

U HLA PE'S
NARRATIVE OF THE JAPANESE OCCUPATION OF BURMA

Recorded by U Khin

Foreword by Hugh Tinker

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PREFACE

When World War II broke out, I was a junior civil servant working for the Government of (British) Burma. Britain was at war with Germany but the people of Burma were neither interested nor very much concerned about what was happening except for the shortage of consumer goods and the rising prices within the country. When the Japanese struck Pearl Harbour on December 7, 1941, it was a different matter. Britain and the United States of America had declared war on Japan. While the Burmese were still not interested in the war of the big powers of the world, it was coming closer to Burma where it might eventually be fought. The lightning speed with which the Japanese fought the war and the brilliant successes they were having in the Far East and beyond in the Pacific Ocean thoroughly convinced the Burmese that the war was indeed coming to Burma.

When the first few bombs dropped over Burma and the Japanese Army reached the borders of Burma there was chaos, disorder and utter confusion within the country. And the Burmese very justifiably lost all faith in the might of the British Empire. No one in Burma entertained any hope that the country could be saved.

The majority of the Indian, Anglo-Burmese, Anglo-Indian and the European population lost no time in leaving Burma by sea, by air and by land, while there was a mere handful of Burmese who decided to accompany the British and take a chance with them. I was one of the Burmese who took such a chance.

Very soon I was sent over to the United States of America to do political reporting and broadcasting for the British. While in America my services were also requested by the United States Government and I worked for the Americans in addition to my work with the British.

Because of my experience in the press and publicity work, I was made Press Officer to the Government of Burma upon my arrival back in Burma after the war. One day while I was busy with the gentlemen of the Burmese press, an old school friend dropped in to see me. He was U Hla Pei. He held the post of Director of Press and Publicity during the Japanese occupation of Burma.

Having just returned to Burma I was not only interested to hear all that had happened in Burma during my absence, but I also wanted to know how he handled the press during those difficult days. The following account is what he narrated. I took many notes myself and kept some of his, thinking that I would write a book one of these days when I had the time. Years rolled by and I considered that the material I had with me had become common knowledge and that it was not worth doing anything with it, but after re-reading the notes I found that some of the information was still unpublished. I decided to make it available as U Hla Pei had told it since he, as an aide to Dr. Ba Maw, the Adipadi (Head of State) had had a bird's-eye view of the entire administration during the Japanese occupation.

U Khin

Washington, D. C.
March 1958.

FOREWORD

The narrator of this story, U Hla Pe, held the post of Director of Press and Publicity under the Ba Maw Government from 1942-45. As such he was able to watch many of the public activities of the Adipadi and his lieutenants, although he was not privy to their confidential deliberations. After the war he related his experiences to U Khin, who himself had spent the war years far away from Burma, but who returned when the British-Burma Government moved back to Rangoon from Simla, to work as government Press Officer.

Given these circumstances, it would be unwise to regard this work as an historical document. Events may be seen differently through the spectrum of ten years of independence, and inevitably some significant details will have become blurred. One possible example of a failure of memory or a shift in interpretation occurs in Chapter V, "Preparations for a New Utopia," where it is circumstantially reported that Japanese policy inclined towards the restoration of a monarchy in Burma. According to other accounts related to the present writer, the suggestion for a monarchical form of government came exclusively from the Burmese members of the committee appointed to prepare a constitution. Dr. Ba Maw was known to regard himself as an appropriate candidate for the throne. However, these discussions are said to have been abruptly terminated by a summary directive from the Japanese High Command announcing that a Burmese monarchy would not be permitted, for there was only one monarch, the Emperor of Japan. Which version is true? It is to be hoped that eventually a study of the Japanese period will appear under the auspices of the Historical Commission, established by the Government of Burma in 1954. U Myo Min, Professor of English at the University of Rangoon, is responsible for the study. Perhaps it will resolve the many uncertainties of this time by the reproduction of contemporary documents. Meanwhile U Hla Pe's narrative assists towards filling some of the gaps in the record.

We already have two autobiographical accounts of the formation and subsequent working of the Ba Maw Government: Thakin Nu's Burma Under the Japanese, and U Tun Pe's Sun Over Burma. U Hla Pe's account is not so informative as these studies at the level of political decision, but it does tell us much more about the ordinary life of the ordinary Burman under the occupation. Hitherto, virtually the only account of economic conditions has been the admirable summary compiled by Professor J. Russell Andrus for a "Confidential" publication by the exiled Government of Burma, Burma During the Japanese Occupation (2 vols., Simla, 1943-44); copies of this report are scarce. Now, U Hla Pe relates in detail exactly what life was like--quotes prices of commodities, describes the perils of travel, accommodation problems, schooling, health--and many other everyday details. He also evokes most graphically the spirit of the Burmese people: volatile, never depressed for long, turning tragedy into farce, and making buffoons out of their ogreish conquerors. This was the spirit that kept alive a sense of national pride during a century of British rule, and today sustains hope and expectation after the devastating disappointments of the first twelve years of independence.

Editorial interference has been kept to a minimum. Some irrelevant passages have been excised, while occasionally a sentence has been expanded where the meaning seemed less than clear. The footnotes have been inserted when they were essential to an understanding of the narrative, or when a

statement was factually incorrect. There has been no editing of interpretation: the text throughout is that of U Khin, based upon the recollection of U Hla Pe.

Hugh Tinker

Ithaca, New York
July 1959

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CHAPTER I

THE COMING OF WAR

In the First Great War men of my generation were still children and they enjoyed it immensely. It was a grand show altogether for the people of Burma. Adventurous young men enlisted, fairs and festivals were organized for recruitment and for the collection of donations. Village headmen and officers of government vied with one another in recruiting men and collecting money, by fair means and foul, but the children enjoyed themselves at the fairs, when they took pot shots at the effigy of the Kaiser, not knowing that this form of aunt-sallying was a type of propaganda. The people, as a whole, prospered with the war boom. Paddy, teak, oil, tin, etc. were at a premium. It was a jolly good thing to watch a war from a distance and make profit! The Sphere, the Graphic, the Illustrated London News gave vivid photographs of warships, tanks and aeroplanes in action and men dying in the trenches. Then there were tales of the illusive [sic] Emden, which lost its glamour as soon as it was captured. But when the jolly war ended, a few hot headed young Burmese made the beginnings of the political struggle in Burma. Home Rule was what they wanted-- whatever that meant then--Boycott of Foreign Goods was the method of getting that Home Rule. The influence of Indian politics and political methods were spreading to Burma. Gandhi, Non-Violence and Non-Cooperation were the order of the day. Those men, who led the country then, are now retired moderates, probably looking on with some satisfaction at the progress of the work they had begun. Dyarchy came and the first real split in Burmese political unity took place and for the next decade or so, the political squabbles continued and much dirty linen was washed in public. All classes of people played at political dogs and cats, but there had emerged out of the ruins of the first mass movement, a tangible desire to rule ourselves. The details of the political struggle is of no importance now, but with the birth of the new constitution by the Government of Burma Act 1935, which gave further responsibilities with safeguards to the people, the young with all its energy of youth arose and made it clear to the world what it wanted. Many of the older politicians realised that Burma had reached a stage of political development, which would take her willy nilly along the path leading to freedom. The world setting of two armed groups, fighting each other for the freedom of the peoples of the world, provided the opportunity. The quarrels and discontent of the last part of the last decade left the country in despair. She was now face to face with realities. She had been drawn into the war. She was "in for it" whether she liked it or not. She had never seen a modern war. The people as a whole wondered vaguely what they were going to do. That was when they were not too excited with news of bombings, victories and defeats at the fighting fronts. We were all nerve strung--something big was about to happen. We knew what we wanted, but did not know what our leaders were going to do. We had no war leaders and we could not, at the time, know fully what was going on in political circles, for the arrests and subsequent prosecutions which ran riot in Burma since the years 1938-39 had driven the National Movement underground, and the general public therefore were not in the know.

There was something afoot I knew, for one of my cousins had disappeared and he had ostensibly gone to the Dutch Indies. Old friends who belonged to the Dobama Asiayone (the Thakin party) had I knew for some time deliberately engrossed themselves in such pastimes as races, gambling and pictures, in which they had taken such scanty interest before. There were comings and goings in

my native town somehow known to me. Quietly agents slipped in and out of the town several times. It is however not my purpose to give the history of the underground which worked in collaboration with the Japanese at that time. It is common knowledge now. The "Thirty Comrades" had gone to Japan and they were now waiting on the borders of Burma to come in together with the Japanese Forces for the liberation of their motherland. That was the first Japanese Radio broadcast at the time of the invasion. News was what we wanted and every radio in the town was tuned in to Radio Tokyo and Bangkok. Some of us were skeptical and were quite certain that the Japanese could not come to Burma so quickly. There was the Singapore Base, and assurances in the papers that the British were ready, fully equipped to smash the Japanese Forces. Air Marshal Brooke-Popham had clearly stated to that effect. But it was a new kind of war and we were in mortal dread of the bombing aeroplane. Those fears only heightened when news of the first bombing of Rangoon on December 23, 1941 reached us on the same night. Civilian casualties were high. The whole of the town buzzed with excitement when the radio announcement was heard, but as soon as special broadcasting was made by one officer of the Publicity Department to reassure the Burmese people, the town became almost panic stricken because the whole speech was one nervous farce--it was more unnerving than the actual news. At once, local officers ordered reduced lighting followed by the formation of Air Raid Precaution and Civil Defense Organisations.

