



## Porters

Myawady market is situated on the banks of the Moei river which separates Thailand and Burma near Mae Sot Thailand. Generally the market is a bustling place as Thai and Burmese merchants move freely back and forth carrying consumer goods from Thailand into Burma, and food items from Burma into Thailand. During the dry season, the river can easily be forded on foot, with the water less than waist deep.

During the first week of February, the scene along the river changed dramatically. Hundreds of young Burmese men suddenly fled across the river to the safety of the Thai side. The reason for their flight was that the Burmese military was rounding up able-bodied young men to be porters for their planned military attacks in the nearby Karen controlled area.

Porters are not only needed to carry weapons, and other supplies for the Burmese troops, but are also needed to walk point. Walking point means that they proceed ahead of the troops, tripping any booby traps or land mines which might be in the way. If they are wounded, they are sometimes sent back to their home towns where they are responsible for getting their own medical care. However, they are often simply left to die along the road side.

A vendor selling noodle soup on the Thai side of the river related that the flight across the river is a common occurrence during the dry season. "It has already become a tradition" she said, meaning that Burmese troops regularly round up young men, some as young as 12, to serve as their porters and point men. She also explained how it affects the women who are left behind.

"One young mother with two children, the youngest only a few months old, came across the river and said her husband had been taken away as a porter and she was left alone to take care of the two babies. She had no work and no money to feed them. She was begging us to take her children, but none of us wanted to do that. Suddenly she flung her youngest child into the river. We quickly jumped in to save it, but you can see how emotionally destroyed this poor woman was. It is really terrible what is being done to these people!"

The 700 or so men who fled this time, stayed on the river bank for three days until the Burmese military finally left. They estimated that probably 200 or 300 porters had been captured, and that a large number of them would never return.

After three days of living in exile, the men returned to their homes in Myawady, knowing that they would probably have to make the flight several more times during this dry season, and if they were lucky and fast enough, they would once again be spared the dangerous task of being a porter, a position they had no interest in volunteering for.

This should be seen as a breach of human rights by the international community. To be forced to do non-paying service might occasionally be seen as justifiable by some, but if that non-paying service puts life and limb at stake, it is most certainly not acceptable. We call on the Burmese government to end this inhuman treatment of the Burmese people, and trust that our international friends will do the same.



The "State Law and Order Restoration Council" standing on the skulls of the people is telling the world "We are working for democracy in Burma!"

# အမေအို

## TO MOTHER

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 အမေ့တိုင်းပြည် သာယာစေချင်လို့  
 ပြည်သူတွေလို ချစ်တဲ့ ဒီမိုကရေစီရအောင်  
 သားတို့ ကိုယ်ကျိုး မမြှောက်ဘဲ  
 ကြိုးစားဆောင်ရွက် နေကြပါတယ် အမေ။

Mother,  
 A place in a forest camp  
 Scattered rays of light  
 through the thatched roof  
 forming patterns on the  
 floor of the bamboo hut.  
 A severe attack of cold  
 We stand firmly in our  
 commitment.  
 Mother,  
 Food is scarce  
 Ngapi and chilly  
 are a delicious meal  
 We live humbly.  
 Mother,  
 Only one set of torn  
 clothing--no spare  
 We are satisfied with this.  
 Though severe malaria  
 endangers our lives  
 our moral is still high.  
 Mother,  
 We are ready  
 to sacrifice our lives  
 for you.  
 Our desire is  
 to develop our  
 mother land  
 to restore peace in  
 our motherland  
 to achieve genuine  
 democracy for our people.  
 We are struggling as best  
 we can  
 and wish no credit for  
 ourselves.  
 (for the Burmese students,  
 "Mother" is a symbol for  
 the country of Burma)

## Steel

Steel graduated from Fangoon University about 8 years ago. His major was English and literature. He had often heard about the difficult lives some of the tribal people living deep in the jungles had to face daily, so he decided to visit them before getting a job in the city.

