nation.

The most shocked and infuriated of the strikers encamped at Shwedagon and the student strikers at Myoma High School was the student leader Ko Than Tin, who had accompanied Ko Hla Shwe to the negotiation talks with U Pu. Two days later, at the Myoma strike camp meeting held on February 28 at noon, he admitted having fallen asleep during the talks. He rallied students to shift

their camp to the Shwedagon pagoda.

As a counter measure, ABSU held an emergency Executive Committee meeting on the same day, February 27, and issued a statement dismissing Ko Than Tin from the Executive Committee and denying all responsibility for his actions. There was an immediate attempt for reconciliation with the student leaders. A parents' meeting was held which entrusted the liaison task to Myoma Saya Hein, Tetkatho Hsu Myaing (Dagon Taya), Daw Mya May, and Daw Khin Hla. This group succeeded in bringing about an understanding. In the presence of Thakin Ba Gyan of Minbu, at the residence of Daw Mya May, the president of the Independent Women's League, Ko Than Tin pledged to abide by the decisions of the student council and Ko Hla Shwe rescinded the dismissal notice served on him.

On March 8 the student council held a meeting at the RUSU building attended by over one hundred student delegates. With Ko Ba Hein in the chair, and Ko Ba Swe as the master of ceremonies, the meeting opened with the Dobama Song. In his presidential speech Ko Ba Hein stressed the importance of preventing the establishment of a rival student organization. When Ko Hla Shwe moved and Ko Thein Aung seconded a resolution reaffirming the end of strike, Ko Than Tin objected, and his objection was seconded by Ko Maung Maung Hla and Ko Ye Myint. Ko Than Tin explained that he objected to calling off the strike out of sympathy for the peasants and workers. He further clarified his claim by saying that:

We have stood in their vanguard and to abandon them now would be sheer cruelty. Besides, our demand for the withdrawal of the Constitution is still unheeded, and the restrictions over individual liberty still prevail. It is true that the examinations are soon to be held, but we have not gone on strike for educational gains. We had plunged ourselves into politics. If it had been suggested that the strike be called off at Ko Aung Gyaw's death, I would not have objected, but now seventeen more have lost their lives and to call off the strike now is sheer folly.

With 87 for, 27 against, and 2 abstaining, the proposal for calling off the strike was finally confirmed. Thus the student strike which had begun on January 8, 1939 over the arrest of the two student leaders, Ko Ba Hein and Ko Ba Swe, came to an abrupt end exactly two months later.

The student support had greatly enhanced the popularity of the strikers. Students are not a class by

themselves. As they are the Sons and daughters of the nation, their entry into the strike automatically brought closer contact between the strikers and the populace. The fall of the Ba Maw cabinet had been the direct result of the massacre at Mandalay, and the massacre had its roots in the arrests of the students. Therefore, although the period of the students' strike was short, it had an immense effect upon the political scene.

The manner in which Ko Hla Shwe conducted himself in reaching the agreement to call off the strike calls for strong censure. He seems to have been carried away by his popularity. In this extremely important action, the decision should not have been his alone. The outcome of the votes taken at the student council on March 8 does indicate that he might have had majority support had he but asked for a vote. Yet this cannot be safely assumed, for the two situations differ a great deal. The decision made at the student council was whether or not to confirm the resolution already made. That vote was not taken to decide whether or not to call off the strike. The withdrawal of the students from the strike camp greatly weakened the entire movement. One last stand was to be made before the strikers' anger petered out and they returned home, a sad, dejected, and depressed band of stragglers, a far cry from the glorious marchers who had entered Rangoon on January 8.