Fortunately we had a local fire brigade which could be utilised at once for A.R.P. purposes. There was one fire engine belonging to the Municipality and many volunteers, but there were no warning sirens, available at hand. Rangoon could not spare any. For the time being at least, though the town was at the moment of no strategic importance, there was a mad search for a siren. It gave us no peace until one of my cousins hit upon the bright idea of using a steam siren in the middle of the town. He had an upright boiler which he used at one of his workshops. That was carried to the Fire Brigade headquarters and was kept steaming for the next three months--to be exact until the evacuation of Shwebo. It is unique in this respect that my home town was the only town in Burma with a steam siren. Soon the panic began to die out and we began to roast nuts at the boiler fire and tell ghost stories. One very cold night when there was not even a practice alarm, we sat around the boiler and read one of the first war stories that had reached us. Its origin was in Henzada. It was about Bo Aung San, the leader and hero of the student movement of 1936 and 1939. When Rangoon was bombed it seemed, Aung San, known in the B.I.A. as Bo Teza or "Fire General", piloted a plane. When the enemy planes were sighted, Tin Ngwe, a cinema actor known for his incredible stunts on the screen, took off with one of the fighters of the R.A.F. and intercepted it. When he had caught on to the tail of the bomber, Aung San waved the Burmese tri-color flag and commanded him to stop. But he was so overcome with grief and repentance that he at once resolved to fight for the liberation of Burma. Thereupon, driving level to the bomber, he climbed out of his cockpit and jumped over and went back to Japan, hanging on to the wing tip of Aung San's plane. This tale represents the trend of thought among the Burmese masses at the time. The Thirty Comrades were catching on to the imagination of the people. This state of mind developed as the British forces retreated to Upper Burma. The younger people became impatient, waiting for General Aung San to deliver Burma. They had heard stories that Burma would be an independent state as soon as the Japanese had liberated it--together with the Burmese Independence Army. With the fall of Rangoon and the rapid northwards retreat, we began to get more panicky and Shwebo became one of the main evacuation bases. Mandalay was heavily bombed. Trains were crowded to the roofs. On the first day Mandalay

was ~~bomb~~ed, the scare was so great that one woman, hysterical with fright, had come to Shwebo with all her property and realised half an hour after her arrival that she had left behind her two year old child on the platform at Mandalay. It was never known whether the child was found. Burma was beginning to get it. She must learn to take it. Deliverance or no deliverance Burma was the battlefield now. I remember a friend who, in the old days, was so disgusted with the local parliamentary politics and his own people that he said he wished disaster would overtake Burma so that she might regain her senses. Disaster was overtaking her all right. So went the war until it seemed necessary that Shwebo should be evacuated by the civilians. The Army Headquarters had moved into Shwebo.

What happened to us during those troublous days happened everywhere in Burma, with one army retreating and another over-running the length of the whole country. There is in our country a curious mob tradition. That when there is no ordered government, the people are at liberty to do what they like with other people's property or lives. When there is no lord and no master of the land--what does it matter if they rob, pillage, plunder, and steal? This lawlessness may have occurred repeatedly in Burma's numerous dynastic changes. There is a saying that "When a forest fire rages, the wild cat exults." So it is with lawless men, but we are not by nature lawless and that perhaps is the reason why we become so lawless when law and order cease to exist. Or is human nature so wicked that uneventful, humdrum and law-abiding lives make us suffer from repression? Not having witnessed the change of rulers in other parts of the world I will not suggest that as in Burma the same things could happen elsewhere. The forest fire was raging in the country and exultant wild cats were at large. It is during such periods that truth will out and human failings be exposed, for then people have to get together and live a life of give and take and living together as equals in crises is as difficult as living in solitary confinement.

When everyone's life is in danger, and when all the available food has to be shared, when the sick have to be tended, the dead buried, and when circumstances demand the subordination of self, men appear in their true colours. Such exposures occur with greater frequency when the persons who control such communities have to depend on the gratitude and goodwill of their followers. It convinces me that human goodness is only negative. It depends greatly upon the coercive authority which forces goodness upon man and therefore, only an indication of the degree of evil man can avoid. In other words, he is not his true self so long as he lives in organised society. Life during the interregnum was the nearest approach to primitive living under modern circumstances. It was too much to expect civilised behaviour from others in return for the law of the jungle. It must have been the same with other such evacuation camps in the country. In retrospect, we discover mistakes made in the heat of the moment and wish that we had not made them and are inclined to forget that decisions in war time have to be made on the spur of the moment; for there is always a way open for change later on. We had decided to get together and move out a few miles from the town for the days that might elapse before the Japanese entered it, leaving most of our personal belongings hidden in secret vaults. Relations, friends and dependents and strangers had all made up their minds to get together. This decision had very disastrous results and neither the people nor the government are free from responsibility for the mad and wanton destruction that followed the retreat from Shwebo.

A "Strictly Secret" instruction issued to officers of government, like most other secret instructions, leaked and we received the news that all government servants were to continue to administer the areas under their control until they could be handed over to the invading forces. That was evidently to prevent disorder. Home Guards and Civil Defence units were to be formed. There were, among the people, many who were willing to co-operate till the very last, in order that life and property may be secured for the interregnum. Lack of the trust between the Government and the public, left the town to a fate which could have been averted. The most influential men in Shwebo were not trusted and the men who might have "stayed put" to look after the town and its people were forced out. It has happened again and again in Burma that the right people are never given the requisite number of firearms to protect themselves. They are generally harassed by the police, while bad hats and deserters are allowed to carry on profitable gun running and to rob people at will. The arms at the police station, which might have been used for the protection of the town, were taken away under the mistaken notion that they might be used against the retreating British, while train loads of tommy guns, brens and rifles complete with ammunition were left behind for the thugs who were, of course, the first to get hold of them. Law-abiding people had to trust to luck and leave the rest to the devil. A curious thing however happened. Officers of government who were to have looked after the people sought their own protection. Temporary huts were built in the compound of a rice mill some six miles north. The railway line was chosen, because it was the line of retreat and dacoit gangs were not expected to venture so close to military operations. Each hut accommodated about 80 to 100 persons and living space had to be provided for about 3000 people. The rice mill generating plant was used for lighting, while the water tanks around the mill formed natural moats protecting the camp area. Necessary arms for protection had to be obtained by dubious methods. That was risky but was the only course open. Water was a difficulty and had to be bought and supplied to all and sundry. Men slept out in the open or kept guard at strategic points. Despite the supply of water, rations, sleeping space and electric lights, men and women squabbled--dissatisfied with the lot provided, flouted "authority," and refused even to clean up their own diggings and latrines. I somehow began to assume charge of duties as headman and factotum. Even close relatives began to grumble. The women cried at what they considered to be injustices, because one had to be strict with all; especially on questions of health. The latrines and water supply were the really two thorny problems. While a whole army was withdrawing to India, here a mere three thousand quarreled among themselves. There were government officers' wives and relatives who said that they could not use improvised latrines. They wanted commodes, they said, and they wanted them next to where they slept and ate. Only rudeness prevented them having their own way and I began to get unpopular with people who had been my friends, but who could not be reasonable even for a short period. Then cholera broke out.

We had made it compulsory for everyone coming into the camp to be inoculated against cholera. Anti-cholera serum was scarce, and the two doctors-in-charge of the dispensary were in despair. Lives had to be saved. There was no visible form of government and so under the very noses of the military, serum had to be stolen, or stolen serum bought from the base hospital staff at high prices. Many refused to take the injections, through a belief that injections instead of preventing disease infected the person fatally. Inoculations sometimes had to be forced on people at the point of the revolver. Cases of cholera were concealed and people refused to be segregated, and again

a loaded revolver came in handy. It spoke an eloquent language. We were accused of poisoning the women and children because we went round and put chloride of lime in the drinking water. No one would touch cholera patients. Fabulous sums had to be paid for burial not by the relatives of the dead, but by the host. It had to be done and we did not relish the thought of having a rotting corpse in our midst. We had taken on too much. Daily duties consisted of issuing rations, preventing people from using drinking water for bathings, sterilising water, washing latrines, nursing patients, burying corpses, evensdigging graves and keeping watch at night. Liquor kept some of us going, but there were others dropping off from over-dosess. The sleepless night and the unpopularity were worth it. Cholera was under control after seven deaths. Meanwhile British tank units and retreating Chinese put the fright into the camp, and within half an hour we left for the second camp which had been built three miles to the east, off the railway line. It was a lucky move; for the next day there were explosions all around and the old camp was no more.

That night can never be forgotten. Fires raging around accompanied by deafening explosionss. None of us knew anything about artillery in modern warfare. We had ruled out the idea of any rear guard artillery action. Were we mistaken? Many urged that we should spend a night in the forest nearby. Immediate decision was demanded. People began to pack again. Strange it was that the people, who formerly administered law and order, were the most scared of the lot. The ignorant were vaguely frightened. The learned formed theories. None of the theories was right, for at last the practical suggestion, that scouts should go and look around, was accepted and a couple of hours before dawn we learnt that the raging inferno of the night was the work of the demolition squad. With that the last vestige of the retreating army had gone. No Japanese came to deliver us. No Burmese Independence Army came. For nearly a week nothing happened. The air was empty and we felt a little hollow in our stomachs.

Everywhere in this country of ours which was cut off from the rest of the civilised world, there was murder, looting, useless destruction, disorder--complete chaos, where an ordered government could have saved much, if it had had the guts and the intention of saving much in this beautiful land. It is not necessary to go into details of that 1942 tragedy. The Helpless, ignorant, untutored, totally unaccustomed to modern warfare, the masses passed through a hell and realised that it is not government and the British Raj and civilisation which gave all the nice things on earth to the Burmese peoples.

When our deliverers came, news reached us of Dobama Nippon Biruma Banzai. There was apparently a formula for the deliverance of Burma. The first thing the soldier said was "Dobama" with a fascist salute of the closed fist type. Then a "Nippon-Biruma Banzai," after which the recipient of the greeting is stripped of his slippers and whatever knick-knacks he has on his person. And, of course, a slap on the face if he resists; for the Japanese only slap men they love. Face slapping is done out of love. Otherwise they kick. And atrocities are committed by Manchurians only. There was not a single Manchu in the whole Army, but the tale gradually gained credence because to the Burmese mind then, the Japanese could do no wrong. Many of the townspeople went back to town to welcome them. Fortunately for me, I was not among the number, for I followed the old Burmese saying: "Meet not and fraternize with the Vanguard of an Invading Army nor pay premature homage to conquerors."