His pilgrimage took him to Kawtholei, the Karen State in the southern part of Burma. He was shocked, not only by the poverty he found, but also by the brutality these people had to face under Burmese military attacks. Instead of staying for just a short time to study the situation, Steel soon had committed himself to living with the Karen villagers, and seeking together with them, ways to develop their villages and lives.

Last year, the village he was living in came under attack by the Burmese military. Together with the village people, Steel ran to safety. After the troops had withdrawn, Steel returned to find the village totally burned to the ground, and all crops destroyed. Unaware that the Burmese military had left behind anti-personnel mines, Steel went looking for his small goat herd. His foot accidentally triggered one of the mines, and his life ended in that instant.

How tragic that a life committed to serving the people must be snuffed out so mercilessly. How tragic that this story can be repeated over and over so many times in Burma today. I write this in memory of Steel. He was my friend.

Nyein Chan

ONE OF THE POOREST PEOPLE IN THE WORLD  
HAVE TO SACRIFICE THEIR LIVES TO CHANGE  
THEIR MOTHERLAND

Burma used to be the world's largest exporter of rice. But after 26 years of mismanagement by a military regime, Burma had to apply for Least Developed Country (LDC) status with the United Nations. A new ruling class has emerged, consisting of high-ranking army officers who cling to power only because they want to protect their own privileges and narrow interests.

Meanwhile, ordinary people throughout Burma have to suffer. For nearly three decades freedom of assembly, freedom of speech, press freedom and freedom to express one's views and opinions have been denied our people.

Article 21(3) of the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights stipulates that the will of people shall be the basis of the authority of the government in every country. We strongly believe that only free and fair elections can ensure democracy in Burma; the whims of a despotic military regime can not.

Nearly 5,000 people- including young students and highschool pupils, Buddhist monks and civilians- have been gunned down by this military regime under the pretext of "restoring law and order". These people were demanding nothing more than democracy and respects for basic human rights.

Many young people have already sacrificed their lives in this struggle. But we will not give up untill and unless genuine democracy has been restored in Burma.

The present economic situation in Burma belies inherent richness. Burma's teak, rubies, sapphires, jade, oil and gas go mostly unexploited. "Burma is the only country where the shrimp die of old age" (a Burma newsletter quoting a prawn buyer). In addition, Burma's domestic inflation rate this year was as much as 200-300% and its foreign debt is now in excess of 3.5 billion US dollars. Burma ranks as the ninth poorest country on the World Bank list.

LAWASIA Newsletter, December 2, 1988

# A CHALLENGE TO ALL BURMESE

From ABSDF, Thay Bow Boe Camp  
January, 1989

Since September 18, 1988, when General Saw Maung used the military to brutally crush the peaceful demonstrators calling for democracy and human rights, thousands of students have fled to the jungles on the Thai/Burma border. Here they sought refuge from the repression, and a chance to regroup so they could continue the struggle.

These young students only want to study peacefully. They have left their homes, parents, relatives and friends, because they can no longer stand the inhuman acts of the military regime which has lasted these long 26 years. This is well known by all Burmese people.

These young students are also the ones who must shoulder the responsibility of taking over the country's future. Now, however, these young boys and girls must experience great suffering in their distant jungle camps from lack of food, medicines and clothing. These hardships are too big for these young people to bear by themselves.

Who will help these, our children, who are fighting for democracy and human rights which is so much cherished by all of us?

They know that they need the help and support from international friends who also love democracy. All Burmese inside and outside of Burma understand this also.

But...the fight for democracy is mainly for the Burmese country and the Burmese people. So, who has the main responsibility to help advise and support these sons and daughters of Burma?

You, who are yourself Burmese, who were born in Burma, drank the waters of Burma, ate the rice of Burma and grew to maturity in Burma....are you not responsible to help them? Do you realize that you the Burmese are the ones who ought to help these young ones?