## 15. John F. Cady's Remembrances of 1936<sup>1</sup>

### The Student Strike of 1936 at University College

The hectic chores of last minute preparations for the annual University examinations came just as the “cool” winter temperatures were giving way at the end of February to the oppressively hot season. Although I was not unaware of the restive spirit developing within the University Student Union, since some of my students had participated in Union-scheduled debates, I was entirely unprepared for the student strike which ensued. It proved to be far more significant historically than it seemed to promise at the time. It was instigated by the nationalist Thakin leaders of the *Dobama Asiayone* (We Burmans Society), who had captured control of the Student Union during the previous school year. The President was Thakin Nu, a graduate law student, and Thakin Aung San was the Secretary. By preventing the holding of the year-end examinations, the *Asiayone* had undertaken to dramatize their opposition to British colonial authority generally and to its restrictive control of University College in particular. From the strike sponsors of 1936 were drawn virtually all of Burma's post-war nationalist leadership. They eventually assembled under the banner of the Anti-Fascist Peoples Freedom League or AFPFL.

The following quotations from my contemporaneous letter home (March 2) and from later diary notes reflected my immediate reactions:

The trouble was caused by the expulsion of a leading student [Nu] for attacking orally the British head [Principal Sloss] of University College. Students [are] being prevented from going to exams by strikers lying prostrate across [room] entrances. Judson College is not involved except that many of the exams are held jointly ... British Professors ... cannot come down off their perch and he friendly to the students ... Exams will probably be postponed until June.

Another diary entry provided more detail:

Student leaders attacked Sloss in the University Union, and an obscene article [Hell Hound at Large] appeared in the year book. Both acts were deliberately provocative. The speaker [Nu] was expelled and the writer [if discovered] ... will be. [Many] students facing the impending examinations saw the strike as a way of avoiding ... an immediate inconvenience.

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<sup>1</sup> John F. Cady (1981), “Our Burmese Experience of 1935-1938”, in: *Contributions to Asian Studies* 16: 141-142.

The campus was picketed heavily during the first two regular days of examinations, February 28 and 29, and the whole [examination] program was later stopped by [prostrate] strikers. The action was ... planned [initially] with no definite connections politically. Their first appeal to Dr. Ba Maw, **clever** Education Minister, brought a reply that he was sorry that they had struck, but that he sympathized with the strikers. He helped them draw up their demand for an amendment to the University Act [modifying British control', for which he had [allegedly] been agitating for several years. His program is well planned and is legally feasible. Two or three ... **rival** politicians. U Set, **U** Kun, and Ganga Singh, are trying with might and main to make political capital out of the situation. They are fomenting strikes throughout the provincial High Schools and are trying to undermine Ba Maw's [political] position by making themselves ... members of the investigating committee. Ba Maw replies that internal affairs of the University are purely for the University Council to settle, that the Act must be amended, but that ... the Legislative Council cannot otherwise interfere .... Student discontent □ focused on the British staff .... The Governors's committee will arrange a compromise settlement (Diary, March 5).

One of my freshman Karen students from Upper Burma was clubbed to death by police during an ensuing downtown Rangoon riot. Principal jury attended the funeral. Our sympathies generally lay with our better students, whose examinations had to be deferred.

The eventual compromise involved the replacement of Principal Sloss by Burmese Professor Pe Maung Tin. As warden of Thaton Hall, Tin had sided with Thakin Nu in 1930 during an earlier confrontation with Sloss over his rejection of the singing of the nationalist *Dobama* song.' Burmese politicians as well as the strikers called for a National University, privately funded and manned by a non-British faculty, but the project ran firmly aground. My immediate March 21 diary comment ran as follows:

It is depressing being here without the students ... You get to wondering why you came to live in such a climate and amid such discouraging social conditions.

The strike came to a formal end in mid-May, after Burma's new governor threatened police interference, while citing a law in the India Code forbidding obstruction of entrances to examination halls (Letter home, May 17).

## **16. Lucian Pye on the Students' Strike of 1936 and the Burmese "Politicians' Search for Identity"<sup>1</sup>**

Lucian W. Pye conducted research in Burma in 1958 and 1959 in order to explore the "transitional" political system of Burma. He interviewed Burmese administrators and politicians and combined the "microanalysis" based on his data with a "macroanalysis" of Burmese political culture that determined the country's nation building process. The following excerpt is taken from Chapter V of the book "Political Acculturation and Reaction to Changes in Identity". – On the preceding page, a first "shock of awareness" on the side of the interviewed Burmans is described that was caused by contradictory assessments of the Saya San-rebellion of 1930.