One rich Burmese lady was so enthusiastic in her welcome of the Japanese that she prepared, at considerable cost, a dinner to feed at least hundred soldiers and officers, with her best plates, spoons and forks. She did not know that the Japanese use chopsticks. It was very kind of her indeed. In fact it was a jolly dinner. Overflowing with gratitude the Officer in charge gave her a certificate, which she could not understand and the soldiers with a usual "arigato" (thank you) and, of course, "Dobama" left her, taking away everything that she had put out in a flood of hospitality. And ingratitude more strong than soldier's arms, kept her in seclusion for quite a while. The Burmese hooligans took up where the Chinese left off and made a thorough job of burning the town. If daylight looting was not satisfactory, houses which had escaped the fire were burnt to provide light and the Japanese looked on. Villagers came in thousands with hundreds of carts. It was a big lesson. Meanwhile the camp had shifted to a third place where it remained for about 25 days. Refugees had, by now, learnt to be a little more amenable to discipline and with the usual Burmese optimism made the best of a bad job. We were not at all badly off. The village was at least six miles from where the Japanese camped. It was convenient to have one-third of the population living with you, for daily markets sprung up wherever we went. There were butchers, poultry breeders, vegetable hawkers, carpenters, shopkeepers with us. What they sold was later supplemented by a new class of people from the neighbouring villages. They were the looter sellers, specialising in British Army stores and arms and ammunition. Thugs living in wretched hamlets, lounging on sofas, drinking rum on draught, with barrels on dressing tables; several gramophones and radios mingled with tins of Maxim cheese, Lockheed brake oil; Lea and Perrins sauce rolled over 303 cartridges and bedposts protruded through the thatch roofs. In the cacophony of cackling cocks and hens, wailing phonograph music and human abuse, rifle fire crackled. Excursions to these villages to buy one's needs, was in itself an adventure. Village yokels lost their hands and sometimes part of their faces, playing about with "Iron Pineapple" and "Wooden Bottle" as the British and Chinese hand grenades were called. Bullock carts were lubricated with an entirely new kind of lubricant--cheese, for the villagers did not like the smell of cheese. Hydraulic brake oil looked so fine that people used it for cooking with dire consequences. Cocoa was thrown away because it was too bitter, but the tins which were attractive in appearance were retained. Servants ran away, after either cheating or insulting their masters. Villagers were so "flush" that it was hard to get labour. To hell with the bosses they said. No more sweating! No more working! They were at liberty to drink, drink and drink again from morn till night and night till dawn.

CHAPTER II

THE INTERREGNUM

Like the thousands of other people in the camp, I had lost everything in the process of 'Liberation'. I was "freed" of all my property except two pairs of shorts and a few shirts and cooking utensils. The next problem was how to get back to what was left of the town. Tales of the friendly manner with which our 'Liberators' had "freed" the people from being encumbered with their personal belongings and self respect, reached the camp and it was found impossible to return home, unless preliminary arrangements could be made to escort and to house one-third of Shwebo's population in the glorious waste of rubble, ruins and Japanese soldiery. The Burmese Independence Army had passed through the area west of Shwebo and a detachment had been placed at Hseikkun-- a village seven miles west. With a friend I set out, fully armed with cigarettes, salt and dried peas, scantily dressed with undervests and longyis only, striking our way through unused by-paths to avoid the marauding troops at large and finally reached the town. The only people were some of the workers who had been sent ahead the day before to prepare a habitable abode for us. I found with chagrin that the looters had made a thorough job of our secret vault. The whole town had been stripped bare. In and around us lay the charred remains, with Japanese at odd corners stalking tame pigeons with their rifles, killing about one in a thousand shots. When they bagged their game, the return naturally was insufficient, but His Imperial Majesty the Emperor's ammunition provided good sport.

Dodging our way through bullets that sang through the acrid smell of burning rubble, we saw with surprise that some of the buildings in the south-eastern quarter still remained and there were some school buildings and monasteries which could be utilized with the consent of the presiding monks. It was soon realised that it was necessary for the elders to constitute some sort of governing body to preserve the peace with the help of the Burmese Independence Army. The Japanese had no proper system with which to maintain law and order. Arrangements were made and the B.I.A. detachment shifted from their first camp into Shwebo.

When the B.I.A. came in there were signs of general coolness and even hostility between the Japanese and the Revolutionary forces which had fought side by side in the Burma Campaign. Co-ordination there was almost none. Then one day a Burmese Army Leader came back from Bhamo. The plan had been for the Burmese to seize political power and form a provisional government with its district branches operating similarly, while the B.I.A. forces helped to maintain law and order with the help of the people. He was far from satisfied with events and as present problems were too confused and complicated, I did not press him with too many questions. In the later stages of the Burma Campaign, there had been clashes between the Burmese and Japanese wherever the Burmese Forces were weak. Instructions for the Shwebo District had gone astray and by the time action was taken some irresponsible people in the name of the B.I.A. had committed excesses which no civilised person could countenance. Something had gone wrong in Sagaing; and Shwebo it seemed was also to be taught a lesson. It did not seem that we were going to get what we wanted. Dreams were fast fading away. Conditions in the interior had improved with the advance of a B.I.A. detachment, which effectively, though

ruthlessly, liquidated criminals. The salutary effect of this, too, was fading out.

Shwebo is not only the place where the last Burmese Dynasty was founded but it also is the most criminal district in the whole of Burma, contributing a solid percentage of Burma's crime and is a close second to Chicago. What I saw then was that, unless something was done and that quickly, organised robbery would break out again. Hitherto the firearms used by robbers were muzzle-loading museum pieces, but now they had inexhaustible supplies of British and Chinese rifles and hundreds of Bren guns which they were soon able to handle. And in a short time, wearied with thinking of what was going to happen to the country, I made up my mind to find out things for myself. The Recruiting centre of the Burmese Army and the small committee had but a fortnight's existence; for a new committee had been set up by the Japanese Military Police.

The might and main of the Japanese Empire was personified in an all-powerful and swashbuckling five foot one of a Sergeant Major, Kempetai--the Gendarmerie of His Imperial Majesty, the Tenno Heika. This petty officer's diverse manifestations of zeal and patriotism were colourful indeed! As a perfect Military Police Officer, that is, a Japanese Gestapo agent, he is unrivalled. His short lived despotism in some of the towns of Burma consisted of such achievements as: Collecting Eurasian women, and, for the safety and security of the Japanese Empire, keeping them under house arrest so that he could come and go at will and insult or outrage them at leisure. Shooting young Burmese for their show of partiality to Burma's cause. Killing an innocent villager, who used a Japanese telephone wire as a clothesline. Not far away from this temporary little Kingdom of Terror at Sagaing, there awaited for further orders from their commanders, thousands of young Burmese, carried along in that surge of patriotism and desire for freedom, which swept the country off its feet. The Burmese Independence Army had its headquarters at Amarapura, marking time for the return of its levies. They were returning in dribs and drabs, a heterogeneous collection, ranging from the flower of the youth of Burma, from the best families in the land to the scum of the criminal world; and pickpockets and thieves rubbed shoulders with University men. The collection had started in Lower Tenasserim and had fought its way right up to Myitkyina, its arms consisted of all types of weapons, sticks and stones, kitchen knives and spears, rifles--ancient and modern, double barreled shotguns and revolvers; in fact, everything they could lay their hands on. The majority had joined the army without any prospects for the future and simply because their country needed them, but there were also others who had joined for the usual prospects of loot and plunder. Some of them had in their ignorance tried to administer areas which they had overrun and were sorely disappointed with the scant response or hostility from the local inhabitants. It was not the way to treat conquerors they complained. A queer word that, "Conquerors", when applied to one's own country. In conquering it, they had lost it. To many memories of this Burma Independence Army are only associated with the atrocities committed by the criminally minded section in those earlier days of disorder. These many belong to that class of society who with their one track mind and an inordinate love of security and of their own selfish little selves did not care whether the world went to the Devil and Burma along with it. They were the people who expected the flotsam and jetsam of the Burmese Independence Army to behave in the best drawing room manner. They and the criminal element of the B.I.A. were responsible for all the evils associated with that period. Neither side were willing to see the other's point of view, but wherever the elders took matters in hand and rendered sound advice and help for the interim

administration, the B.I.A. responded and vice versa the restoration of law and order was the quickest.

Of the B.I.A. which certainly contained a good percentage of rascally rogues, there is another side which the people seem to have forgotten. Men, some of them mere boys, unshaved and with unkempt hair, forcing their way behind the war, clothed in rigouts of a thousand varieties--they could hardly be called uniforms, pale and emaciated, sick with disease, having played their parts in the National Rising, were resting in squalid houses, bathing and drinking the muddy waters of the Irrawaddy and eating daily a dreary diet of stale vegetables, stale rice and fresh flies. They were magnificent in their raggedness and suffering. Hundreds were blinded or crippled for life, thousands were yellow with fever. Medical equipment even if it could be had was insufficient. Totally lacking in training and in experience, with the exception of hard months of marching and fighting, this army presented an amazing picture of noise and bustle, patriotism and pride, and inexperienced and inefficiency. The only uniform quality about it was its love of the Motherland and its hero-worship of its leaders. The leaders surprisingly were hard task-masters. The penalty for misdemeanour against one's own country and people was death. Bullets could not be wasted, they said. Deserters and rogues deserved only the bayonet and the bayonet was given freely and without mercy. In spite of all this, there were deserters who formed little regimes for themselves, plundering the people and committing all sorts of atrocities and giving themselves grandiose names and titles. But who could forget those youngsters, barely in their teens, speaking proudly and wisely of their sufferings, those one-legged, one-eyed, and doubled-up figures, without a pie in their pockets. A few of them received compensation from their leaders, but the leaders did not have enough money to go round. Others were forgotten. Meanwhile the Japanese were arresting members of the B.I.A., good and bad, and were disarming them, with that lack of tact and efficiency so characteristic of the Japanese Army in matters such as these. They had promised arms, ammunition, stores and other equipment, they also promised a new heaven on a new earth. They were now not even bothered about what happened to those who were crippled in so gallantly answering the call to arms. Some people continued complaining about this unmannerly army of a New Burma. Revolutions which conform to rules of etiquette are not revolutions.

Rangoon was still far off. In the old days when one felt like going down to Rangoon, all that one had to do was to get out one's old bus, pack a towel and a tooth brush and there you were in Rangoon. Preparations for that journey in the new days was a much more complicated affair. Endless enquiries about the bridges and Japanese checking stations, making special notes of the idiosyncracies of certain sentries at certain points and the procuring of permits to travel, a sort of passport as it were in one's self-same country, and a "liberated" country at that, constituted the first trying, though not the most trying part of the journey. One had to be very circumspect about questions on the road and rail conditions for fear of being arrested on suspicion of espionage. "You SPY!" were dreaded words. Travelling permits and protection cards were believed to ensure an 'anti-assault' and 'anti-commandeering' of property remedy for all and sundry. When these preliminaries are ended there is still the all important question of petrol supply. Wherever possible the Burmese had been 'freed' of the burden of selling or possessing petrol licensed or unlicensed--this perhaps was a sign that in the near future this precious juice would be kept strictly on a Co-prosperity basis.