Oh Burmese...are you going to close your eyes and step aside and say the suffering of these young Burmese has nothing to do with you?

The restoration of democracy in our motherland is the duty of these your loved ones and also your duty...so history now challenges all Burmese to help support the children of Burma in the fight for democracy by all ways and means.

We challenge all Burmese to live for Burma, fight for Burma, and if necessary, to sacrifice your lives for Burma, the country we all love.



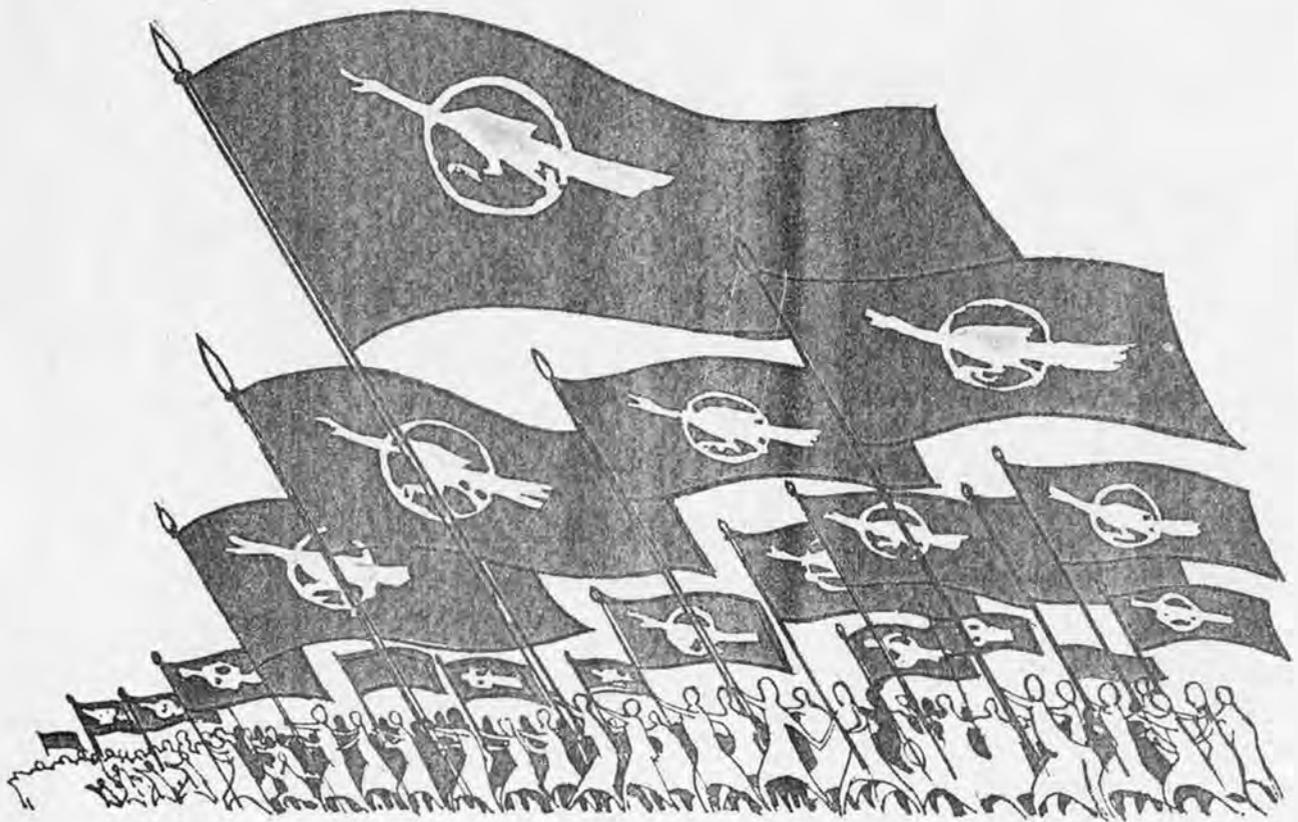
General Aung San, National Hero

There is no greater pride and no higher moral work than to sacrifice your life while fighting for freedom, development and peace for the people.