For the next generation of Burmese politicians, the incident that caused the shock of awareness was the 1936 Rangoon University student strike. The incidents that sparked the strike were so trivial that the participants are now generally embarrassed at their mention. The strike itself was an exhilaratingly irresponsible experience, an incident which the participants knew was little more than an act of boyish excitement. Yet, like the Saya San rebellion, it was hailed by foreigners as a demonstration of Burmese nationalism. Some of our respondents indicated that they were disturbed by this development which had made Burmese nationalism seem more like a childish outburst than a responsible movement. It was somehow too easy to be a national hero; national greatness should involve more than the particular chain of events associated with student action.

Whatever the nature of the particular incident which caused the shock of awareness about the question of Burmese values, the aspiring politicians were uniformly victimized by the assumption that the sentiments of nationalism are more truly reflected in atavistic feelings and destructive emotions than in reasoned efforts at improving oneself and one's country. Just as some of the administrators, when faced with the irrationalities of the nationalist politicians, came to wonder whether they might be lacking in nationalistic ardor, so early in their lives many of the politicians had found it necessary to accept behavior they could not admire as being truly Burmese. The individual politician was thus caught in a conflict between the attraction of the world culture with its stress on rationality and the demand of a brand of nationalism which be-came under the circumstances peculiarly antirationalistic.

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<sup>1</sup> Lucian W. Pye (1962), *Personality, Politics and Nation Building: Burma' Search for Identity*. New Haven, Yale University Press. (reprint: 1976): 260-261.

Many of the respondents mentioned that in response to this conflict they had felt a need to be more assertive, more emotionally demanding, more willing to act on impulse; they tried to convince themselves that restraint, reason, and modern ways were alien qualities inappropriate in a Burman. It was the combination of becoming more assertive while striving to become more identified with traditional Burmese ways which several of the politicians identified as the motivation behind their decision to affect the title of *Thakin* or "master" as used in addressing Europeans.

At the same time it appears that the politicians generally remained unshaken in their initial psychological commitment to being different and to becoming more modernized. Now they can generally speak quite freely of this conflict in values between the old and the new. We need here note only two aspects of this conflict. First, it appears that an awareness of even marginal participation in two cultures tended to make our respondents particularly sensitive to the possibility that others might be similarly torn and that therefore their behavior might be highly unreliable. Thus the Burmese politician will complain that his colleagues are constantly shifting back and forth between advocating modern ways and upholding traditional practices. There is a valid reason for this view of others: the Burmese politician has in a sense such a wide range of choice of generally acceptable bases for defining his position at any particular moment that at one time he can strike the posture of a progressive modernizer and at the next he can extol the virtues of reverence for Burmese ways. The result, nevertheless, is that when one politician exploits such possibilities others inevitably tend to charge him with being an opportunist, a man without fixed convictions who seeks only to gain momentary advantage. It follows that there is a significant element of uncertainty in Burmese politics, and that, as we have noted, there is a high concern about opportunism.

A second significant consequence of the Burmese politician's inner conflict in values is that it gives him an exaggerated and quite false sense of the degree to which he is free to choose among alternative models for the future of his country. He tends to believe that it is possible to select the best ways from both the old and the new and in this fashion ensure that the "Burmese way" will remain the best way. This approach to the future is comforting since it implies that omnipotence is possible after all, and that a time will be reached when the country will have picked all that is good and eliminated all that is bad. But the result is a kind of reformism in which there are no forces of evil to be anxiously destroyed; there is only the pleasant task of choosing from the various acknowledged candidates for the best. Unfortunately in recent years it has become increasingly difficult for the Burmese politicians to feel satisfied that they have been achieving the best, and hence another source of suspicion of the motives of others was introduced into Burmese politics.

### **III. APPENDICES**

#### **SHORT INFORMATION on the MAKING of the BOOK REPORTS**

CHOSEN BOOKS from the bibliography will be provided on a lending basis by the manager [or for people in Myanmar through the Myanmar Book Centre in Yangon (55 Baho Road; telephone 221-271, 212-409)].