I did not understand how the ticket system worked. Since every one going down to Rangoon swore to its efficacy, I spent a hot afternoon amidst the ruins of Mandalay to look for what was probably a goodwill mission run by Japanese Buddhist priests. A certificate was issued by a monk in an officer's uniform, who said that he was a Buddhist monk. The Burmese concept of a monk was a monk with yellow robes, beads, shaven head--a person who tried to get away from the world. What I saw was a soldier who said he was a fighting monk, who at home used his beads and robes, and the sword at the fighting front. I began to suspect whether this was not all a big hoax. No one has ever heard of crusading Buddhists. This was evidently not a religious war. Anyway the certificate was already in my hands and its efficacy was proved on the way to Rangoon. We were not allowed to pass the bigger bridges of the main road until a high ranking Burmese Army officer explained the purpose of our journey. The British had made a thorough job of the destruction of bridges and by the way one word about bridge-building a la japonica. They are about the fastest bridge builders I have seen, heard or read about. The famous Swa bridge which spans a fast moving stream was built in a couple of days and there are no people in the world to build bridges as cheaply as the Japanese because free labour cost nothing. There is only one minor flaw in their bridge building--their bridges last as long as they take to build. But in Burma labour is cheap, and wood plentiful and there was a story of Japanese bridge building, economy and discipline. It was invented and circulated secretly among government servants and journalists. It seemed that one fine day the Ava Bridge was repaired within an extraordinarily short time. It was a good piece of work but the Japanese officer in charge had committed hara kirid Nobody knew the real reason but soon the full facts were discovered. The officer submitted the repair bill of two spans of the Ava Bridge as follows:

Materials	free
Labour	<u>Rs 10/-</u>
Total expenditure	Rs 10/-

The bill went through the Army Headquarters and back from Japan came the Imperial Government's remarks--"Too expensive--labour should have been free." Hence the hara kiri.

At Meiktila, 92 miles down southwest of Mandalay, one-third of our party was arrested. There was a wild search in the darkness, because we had heard upon arrival that they did what they liked in this town, that sentries had to be saluted and everybody had to have identification cards. Meiktila was the conqueror's pride. Everyone had to lift his hat or his turban. There is nothing in the Burmese dress which comes off as easily as the turban and nothing as difficult to restore to its exalted position without the use of both hands, eyes, a mirror and a hairpin for the finishing touches. Males generally did not carry mirrors and hairpins in their pockets and downing the turban of elusive silk is a complicated affair so they either risked a face slapping, arrest or the indignity of being found trying to dress in public. Burma of all countries was being taught to be polite. To come back to the point, the search party also did not turn up and the late dinner was waiting. Meanwhile our kind host, a Minister of the U Saw Government in 1941-42, who had been to Japan and had hitherto spoken of the Japanese people in such glowing terms, told us wistfully, I thought, that to go through Meiktila it was necessary to carry identification certificates. This certificate business was getting beyond me, for to accept it meant getting a certificate from every local authority. We went on with the leading car protecting us with its Burmese Flag, to stop at

Pyinmana for some days--a feat of Japanese engineering south of Toungoo having broken down. Then we got to Rangoon in typical monsoon weather. It was in complete darkness four months after its capitulation.

The first thing one noticed about Rangoon was the numerous bazaars. Everywhere pile upon pile of all range of goods from hairpins to Lister engines. Crockery, furniture, radio parts--all stolen property; and, before we had time to find out about Burma's future, we visited friends and exchanged accounts of experience of the last six months. The Burmese generally have suitable words for any and everything. The new bazaars were named after the notorious Burmese thief Nga Tet Pya. Hundreds of Nga Tet Pya bazaars catered to the public who had lost everything and were setting up new homes. There is an amusing story of Lady Tha, the widow of the late Sir Po Tha. She went out shopping one day, and was thoughtfully handling what appeared to be pieces of her own crockery when the shopkeeper told her she could be assured of the quality because he specialised only in properties belonging to the Tha Family. It was taken in very good humour. From these diversions we came back to realities. None of my friends appeared very happy about it. No Independence--No Burmese Army--the B.I.A. was being disarmed, but there was a Burmese Government with a Prime Minister, but it was under the Japanese Military Administration. Was it Democracy, Socialistic or Fascist or was it oligarchy?

Hopes were dashed to the ground when news spread that the Burmese Independence Army was disarmed. The army was a ragged lot but it was our very own, collected at random and built up nevertheless despite heart breaking disappointments and losses. However fleeting, it had given hopeful and romantic flavour to the imagination of a people whose tradition and folklore abound in cryptic prophecies, called 'tabaungs' in Burmese. 'Tabaungs' are prophetic utterances in verse, which can only be composed or interpreted by sages. The 'tabaungs' are believed by a considerable portion of the people in the country. Believers of the 'tabaung' have given instances wherein 'tabaung' foretold the future as for instance in the case of King Thibaw before his accession to the Burmese Throne; there was a prophecy which foretold his fall. The Burmese Independence Army exploited the Burmese belief in the 'tabaung' by utilising one old 'tabaung' which embodied a prophecy of the British being driven out of Burma in the near future. This 'tabaung' is said to be about 200 years old and its publication had been banned by the Burma Government before 1942. It runs roughly as follows:-

"And on the lake a Brahminy duck alights
When with a bow a hunter bold, he killed it;
The umbrella rod laid low the hunter bold
But the rod by Thunderbolt was struck.

This 'tabaung' covers the history of Burma from the fall of Burma up to the present day. Ava fell at the hands of the Talaings or Mons who in turn fell to the New Dynasty of Alaungpaya founded at Moksoboq i.e., Modern Shwebo. The Alaungpaya Dynasty was displaced by the British under Queen Victoria. The British were the rulers now and the last line of the 'tabaung' translated above is a further prophecy that the British would be replaced by another ruler. It is first necessary to understand the special usage of some of the words in ^{the} 'tabaung'. Lake or Fishery in Burma is 'In' which is also the first syllable of the word 'In Wa' or Ava. Thus the lake in the 'tabaung' represents the Ava Dynasty, which according to history was conquered by the Talaings or Mons and the Brahminy Duck (Hinthu) of the first line was a symbol

of the Talaings and therefore represented the Talaings. Thus as proved in history the Lake (Ava Dynasty) came under the Brahminy Duck (the Talaings). Then in the second line 'hunter' in Burmese is 'Mokso', which is said to devote Moksobo, the birth place of Alaungpaya, who according to history overcame the 'Talaing'. Thus the Mokso or hunter had been used for the Alaungpaya who killed the Brahminy Duck (i.e. Talaings). And so the Umbrella was said to be used to denote the ruling house in Great Britain. So the 'Umbrella' struck the Mokso (the Alaungpaya Dynasty). Then the last line. The 'Umbrella' is to be smashed by 'Thunderbolt' for which the Burmese word is 'Mojo'. Just as in the other lines of the stanza somebody was expected to displace the ruling house, but what the word 'Mojo' was intended to mean nobody knew. It was this word which the Burmese Independence Army exploited. They had given the Japanese Commander of the Burmese Independence Army the name of 'Bo Mojo' in place of his real name, Colonel Suzuki. The belief was that the last line of the prophecy would be fulfilled by the person Mojo, who it was believed was not a Japanese but a descendant of the Myingun Prince who had been exiled during the time of King Mindon. To a few old men who had lived in the Burmese Court of the reign of Thibaw this brought fresh hopes to their old hearts.

This stroke of propaganda had brought to the army a great measure of its popularity. The lugubrious rustics and market vendors alike noted for their gossip-mongering, in a land where the newspaper circulation is infinitesimal, were thrilled with the story of a possible restoration and the invulnerability of the Thirty Comrades. Bo Yan Naing, it had been believed by thousands could shoot the contents of a Tommy gun magazine into his mouth and spit out the bullets in all their entirety. There was also the story that Bo Setkya (Colonel Aung Than) with a mere move of his arm could neutralise all enemy gunfire. These incredible yarns had stirred the imagination of the spirited boys and enthusiastic maidens. Now that the Army was about to disappear into thin air these young people did not hide their disappointment. But shortly after, characteristically and with true philosophy, the Burmese said 'Well it is the beginning--let us wait' and also with true Burmese humour began the telling of the old story of the novice who lived in a monastery. Finding the presiding monk a very hard taskmaster he prayed and prayed for the monk's demise. He was getting tired of getting a knock on the head every time he committed some trivial wrong. It so happened that this prayer was answered and a new presiding monk came along, but soon the joy and enthusiasm of the novice gave way to disappointment for the second presiding monk gave, not one knock but two hard knocks for every wrong committed. And for ever and ever afterwards the novice became a sadder and a wiser young man. The inevitable had been accepted but it was not in the nature of things for the nation to remain quiet. Patience was needed and patience brought forth a new army. Aung San and his thirty comrades despaired and worked themselves to a standstill. Dr. Ba Maw, now the Leader of the Burmese, fought tooth and nail with the Japanese High Command. From endless arguments, bickerings, threats and compromises the New Burma Defence Army was born. The fog was beginning to clear and there was still a fighting chance for the country and the people, Government servants and public alike plunged into the task of shaping Burma's destiny against the odds.