## BOYCOTT-BOYCOTT---BOYCOTT

Students and opposition leaders are beginning a boycott of all Thai goods being sold in Rangoon. This is in protest against Thailand's recognition of the Saw Maung government, the Thai repatriation of Burmese students which is done only for the benefit of the Thai economic interests, and the economic imperialism of Thai companies which are beginning to rape Burma's forests and waters, and mines. Small Burmese fishing boats are now being forced out of their traditional fishing zones by large Thai fishing vessels, and the Burmese fishermen have no way to earn their living.

The boycott will involve a wide range of Thai goods which filter into the country such as clothing, plastic goods, soap, ajinomoto seasoning, toothpaste, steel etc. The students and opposition leaders are confident that the general population will also join in the boycott.



Join together with us to fight for economic justice and peace!

## NEWS FROM INSIDE BURMA

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Almost daily, students in Rangoon continue to carry out small demonstrations against the Saw Maung/Ne Win government. These demonstrations take place suddenly, and then disperse as soon as the military starts moving in.

On January 14, 1989, such demonstrations were

are surprised that only a few days after arriving in Rangoon, they suddenly get a very severe case of malaria. We are told that in the Tak repatriation center they are treated for malaria and when they arrive they are healthy, so why do they suddenly get sick a few days after arriving home? When they get so sick, the soldiers take them away for treatment to some hospital, but we never know

I would tell the students at the border area, "Do not come back to Rangoon now!" It is dangerous for you and you will certainly be arrested and tortured. Stay and continue your struggle so that we might one day have democracy.

where. When the students finally come back, they are confused and can not recall anything. It looks like they have been drugged with something.

The Burmese people were really angry about Thai General Chavalit's visit to Burma. He made friends with our dictator, and also arranged for Thai companies to rape our land of the precious resources which we, the

being held in various places around the city. On this day, military snipers sitting on the tops of buildings, shot and killed three student demonstrators. Two were killed in Thingangwin Township in the east part of Rangoon, and the other student was killed in Pazaundaung Township nearby. Both of the students were members of the Student Union.

The brutality against pro-democracy demonstrators continues, but is never witnessed by foreigners, so is not reported in the international press.

The people in Rangoon are still very angry at Saw Maung. Prices are always going up and there is no money to buy food. People continue to be arrested and some of them disappear.

(Reported by a recent arrival from Rangoon in Mae Sot. )

The students who came back under the repatriation program arranged by Saw Maung and Thai General Chavalit are usually treated fairly well since there is so much public attention on them. However, sometimes we

Burmese people, have no rights to. We get more and more hungry, while these Thai companies help feed the military dictatorship and make it possible for them to buy guns to kill our students with.

I would tell the students at the border area, "Do not come back to Rangoon now!" It is dangerous for you and you will certainly be arrested and tortured. Stay and continue your struggle so that we might one day have democracy.

A Swedish senator visited Burma last week. He met with opposition leaders, students leaders as well as with Saw Maung. He reported that a change must take place in Burma within the year because of the discontent among the people. Everyday students suddenly appear in the streets or in the market places and raise the Student Flag. They then give short speeches about democracy before disappearing before the military can arrive. (a compilation of reports from friends inside Burma)

## FROM THE NEWSPAPERS

"Nation"  
February, 1989

### SAW MAUNG SELLS BURMA TO SURVIVE

Burma, one of the world's poorest countries, has lost most of the crutches keeping its crippled economy going and is now selling the few left.

Rice and teak exports, tourism, foreign aid, industrial output--all slumped to zero by last September after months of anti-government unrest and a bloody army takeover.