TWO REPORTS on each book by different persons are accepted.

LENGHT: 8,000 to 12,000 words (plus special space, if desired);

LANGUAGE of PUBLICATION: English; manuscripts in Myanmar language will be translated;

CRITERIA (must not slavishly be observed):

1. Biographical information about the author/translator, and other contributors;
2. Information about the non-Myanmar sources used in the book; (if the book is a translation, the original English version will be provided, too, if possible;)
3. Summary of the book's contents;
4. Information about the special aim and intended impact of the book at the time of publication;
5. How are foreign terms and concepts translated or transformed into the Myanmar language and the Myanmar context? (May be omitted!)
6. Personal assessment by the reviewer of the book, its impact on later times and its meaning for today

DEADLINE of DELIVERY of the REPORT: December 31, 2005 (the deadline can be extended);

DELIVERY of the REPORTS DRAFTED: Directly to the manager of the project by email or through the Myanmar Book Centre.

COMMENTS and EDITING: The reports will be commented upon by another person. The reviewer may react on the comments and answer the questions as he or she likes. The responsibility for the final editing of the reports is with the project manager.

REWARD: As a financial reward, each reviewer will receive 50 US \$ at the time of submitting the book report and 30 US \$ after the final editing.

OTHER CONTRIBUTIONS like recollections of elder people, who remember the impact of



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Nagani on their life, and essays on subjects related to the club (Nagani Song, Nagani Magazine, the role of literature in disseminating knowledge in Myanmar, etc.) are very much appreciated.

## **INFORMATION about COMMENTARIES on BOOK REPORTS**

**1.** The commentaries asked for shall serve two aims:

First (and most important): To start a dialogue on Myanmar's intellectual and literary heritage between interested people inside and outside of Myanmar.

Second (and important, too): To check the clarity of the report with regard to the intended publication.

Therefore, the commentator should be interested in Burma affairs and in the general topic of the respective book, but must not know anything about its specific content.

**2.** Length of each commentary: Must not exceed the space of this paper.

**3.** Some hints that may be useful to observe in writing a commentary:

Are there any questions that are brought up by reading the report?

If yes, what kind of questions do arise?

Are the criteria listed in the "Short information on the making of book reports" (see attachment) met by the book report?

What information on the book report do I find interesting/exciting or unnecessary/redundant?

Is there anything that I would recommend to the author of the report?

**Delivery of the commentary:** It would be appreciated if the commentaries could be sent by email to the above mentioned email address. If the author of the report chooses to react on the commentary, the commentator will be informed.

**Affairs to come:** All participants will be informed about the development of the publishing process of the reports and are invited to participate in future deliberations and activities. - Questions and recommendations are very much appreciated!

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MYANMAR LITERATURE PROJECT



Starting with an investigation into the NAGANI BOOK CLUB

The project's

**Working Papers**

are published by

the **Department of Southeast Asian Studies of Passau University**

Already Published:

No. 10:1, An Introduction into the Nagani Book Club

No. 10:2, Thein Pe, *Saya Lun* and *Member of Parliament*

No. 10:3, Ba Hein, *The World of Capitalists*

Forthcoming:

No. 10:5, Ba Khaing, *Political History of Burma*

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Some Nagani Books

were scanned and are available on CD.

For details contact

habezett@t-online.de

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All Working Papers published until now are available  
at

**<http://www.zoellner-online.org/mlp.htm>**

and at the Online Burma Library

**<http://www.burmalibrary.org/show.php?cat=2083>**

## INVITATION

Readers are invited to participate in the project by

- writing **comments and criticisms** on the contents of this and other volumes of this series;
- contributing **essays** on Burmese/Myanmar literature as a medium between the international world and Burmese society;
- providing **material** that sheds more light on the Nagani Book Club, its context and impact on Burmese intellectual and literary life;
- offering **assistance** as translators and commentators of book reports.

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For contributions and questions, please contact:

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