Meanwhile, a Government had also been formed and the clock went back fifty years. I did not like the photograph I saw in the papers of Lieutenant-General Iida standing on one side, Burmese leaders on the other, apparently approaching the Commander-in-Chief of the Japanese Forces in Burma, receiving their letters of appointment. The Sovereignty of the New Order Government did not emanate from the people. The Preparatory Committee for the framing of a system of

Government that was to take the affairs of the state into its hand was appointed in Maymyo. The following is a gist of the origin of the Preparatory Committee. When the Japanese overran Burma they contacted Dr. Ba Maw in the Shan States and brought him into Mandalay and thence to Maymyo. For his personal safety and security (these terms will occur very often in these pages) two petty officers of the Japanese Gendarmerie were attached to him. He had been approached by Lieutenant-General Iida through staff officer Colonel Nasu (later Major General) to form a committee for the restoration of the civil Administration in Burma. Other leaders in the country were invited to Maymyo. Three days before the meeting, leaders of the Thakin party and the B.I.A. who had informed Dr. Ba Maw in writing that they accepted his leadership of the Burmese People, were told by their newly accepted leader that he had a scheme and that a committee was to be formed. What the scheme was, was not given out to the other leaders, until later when they learned that it was to form a Committee with Dr. Ba Maw as the central figure. It was, after all, the desire of the Japanese Army to appoint a Committee under its control. That was how it came into being after the rejection of a counter proposal by the former United Party Leader that the Legislature of 1937 should be revived, in order that a legal severance with Great Britain should be made possible: U Ba Pe, the old veteran, is a man who believes in constitutionalism and he refused to cooperate on the terms given, but the excuse he gave was that he was suffering from gout, he was getting old; and he was returning home. Independence had gone off the face of the earth, but it was the best thing available for the moment and provided some sort of plank on which to stand to negotiate and discuss with the conqueror. Polemics cannot pull a job through when guns and bayonets form a solid phalanx of argument on the other side. The fog had cleared. The problem of Burma was no longer neither ^{here} nor there. Clear as crystal it stood. It was like climbing a mountain. Just as you expect to get to the top at the only obviously last ascent, you find a stiffer climb ahead with no prospect of every reaching the peak. To realise that predicament was a comfortless thought.

CHAPTER III

A NEW ORDER

I had come. I had found out. And I was going back to continue my legal practice or to find out if there were opportunities to trade. It was Cecil Roberts who said that a man's honesty depends on his income. When he has sufficient money to buy whatever he wants, he is more moral than his unfortunate brother who out of sheer necessity is forced to steal. This advice is sound because it is practical. I was not very ambitious, but what I wanted was a fair amount of comfort, a fair amount of food, a fair amount of liquor and cigarettes, a fair amount of leisure, and a kick out of life. I accordingly went back to Shwebo with a friend who was hard up as I was. Information reached me through diverse sources that I was wanted at Rangoon to fill a post in the new government that had been formed. I did not know what sort of kick I was going to get out of it after all, but it gave me a chance to be in the outer fringes of the inside ring to see things for myself and to help the Government in restoring Burma to whatever prestige she had lost. It was only then I began to feel that, unless the Burmese got together in the process, it was not going to be a howling success. The rest of my fellows were in the same frame of mind. This face saving device known as the Burmese Government to the Burmese people was thus begun. To the Japanese, it was merely a central administrative organ or an executive commission, whatever that meant in Japanese terminology. In actual practice it was only one branch of the Military Administration which acted as the Civil Administration of the country, and Dr. Ba Maw was made the head of that Department. In Burmese the word wungyi-gyok was used to mean Chief Minister, but the Japanese term was Chō-kān (Chief of Department) and he was clearly not a Dai-jin (Minister). The rest of the ministers were secretaries to the Chōkāni and therefore did not have direct access to the C-in-C except socially. There was also a Japanese side of the Josefu as the Burmese Government was known, headed by a civilian Japanese who had been a Prefectural Governor in Japan and a whole string of "counsellors" spread out in all departments of government. Whatever was meant or said by the Japanese the Burmese officials were determined to work out a plan which provided for a Government much on the same lines as the pre-war government. The old Legislature had died an unnatural death and by a strange irony of fate the building itself was destroyed by British bombing a few months later, commemorating as it were, the beginning of the end of parliamentary Government in Burma on the British model. The new Burma Defence Army was on its own under the Imperial Army command. The country was in grave danger and for the first time in many years, political differences and the usual hostility between the public and the administrative services, were laid aside and forgotten. There was work to be done and the response by the workers was very satisfactory on the whole. There were, however, in Burma as elsewhere opportunists who sought the favour of the conquerors.

When revolutions take place and the revolutionaries come into power to set up a new government, the inclination to look down upon the permanent services is very strong. Supporters' interests have to be safeguarded leading to appointments of fresh men to fresh places; but on the other hand since the administrative machinery cannot be set up without the services of the old bureaucracy, a compromise has to be effected. To effect such a compromise between the two elements is one of the most difficult tasks to achieve. When a compromise has to be effected, the efficiency of the machinery of government

is necessarily retarded; the new element that had come into the Burmese Administration began their work by ridiculing the red tape system of the old regime.

"The Government was no longer a vote catching organisation--it would work because it was not going to waste its time with party intrigues--it was to be a One Party System, without a Legislature." The slogan was: Ta-thway, ta-than, ta-meint, "One Blood, One Voice, One Command." That was the new ideology. The attempt was to create an authoritarian government. The objectives were:

- (1) reconstruction, that is a creation of a New Order in Burma
- (2) the establishment of a free and strong independent Burma defending the western gates of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere.

The hackneyed phrase "God helps those who help themselves" forced its way into Burmese minds. We were neither waiting for God nor for the Japanese. From ruins and ashes was born a new will to work, a readiness to try all methods to achieve freedom. The first stage to that freedom was outlined in the plan of the New Order Government. A modern war it was said should be fought on all fronts, and that united Burma with a Four Army Plan was to fight for Japan, who had now begun to reiterate her promises of 1941-42, with definite assurances that Burma's Independence would be recognized in the near future, when Burma became a strong and stable partner in the New Economy and Order in the East. The Four Armies were:

- (1) the Army of Blood, in Burmese Thway-tat
- (2) the Army of Sweat, in Burmese Chway-tat that is the Army of Labor which sweated for the country
- (3) the Army of Wah, in Burmese Wah-tat, that is the Army of National Service
- (4) the Army of the Asiayone, that is the single Political Party in the country.

In these early days of the beginning of the Four Armies of Burma, the first task of Government was a mad scramble for office furniture which had miraculously escaped from the looters. In my particular case, I was rewarded after much argument and sweating with a magnificent collection of one good desk (formerly of the Agriculture Department), one dining table--the Lord knows how it had got to the Secretariat--two chairs with seven legs between them and a couple of empty soap boxes. The stationery was my own. Those who had been with the Preparatory Committee had arrived early and taken more than their actual needs. It was the most unofficial looking office that I had seen in my life. New furniture needed money, and the methods employed in obtaining it would have gladdened the heart of a Shylock. Most of the treasuries in the country had lost their treasures or had been expended for the maintenance of the Burmese Independence Army & the local force Peace Preservation Committees. Some money had been handed over to the government when it took over from these interim administrative bodies which had done some work in the restoration of law and order. Here was a government with no money worth its name. Japanese money--a misnomer-- was obtainable, it was said, from the Yokohama Specie Bank, which temporarily became the Central and Issuing Bank. Loans had to be taken at six per cent per annum. This "face saving" was proving an expensive proposition. Not that it was not known to

those in authority, but there were no other alternatives and the best course was to grin and bear it. It amazes me now that this new-born government functioned at all.

The response from former government servants and the people was equally splendid. The much despised bureaucrat now began to work with a zeal and earnestness hitherto unknown. The Government servant was working for something now--the people were backing him up more than they ever used to--his work was not merely a respectable and profitable career--he honestly believed that he was working for his Motherland. He saw with a much clearer view than most of his countrymen that the task ahead was Herculean, but the knowledge was no deterrent. It only spurred him on to greater efforts. On the other hand the new recruits though ignorant with the ways of bureaucracy were enthusiastic and eager to learn. It was a bad start but there was behind us a will to work if it was for the good of Burma. And so began a series of social events --meetings between Burmese and Japanese officials which were boring to the extreme. There was much hand-shaking, bowing and speechifying. Unctuous politeness of Japanese officialdom was exchanged for Burmese affability. There was one custom of the Japanese which far surpassed the British "After Dinner Speech." It is the "Before Dinner Speech." Speaking after dinner is not an easy or a comfortable task for there is likelihood of the speech being influenced by food. A good dinner lingers on in the man and may find him in a dreamy mood of satisfaction while a bad dinner may also linger on with a bad reminiscent effect. And an indifferent one may create a void in the mind. Every man has a right not to be tortured with a long speech when he knows that after the long speech there are no compensations except bed and sleep, and the longer the speech the more pressing are these elemental needs, and by the time the end is reached, the listener has lost so much control of himself that sleep for the night becomes an impossibility. On the other hand there is little or no difference whether the speech before dinner is long or short, interesting or dull, for there is always the dinner waiting at the end. If at the end of the speech the dinner is found to be bad then the listener should have been discreet enough to have stayed away. That however is by the way. These social gatherings did not however extend beyond official purposes. They did not create any real friendships.

The Japanese began to get interested in the national slogan of the moment. "One Blood, One Voice, One Command." One Blood meant national unity of Kingship of the various tribes of the Burmese. In recent years the ugly head of dissension among the Burmese people had arisen. There had never been anything resembling a communal clash between the Burmese Proper and the Karens, but now in the Delta area, particularly in Myaungmya District, clashes between the Karens, many of them belonging to the British controlled regiments of Karen soldiers, and the Burmese Independence Army and the Japanese occurred.

The incidents that led to the trouble were few and insignificant, but they led to greater trouble when each community in turn started taking reprisals. It was just as undesirable to the Karens as it was to the Burmese for both peoples were living in the same land with the same customs and manner of life, varying only in religion. The Buddhists do not bother themselves with other peoples' religions nor do they have a crusading spirit to spread the same. Peace and goodwill missions were despatched to disturbed areas and peace and order was eventually restored, thanks to the efforts of Karen leaders like Mr. Sydney Loo Nee, Sir San C. Po, Saw Ba U Gyi, Mahn Ba Khin and Saw Ba Maung and other peace-loving Karens. Whatever may be said the minorities got a fair deal

from the Burmese Government of which one of the Ministers was a Taungthu Karen from the Thaton Districts. The young leaders set a good example when Major General Aung San and Thakin Thansun, now leaders of the B.N.A. and the A.F.O. married two sisters of Karen extraction. All races in Burma were of one blood.