Prices have soared so high that many wage-earners cannot afford enough to feed their families. Many middle-class households now run black market shops to earn extra money.

Desperate for hard cash to pay for imports, the army has been selling off timber and fisheries concessions to foreign companies at a rate that has diplomats and businessmen here talking about the rape and pillage of Burma's resources."

Last year's unrest hit the country not long after Rangoon's secretive leaders admitted that a quarter-century along the "Burmese road to socialism" had led the country into a dead-end. Per capita annual income was only \$264.

Classified by the United Nations in 1987 as one of the "least-developed countries," Burma was hoping Western donors would write off much of its \$4 billion foreign debt.

When the army crushed the democracy movement by force last September, foreign donors stopped all aid programmes--worth about \$500 million a year--and cancelled any plans to write off earlier debts.

Much of the aid, mainly from Japan, West Germany and the United States, used to pay for needed imports, Western diplomats said.

The army has also sold off concessions to foreign timber and fishing companies so quickly and cheaply that opposition politicians are warning about lasting environmental damage.

"We have had forestry conservation since the British

were here, but there is no provision for it," said U Nu, Burma's last freely-elected leader. "Our forests will disappear. There will be no more fish in our waters."

Diplomats said Rangoon had sold 176 concessions to Thai timber companies eager to start logging in the thick forests of teak and other hardwoods along the Thai-Burmese border.

The government has also sold off nine concessions to Thai, Malaysian, Singaporean and South Korean fishing companies to tap Burma's rich maritime resources in the Andaman Sea.

Rice prices -- the poor man's inflation index -- are five times higher than before the unrest. Cooking oil costs three times as much.

Fares on Rangoon's 1940's Chevrolet buses can be up to 10 times higher because fuel is scarce and expensive.

"Bangkok Post"  
February 3, 1989

### EC PROTESTS AGAINST ABUSE OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN BURMA

The European Community has protested to Burma's military government against what it says are continued human rights abuses.

A statement issued by the French Embassy yesterday said Ambassador Georges Sidre handed a protest note to the Burmese Foreign Ministry on Tuesday expressing the concern of the 12 EC members over "continuing and widespread abuse of human rights."

The protest said there has been no progress towards ensuring human rights since the bloody army takeover on September 18 to crush an uprising for democracy.

It recalled that on September 23 the EC "expressed the firm conviction that the Burmese people's clear desire to enjoy the benefits of peace, prosperity, full protection of human rights and democracy should be met."

"The Nation"  
February 6, 1989

#### OUT OF SCHOOL AND OFF THE STREETS, BURMESE STUDENTS FIGHT ON

Out of school and off the streets, Burma's angry students are looking for ways to press their struggle for democracy.

A small group in Rangoon has gone underground and rattles nervous soldiers with handbills and posters urging the people to topple the military government.

Schools and universities have been shut since June and protest marches banned. But beneath the calm runs a rage and impatience that students, opposition politicians and foreign diplomats here say could flare up in renewed protests.

"We want to work for democracy peacefully," said a Rangoon University student sitting beneath a sign reading "students never surrender."

"But if we cannot get it peacefully, we will take up arms."

Students have long been in the vanguard for change in this impoverished country. Their symbol -- a fighting peacock -- is so linked in Burmese minds with independence that the National League for Democracy put it on its blood-red party flag.

"Far Eastern Economic Review"  
February 9, 1989

#### CRITICAL CONFRONTATION by Bertil Lintner

A confrontation appears imminent between Burma's increasingly assertive politicians and the ruling military following a two-week campaign tour by popular opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi of the Irrawaddy delta region southwest of Rangoon. During the tour, which took her to Bassein, Mabin, Myaungmya, Henzada, Labutta and other important towns in the country's main rice-growing area, the local army commander, Brig. General Myint Aung, sent troops to intimidate the crowds that turned out to welcome her.