The second word of the slogan also stresses unity and is really the continuation of the first. The translation of the Burmese word "Ta Than" as "one voice" here is inadequate. It means more or less "single mindedness" and the last word which meant literally "One Command", really means "One Leader". The idea was "A united nation behind a single leader in whom all authority was vested." This naturally resulted in centralising of power, which it was said was very necessary during wartimes. The Government was to be on the Leadership principle, each officer a leader of his own charge. It began very well at the centre, for we worked in close proximity to one another and the Ministers offices were easy of access, but in the country things went wrong. It was centralisation without delegation of powers. Everything lay in the hands of the Prime Minister. The Ministers found themselves unable to appoint even their messengers without the formal approval of the Prime Minister. This state of affairs led to a glorious confusion. The processes of appointing a Minsay, equivalent of messenger, were thus: the head of the department selects a suitable man at once--the New Order required quick work and offices cannot function without messengers--the papers are then sent to the Secretary of the Department for approval and for obtaining the Prime Minister's sanction. The Secretary consults the Minister concerned and forwards them to the Prime Minister's office to hibernate for weeks on end. With extraordinary luck the papers may return to the officer concerned in about twelve weeks, by which time the peon is no longer working on the staff, for people cannot work without salary and three months waiting will not feed the stomach or keep the children at home alive. A new man is appointed and so on. Then financial complications set in. The man may have worked one month but the records show a credit to him for three months, and this credit is seldom drawn by the messenger, and office clerks resort to the convenient method of keeping the same name in the records and pay a new appointee the salary drawn for his predecessor. Less resourceful clerks scratch their heads while their bosses swear. Heads of Departments, the more daring and less trained in the ways of the Civil Service, sometimes resorted to the expedient of diverting their funds for the purpose. We were saving face anyhow. People were beginning to believe in the efficiency of Governments. There was a new system of Government it was said. Undoubtedly it was. The names were all new. Mostly the rules of procedure were old. And to give this a semblance of a new paint, a few new rules were introduced and the rest of the time is spent in trying to get these rules to work with the old system with which it did not fit. The Prime Minister was almost a Minister holding all the portfolios of Government. In spite of the inordinate delays incurred by the attempt to abolish the red tape some headway was made. All major problems were taken in hand. Public response and appreciation were still fine. It was not a Democratic Government nor was it Parliamentary. It had the saving grace of keeping out inner party dissensions from the public eye. No linen could be washed in public except with the assistance of the Japanese Propaganda Bureau which imposed prior censorship of all publications. Save for a few defections all the newspapers were singing the same tune. We at the centre were a fortunate lot and most difficulties were only more or less on paper. There were always the Ministers at hand who could report to the Prime Minister who in turn could then see the C-in-C.

With the officers at outstations it was a different story altogether. As in the centre, the District Officer had Japanese Counsellors; as in the centre

it was his business to form the Four Armies and to foster their growth. He found himself hemmed in by persons who were interested in all Four Armies, to say nothing of the Japanese Imperial Army, whose needs he had to cater to under a veritable sword of Damocles. The danger was on all fronts with him. Basically he was required to act in the interests of the Burmese people and he had also to fulfill the wishes of the Japanese Army posted at his headquarter, and he could do neither without prejudice to either side. He could be accused of partisanship by both sides. It was fortunate that the demands of the First Army of Blood, that is the Burma Defence Army, did not extend to assistance in recruitment, a duty to which he had been accustomed before.

The Sweat Army, one of the biggest rackets of the Japanese interlude in Burma, is an equivalent of the slave labour of Nazi Germany. It all began this way. The Japanese needed a land route from China to Malaya and Burma, and Burma as a member or a future member of the Co-prosperity Sphere was required to contribute her share in the construction of the Burma-Thailand Road. So through their advisors, conversations started for the recruitment in numbers of thirty thousand labourers from all over Burma. Before the discussions were completed it was found that recruitment had already started in Moulmein and Thaton Districts. It was characteristically Japanese to face Government with a fait accompli. The Burmese Government planned that it should take the whole responsibility of providing the necessary quota, was accepted and later meetings confirmed the decisions on questions of remuneration, rewards and other terms of service. To cut the story short, these terms were never fulfilled. Direct Japanese recruitment still continued. The greatest publicity was given to the labour recruitment campaign. The rosier of wage terms and tempting pictures of commodities coming in by way of Thailand filled the newspapers. Special medical treatment for workers and rewards for those remaining at homewere publicised. Advance wages to provide for the wife and children attracted enterprising labourers from all over the country. The first quota was fulfilled in no time. The Japanese Military authorities were effusive at times and Government was glad that it had proved to the Japanese that the Burma Government was capable of work and was fulfilling its promises. The gladness was shortlived for soon news reached that all was not well. The Dobama Sinyetha Asiayone, the Political Army, public spirited citizens and Government servants reported on the true state of affairs. The local Japanese methods of recruitment was conscription of the most brutal type. The Burmese officers could do nothing about it without risking violence. The cultivator evaded recruiting parties in devious ways. Headmen could be bribed to leave out certain people from his village. A system was devised by the headman and villagers of subscribing towards a payment of bonus to anyone who volunteered to fulfill the village quota. A man obtained at least two to three hundred rupees every time he volunteered to join the Labour Corps in place of other more wealthy persons. The Japanese could not or did not distinguish between the landlord and the tenant or shopkeeper and recruited all and sundry. The labourers concerned paid the headman a percentage of his bonust There were cases where professional sweat army men could not be obtained. In such cases men were forcibly dragged away from their homes. When they reached the labour camps and had started working, thousands saw neither the much promised clothing and cash, nor the food and medical aid. Towards the last stages of the journey to Thanbyuzayat, the rail-head labour recruited by the Burma Government were not only badly treated, but were kidnapped by the Japanese and recorded as Japanese recruited labour--a convenient method discrediting the Burma Government. These men were taken into malarial jungles without sufficient clothes, food and shelter, and made to clear the wonderful road that was to make Burma

a Paradise of a terminus of a gigantic Co-prosperity Sphere railway from China

Burmese Government's Labour Officers were not allowed to visit camps in the interior. Burma in all her history had never witnessed anything more appalling in the treatment of human beings. Women labour was also recruited for labour and rape. Brothers of women who were outraged, were either shot for protecting their sisters or left to die a slow death in the Tenasserim jungles, where the annual rainfall is about 280 inches per annum. Two young officers of the Government however had the opportunity of visiting as far as the 173rd kilometre from Thanbyuzayat for which reason alone they were detained for nearly four months in the interior of the Thailand forests. It was with the greatest of difficulty their release from "duty" was obtained. When they came back, letters of thanks and appreciation were received for their good work in restoring the morale of the workers. These malaria stricken officers came back with harrowing tales of their experiences. Their first words were "Please do something quick or there will be a people's revolution." For months labour conscripts had had no one to whom they could lay their grievances. They were dying like flies from disease and starvation. When these two officers returned to Rangoon, they were very politely warned that any report of the true state of affairs might involve them with the Japanese Military Police. Like true sons of the soil, they ignored the threats and gave a first hand account to Government. It was nothing new. It was a confirmation of the so-called rumours about the evils of the Labour Campaign. District Officers were forced to "recruit" men to a slow and lingering death. If they did not, the Japanese reported non-cooperation. If they did, the Political Army reported to the Government that they were ill-treating the Burmese. The National Services also made heavy demands on them. District Officers were under investigation all the time. Even the sleeping hours were not their own. Zealous Japanese officers would call on District Officers at any time of the night and ask them for assistance: how they retained their sanity is a marvel. Frantic efforts were made by Government on the inside, while glowing accounts of "Labourers returned from the camps" covered the front pages of newspapers.

"One Blood" was working out alright it seemed, but the second, "One Voice" or as translated "single mindedness" did not. The Political leader of the district, subdivision, township, village-tract, and the National Service Leader of the same, and those who were in favour of the Government, each had his own mind, his own opinion, and his own way, besetting the District Officers with impossible demands. These men who did not have to shoulder the burdens of office and its attendant responsibilities had free access to Government and pulled wires to get their demands substantiated. In fact the slogan "One Leader" changed its character and meant exactly the opposite. Every mother's son of a leader became a leader. The widespread application of the leadership doctrine led to the birth of a thousand leaders doing a thousand things. One could not visualise what all this was leading to. Things were going wrong with the face saving machine.

I have said in the earlier pages that we Burmese are a highly optimistic race. Many of my friends who had never trusted the Japanese did not miss the opportunity of visiting me with "I told you so" expressions on their faces and when one is beginning to feel like a hungry boy caught with traces of stolen jam on his face, it is best like Richard Crompton's William to change the subject with a torrent of irrelevant eloquence.

We went on, and further assurances of the Promised Land became more definite. The problem was whether promises could be kept, whether the Independence was worth the sacrifice, both willing and unwilling. The way of unscrupulous nations had taught us that the path of freedom was a hard one. "We owed an enormous debt to history" said our leader, "we had lost our freedom because the Burmese could not stand the test of the survival of the fittest. To survive we must liquidate that debt, no matter what the sacrifice. The habit of depending on others has grown upon us through nearly a century of subjection and has made us soft." This appealed to the people. There was still a chance and it was worth while giving this "liquidating of our debt to history" a trial. The rude awakening to the Japanese failure to honour their pledges to the Burmese had disappointed all Burma. In all honesty it must be said that there were among the Japanese, many who saw the rift caused by Japanese delinquencies and who sincerely deploring the true state of affairs did their best to get a square deal for the Burmese Nation, but these men formed a weak minority who could do nothing effective. It was our job and ours alone.

CHAPTER IV

A VISION IN THE EAST

Thagyiwun Myo forms the background of Burmese legendary history. Thagyiwun Myo means "the Chosen Race," descended from the Sun God and thus the use of the word in Burma "Thagyi Wun Nay Myo Nwe"--a race descended from the Sun God whose symbol is the Peacock--Mauriya. Hence the peacock emblem on the Burmese Flag. The Japanese on the other hand belong to that pure Yamato race, which according to Japanese legend, is one big family, the head of which is the Tenno Heika, a direct descendant of the Sun Goddess and the Japanese Flag therefore bears the emblem of the Sun. While the Japanese still believe in the Divine heridity, the Burmese have almost forgotten it except for propaganda purposes. Unless there are several sun gods and goddesses it seemed as if the Burmese and the Japanese belonged to the same Family. They were both Easterners and with the natural prejudice of the East against the West, the dream of a Greater Asia was genuine enough. But events killed that dream in its infancy. The mass introduction of the descendants of the Sun Goddess and the sun goddess whose government had openly declared that they were "guided by high moral and ethical principles" to give every nation its right place in the Sun, failed at the very outset. If language barriers created misunderstandings, the Japanese system could not provide the ways and means to end those misunderstandings. The Japanese fitted in perfectly in their own system but the Burmese could not. There had been mass demonstrations of friendship when the Japanese Army came in but these demonstrations could not in the circumstances, develop into any real friendship, for no friendship can be based on suspicion, force and patronage. Neither of the two races could learn to trust each other. Hitherto, most of the clashes between the Burmese and the Japanese were mainly over the attempt of the B.D.A. to seize administrative power, but with the establishment of the Burma Government, with greater contacts, clashes became widespread. The people were beginning to venture out of their hiding places either to return home or to seek employment. They met the Japanese en masse. Things were returning to normal and the fear of bombs appeared to have died out. There was a certain amount of complacency because of a mistaken notion that war was over as far as Burma was concerned. Personal safety, it seemed, was secure. This complacency could not last very long, for the very presence of the Japanese Army brought home the awful truth that we were in the midst of a terrible war, under a nation which believed only in the efficacy of force. The Government had been driving the people to understand that the war was not over and that it was still in its early stages and that the future of Burma depended upon how much, and to what extent, the country as a whole, could work towards her destiny. The roads and waterways which in the early months of the administration had not been safe, were not better protected and with freer movements of commodities, a new boom was setting in. And people forget easily. There were plentiful demands for labour. Living was becoming cheaper and jobs went begging and some even spoke of the new prosperity as being the result of the British defeat in Burma. "In those days," people said, "everything was in the hands of the British. What was left over by them fell to the Chinese and Indians and no Burmans had had a fair chance in the trade of the country." In blissful ignorance of what was to follow, the carefree Burmese had a good six months of easy profit in the cities. So they did not care. Warnings went unheeded, smaller Japanese misdemeanors were ignored. Money was flowing in.

The public knew only when it was too late that the Japanese Military Administration had formed the Nippon Burma Timber Union which was to control the timber in the country, the Nippon Burma Rice Union to monopolise rice, and the Commodity Distribution Association of Burma, consisting entirely of Japanese members, cornering every commodity in Burma. The last named Association was an organisation which controlled all wholesalers of all goods for distribution through retailers to the Burmese public, while it also supplied to the Japanese Military. Burmese traders could only function under the control of this Union, over which Burmese Government could exercise no control. Frustrated traders had to look on or fall in line with the Japanese idea of Co-prosperity. Every commodity was being monopolised by the Japanese, under the perennial excuse of "war necessity". Not only were people harassed in this village, on the roads and the waterways, but their produce was being taken away. Searches at the railway stations and jetties, seizure of produce on the way, added insult to injury. This 'development' of Burma's resources included the forced purchases of mines, steamers, motor launches by the Japanese firms which said that they were compelled to act by the Military Authorities. Prices of paddy went down to Rs. 15/- per hundred baskets, each basket weighing 48 pounds. Paddy cultivation no longer was a profitable occupation. Labour was claiming its toll regularly. District Officers were getting frantic. Many profitable occupations, such as sale of petrol and kerosene oil and other by-products were forbidden. There was a general feeling of insecurity among the people. They were afraid of the dacoits and the Japanese soldiery, who could take away things at leisure and when they pleased, also of the Government, and worst of all of the Japanese Military Police. A man might be taken off the road and held "incommunicado" for months on end. One did not have to commit a crime to be arrested. A witness of any crime or alleged crime, whether military or otherwise, may be detained for months on end and treated in the same way as guilty persons. The descendants of the Sun goddess were proving themselves very hot indeed. If a person happens to be even a mere acquaintance of any person arrested by the Kempetai, he may be similarly caught and ill-treated. Persons old or young, high or low, were meted out the same treatment. The Burmese who for about a thousand years had known what Rule of Law was, felt even more insecure than their ancestors had when Burmese Kings were bad. They were not only seizing our possessions; they were molesting and killing innocent and guilty alike, without even a pretence of justice. Thousands found themselves in the jails and lock-ups, not under the control of their own Government which had no right whatsoever to even touch any Japanese subject. An average witness stayed in the hands of the "Kempetai" for about three months, during which period he undergoes all conceivable forms of torture. A person going into the lock-up is first greeted by flogging on the eyes and face with leather belts fully buckled or with a stick. He may be tied upside down for hours on end, while sentries or others on duty going in and out may thrash or kick him on any part of his face at any time. Pliers came in useful for plucking out finger nails. Beating the knuckles, the hind portion of the thighs and the buttock for hours with a rubber stick could prevent a person from sitting down during his sojourn in prison. When he lies down from exhaustion, kicks for laziness bring him up again. The normal life in the Japanese prison is bathless and waterless. The life especially in the old town lock-up was horrible. The daily diet was rice with salt twice a day with no drinking water. The lock-up latrines which had long ago gone out of commission and were flooded to the full, was the only source of drinking and washing. People were released when they were dying or not released at all. When they died, a small box was brought into the cell, the bones broken for the corpse to fit into it and carried out to the Lord

knows where, and the nearest of kin are not informed. One person commits a petty breach of prison discipline, the whole lot in the prison are flogged. Any person enquiring into whereabouts of any other person taken under arrest is promptly taken into custody. When the Government by some chance finds Burmese subjects arrested without reason and puts forward claims for the release of such persons, the Government is politely informed that the arrests are on grave charges of espionage, or that there is no such person in Japanese custody. Meanwhile the person concerned would be taught by brutal torture a lesson for having asked for justice, accompanied by rude remarks on the Burmese leaders or Government.

I have seen the British, Indian, Chinese, United States and Burmese Armies and they have their feelings also but there is none to beat the Japanese in their "spy mania" and there has been no other organisation in Burma which depended so much on the information of thieves, smugglers, pick-pockets and local thugs. The average Kempetei agent is one of the lowest type, renegade Burmese, renegade half-caste, of all nationalities ranging from small boys of 13 to old men of 60. There were of course others who were recruited from Japanese Language Schools and ex-prisoners whose liberty depended upon their being informers. Report to the Supreme Command brought no results. Even report to the Imperial Government did not go beyond a small change in the "Kempetei's attitude". The heads generally deny all knowledge of the misdemeanors of its petty officers and soldiers. The Japanese themselves are scared stiff of their own Military Police and the ordinary Japanese soldier hates the sight of a Military Policeman with a red arm-band.

The soldiers on the other hand were a better lot. They fraternised with the people to such an extent that there was even a danger of the people being Japanised. Unforgiving villagers however returned violence when opportunity offered a safe revenge. There was one incident which the Japanese had to forget and swallow their rage and pride. Some thirteen Japanese were patrolling a chaung--a small stream--armed with rifles and a light machine gun, when suddenly the native craft which they were using ran into a rope laid across the chaung, and from the darkness some Burmese leapt into the boat, took the thirteen Japanese by surprise, and knocking them senseless with sticks decamped with all their arms. These Burmese were not caught. All this happened behind the exchange of goodwill and professions of friendship. Public opinion found expression only in whispers in the dark.

Men and women--especially the latter--made money. They supplied all requirements of the Army or the firms attached to the Army at exorbitant prices. A new word came into being "Master", to be more correct "Mah-sa-tah" in the Burmese way. A few "Mah-sa-tahs" and assumed humility brought in money. Behind their backs the usage was "Ngapu"--meaning "shorty" or "Muto"--a derogatory term for the meanest of Indians, or "Khway-Gaung"--dog, or a more polite "Maung Pan"--Maung Japanese, using only the middle syllable. People had to learn to keep out of the way and after about eight months were past masters in the art of dissembling. That was the background of the second promise of Independence made by Premier Tojo. We were weak and Independence was just around the corner, and we thought that when that was won, all evils would be remedied. So we thought! There was time for it yet, we hoped. Even the skeptical section of official and unofficial opinion took heart, but the day was drawing nigh for the realisation of Burma's dream. The bombing of Rangoon helped us to forget all our troubles for a time. Bombing by the Allied Forces at that time were sad affairs. Civilian casualties were very

high and for a year no damage worth its name was inflicted on any military installation. The best the Allied air forces did was to hit one empty transport after about a year and a half of bombing the harbour. Popular feeling against the Allies was stirred and Allied marksmanship became a standing joke in the teashops and bazaars. It was not joke to the thousands who were rendered homeless. The hospital could not cope with the work. There were no anesthetics available--the beds were insufficient, the nursing staff inadequate, for many of the nurses had been taken away and employed at the Japanese base hospital in addition to their own Japanese nurses--even ward attendants were not available (It had two--one half mad and the other a drunk.) These first air raids and the raids of the subsequent years which were more effective brought to light the handicaps under which the hospital staff had to work. The mortuary--for there was only a small one which had been the garage of a school--could not accommodate the people who had died of shock and septic wounds. There were not enough bandages to go round. Old conservancy trucks were used for the collection of the dead and the injured. In spite of the mistakes and injustices in the hospital administration, Burma owes a limitless debt of gratitude to these men and women who worked under the most abominable conditions. The real meaning of war loomed large. The hopes for its speedy end disappeared. The city had shown signs of a return to former gaiety with new restaurants and theatres, but with the evacuation of almost the entire population from the city area, a gloomy and irritable atmosphere overwhelmed Rangoon and the leaders became as jittery as the led. Civilians built temporary sheds along the lake areas and new settlements and markets sprang up on pagodas and phongyi kyaungs (monastery schools). In their trouble they had sought the solace and protection of holy places which still remained their residences for the next three years. Others fled to neighbouring districts. The State if it could be called a state, built evacuation camps and started on a campaign of propaganda for the establishment of National Services for rescue, evacuation, relief and other Civil Defence and Air Precaution measures. Again the response of the people was beyond expectation. In those earlier days the confidence and the faith the Burmese people had in what they considered to be their own Government was touching. They believed that the Government, which consisted of all the men who had gone to jail for their country, could provide the panacea for all ills, so long as they stood behind it. And hopes brightened when news of a likely Burmese mission to Tokyo spread among those in the know. It was carried from one intimate friend to another and so on until almost all in the country knew about it.