People reportedly were told not to come out of their houses, barbed-wire fences were erected in major streets leading to the places where Aung San Suu Kyi was going to deliver speeches and 34 NLD workers were arrested in Bassein and elsewhere in the wake of her tour.

"They followed me everywhere with a rasping

cassette recorder playing battle tunes," Aung San Suu Kyi told the REVIEW in a telephone interview. "Myint Aung is not adhering to the army's pledge of neutrality in politics."

Resentment of the military government is said to be growing -- especially in the delta region -- and not only because of the recent campaign against the NLD. In order to earn badly needed foreign exchange, the rice-rich delta has been given top priority for paddy procurement. Initially, the government demanded 12-13 baskets an acre from the farmers at Kyats 1,600-2,000 (US \$253-317 at the official rate) per 100 baskets.

"But in order to secure an overall procurement target of 1.2 million tonnes of rice this year, Myint Aung has ordered his men to collect 22-25 baskets an acre in some areas, which means that the farmers there get just enough left to survive on, and nothing to sell in the free market, where the price is Kyats 4-5000," a Burmese source said.

Additional hardships are said to have been caused by recent fishing agreements between the military authorities and Thai companies, which followed a visit to Rangoon on 14 December last year by Thai army chief Gen. Chaovalit Yongchaiyut. Fishing rights along the entire Tenasserim coast have been sold to Thai interest, mainly the Atlantis Corp, and Mars & Co.

Local people in the Tavoy-Mergui region -- who for generations have depended on fishing for their survival -- have now been forbidden to fish there. Instead, they have had to move to the mouth of the Irrawaddy delta, where the region's many farmers often supplement their incomes by fishing as well.

"People are upset with the military authorities and the Thai companies," A Burmese source said. "The situation in the delta is becoming explosive and unrest may erupt if the problems there are not dealt with in a tactful manner."

"The Nation"  
February 10, 1989

#### SAW MAUNG: ELECTIONS IN BURMA THIS YEAR

Burma's military leader Gen Saw Maung was quoted yesterday as saying he hoped elections could be held eight or nine months after publication of an election law in March.

Western diplomats said it was the first time a Burmese official has given a rough timetable for a

poll since the army took over in September promising "free and fair" elections.

An official election commission has said 186 parties have registered, although many are expected to merge or disband before an election take place.

Many opposition figures and Western diplomats express doubt that elections will be held at all, saying harassment of parties trying to campaign has indicated even if they are held they may not be free

and fair.

Australia, like some other states in the Asia-Pacific region including Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore, has already established links with the military government.

The United States, Western European countries and Japan have boycotted the government and stopped all aid in reaction to the harshness of its crackdown on opposition.



*Kyi Moe being interviewed by Mr Peter Nettleship (BBC) and Miss Ann Marie Kooistra (Radio Netherlands International) in Taunggyi on 19 January.*  
NAB Photo

This photo caption is nearly cent per cent wrong . It doesn't show Kyi Moe but Sai Myo Win Htun. The bearded journalist interviewing him is Tony Hill of Radio Australia, not the BBC's Peter Nettleship. The only person they got right is Ann Marie Kooistra of Radio Netherlands.

Neither Kyi Moe nor Sai Myo Win Htun said what the Working People's Daily claims they did; they both expressed fear for their safety, insisted that they had not returned to Burma voluntarily- and thanked the journalists for coming and , literally speaking, saving their lives.

Journalists who participated in the in the government-organised and army mentioned press tour say that some of the answers they got from students

returnees seemed preprepared, as if they had been read out from written instructions. Only a few students dared tell the truth and challenge the official version of their home-coming.

One of these students secretly passes a written message into the hand of one of the foreign journalists. The message read: We do think that if we gave things as they really are , then just on the way home or afterwards we may be seized and beaten" .

THANK YOU VERY MUCH

We wish to thank all of you very much for your kind help:

"DAWN"  
P.O. Box 317  
Rajdamnern Post Office  
Bangkok 10200, Thailand