Whether it was a delegation proceeding to Tokyo on the wishes of the Burmese Government, whether it was a goodwill mission to establish friendly relations between the two people who, having tried to live together, had got into one another's way, was not known until the return of the leaders from Japan. Dr. Ba Maw had been invited by Premier Tojo to visit the Japanese capital and he was to take along other leaders of the Cabinet to meet the Japanese Government to discuss the question of Burmese Independence. The people looked forward to this with eager expectation. It was a New Vision in the East. Hitherto Burma had turned towards the West for her development and freedom, and now as something tangible was beginning to take shape, she forgot all her trials and tribulations and turned to the East again for the attainment of her cherished goal. General Aung San of the Burmese Independence Army on the formation of the re-organised army had reverted to Colonel, and the Japanese High Command thought it fit that he should be raised to the rank of Major General before he left. Congratulations and adroit flattery were showered on the members of the mission and its secretaries. The Prime Minister, who was still a "Cho Kan", nominated three other members, Thakin Mya the

Deputy Prime Minister, Dr. Thein Maung, and Major General Aung San and flew to Tokyo via Singapore where a courtesy call had to be made on the Supreme Southern Command. The trip had been arranged so as to fit in with the announcement of the Japanese Premier on Burma's future in the 82nd Session of the Imperial Diet on March 25, 1943. The ovation given by the Japanese public was tremendous, and although it appeared to be a rehearsed orderly affair, there was certainly to a very great extent genuine goodwill, friendship and gratitude, behind those mass demonstrations. It was clear that the Japanese Press had played their part extremely well. The receptive Japanese mind was saturated with Ba Maw and the Burmeset. These things foreboded well for the futuret

Everything seemed to go smoothly. Handshaking, bowing, exchange of goodwill all according to the itinerary drawn up by the Imperial Governmentt. Tokyo was beginning to recover from its winter drabness, but we who went from the land of sunshine and smiling faces found it difficult to conceal our discomfort of being enclosed in the cold grayness of the atmosphere. I chanced to mention the fact to an official. He was not pleased. I personally had been feeling the solicitous care showered on us by the Japanese authorities all through the journey, for our "personal safety and security". The polite but firm hints as to where we should go or should not go had dampened my desire to see things for myself at least to get some idea of what was actually happening to fellow Asians. In Tokyo I thought there was a chance of looking around. To my disappointment my requests as Director of Publicity for the Burma Government to meet members of the Press remained ignored. On the morning following our arrival, when the papers ballyhooed the Burmese Delegations' arrival, the accounts that were published were fantastict. The Press conferences were all arranged so nicely that nothing so indiscreet as the Burmese point of view ever got into the papers. Though by the way, it is of some interest to mention the affair of the speech at the Prime Minister's dinner. We were working on a speech and had nearly completed the stuff when came along Major General Isomura with a speech for Dr. Ba Ma--written--Oh, heavens! by the Japanese Foreign Office. There were two speeches prepared. The speech weprepared was being hurriedly translated, the Japanese speech had been completely attended to. In the argument that followed whether or not the speech brought by Isomura would be followed the speech that was prepared was completely forgotten. Major General Isomura had kindly impressed upon Dr. Ba Maw that he was still part of the Burma Japanese Military Administration. Orders must be obeyed. In half an hour we were due for the dinner. When everybody is irritable the secretaries bear the brunt and I have never felt so miserable in all my official life as when the most irritable of the lot, our Prime Minister, scolded me for all past and present deficiencies on my part.

Anyway, there had to be a dinner and of course also a before dinner speech. It was a sight to watch the faces of Isomura and some of the Foreign Office officials when the speech was delivered. The person I envied least was Otsubo, the Interpreter. He had been ordered to read out a speech that had been translated and set in type. He found himself giving an interpretation of a speech which within the hearing of the audience was not what Dr. Ba Maw was saying. Dr. Ba Maw had given an entirely new speech extempore and although it did contain the Asiatic ideal the meaning was perfectly clear "Trust begets Trust." The British did not trust the Burmese and the Burmese rose against the British. The Burmese had blindly trusted the Japanese and he hoped that the Japanese would not make the British mistake. Applause. I personally gloated over the speech and later in the night, the Interpreter and

Major General Isomura was summoned by phone to see His Excellency Premier Tojo at once. What happened is only known to them. Result: Major General Isomura came perhaps to get even with Ba Maw. It was nearly midnight. We all assembled in Ba Maw's room and had a good laugh. Even I forgot the misery of the evening.

The important point was that, at least we were getting heard, and in future further attempts to provide speeches for the Burmese Prime Minister was abandoned. Prior to that historic announcement that Burmese Independence would be recognized before the end of 1943, the leaders met Premier Tojo and returned with a short document which laid down the conditions on which independence could be obtained. The conditions were that as soon as the mission returned to Burma the Burmese Government, with the help of the Military Administration under the Supreme Military Commander in Burma, were to form a committee to prepare for Independence, which was to be declared on the 1st of August--exactly one year after the formation of the First Burmese Administration under the Japanese. On declaration of Independence, Burma was to enter into a Military Alliance with Japan and declare war on the United States and Great Britain on the same day. The First Constitution of Independent Burma was to be of a temporary nature, and within one year of the end of the War of Greater East Asia or if war conditions permitted after one year, it was to give way to a popularly (universal adult franchise) elected Constituent Assembly to draw up the future constitution of Burma. And Burma was to be one of the partners of the Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere. Dr. Ba Maw wanted the Japanese and the world to know that he had the confidence of the people and politicians. On return however he found that it was not forthcoming, at least in the cabinet; for there was a cabinet crisis. Thakin Ba Sein--Tun Ok group had not been very satisfied with the new regime and had been working towards a quick change which would result in their coming into power. This was an expected move, but the unexpected happened, when the other Thakin group demanded that they wanted a change in the attitude of the Prime Minister if full support was desired. Meanwhile certain sections of the Japanese High Command were sounding the public about monarchy in Burma. The crisis was overcome, and there was still unity in the cabinet, but it sowed an element of distrust between the two groups, which was to lead to the self-imposed exile of Thakin Tun Ok and Ba Sein. It however showed to thinking men that power politics was the cause of this disruption. Serious dissension however had been avoided because of a common national outlook. Now that a New State was in sight, feelings began to change and the old party feelings of the last quarter began to reassert themselves, with almost disastrous consequences. Appearances however were kept because all groups were unanimous on the main issue. The passage had been rough, but the face saving device was turning out all right. The leaders could now with confidence, tell the people and the world that the sacrifices of the past year had brought concrete results. Mass meetings were organized and interest in the affairs of state reached a very high pitch. Everybody wanted to know, when and how, the New Independent State would come into being. Songs on Independence were composed. As a symbol of Independence and Victory, the Aung Thabye (Victory) tree was planted with due ceremony. The people were told that trust in Japan had not failed. It was lack of trust between Great Britain and Burma that had brought relations between the countries to a disastrous end, but now when the trust was mutual, it was paving a new way to a New Order in which the rights of Asiatics would be upheld and protected by Asiatics. Ba Maw carried on the theme of his Tokyo speech. A new destiny awaited Asia. These arguments were received with the greatest enthusiasm by the people, to whom it appeared that Burma had indeed fulfilled her destiny and that she had not misplaced her

trust in the Japanese; past wrongs were forgotten for a time. Enquiring people asked what the future of the Shan States and Karenni was, and were disappointed because though these states had throughout our history formed integral parts of Burma, this question was left to a later date for decision. Japanese officers attached to Government offices spoke with a certain sadness because they were soon leaving, they said, for time was now ripe for the Burmese to look after their own house. The Burmese became less suspicious of the Japanese. Amidst the fire and destruction caused by British aeroplanes and the sleepless nights of terror, the dull despair of the early stages of Japanese occupation was disappearing. Trade was brisk. People were beginning to be accustomed to the dangers which they now took as part of their everyday lives. There was a vision in the East. And so preparations for a New Utopia were made.

CHAPTER V

PREPARATIONS FOR A NEW UTOPIA

"Independence"--a word that has passed through the lips of all peoples of the world--the most hackneyed and exploited, this "will-o'-the-wisp" had a new meaning to us now. In the past when Burmese nationalism revived the idea of complete severance from the Empire, it occurred in the minds of but a few leaders, although the term "Ko Min, Ko Chin"--"Our own King, Our own State"--however had often been spoken of. For years things had gone wrong. Our rulers the British had not understood the aspirations of a people who were by nature independent. Britain had forgotten to feel what it was to be conquered. Burmese nationalism of the early days of the British in Burma according to western standards did not seem to matter. Contact with Western civilizations and the benefits that accrued to the country after nearly a century of inter-necine medieval strife, pushed nationalism to the background. When proper law and order was restored, the smashing of lone groups of patriots, wrongly branded as "robbers" and "dacoits" by the British took place. The violence and the atrocities of these early days were but outbursts of indignation and national feeling. It was the lack of leadership that had turned Burmese nationalism into an inchoate feeling of anger and violence, which until the early twenties of this century could not find articulate expression in forms which the British could understand. Even then lack of organisation and proper leadership left the national issue either vague or unimportant for the greatest empire of the modern world to bother about. Burma had taken her lessons from the Indian national struggle. Although some well-meaning Englishmen felt that this was a contaminating influence on the Burmese it was really the turning point of Burmese politics. Then the Y.M.B.A.--Young Men's Buddhist Association--and the G.C.B.A.--the General Council of Burmese Associations of the "Wunthanus" or "Nationalists" brought the National Movement on to an organised footing; there was no doubt as to the issues involved in the relations between Burma and Great Britain. And twenty years' faith in Britain and British institutions slid down and disappeared. Events moved to pile misunderstanding upon misunderstanding. The delays, the evasions and prevarications which formed an essential part of British policy of the past two decades, failed to inspire a faith in the British ideal of "the Commonwealth". Indeed on the other hand, suspicion formed the background of most conferences and discussions on British-Burmese relations. In 1918 the Montagu-Chelmsford Declaration which became a British charter of Indian and Burmese constitutional advancement disappointed the "Wunthanus". The demands for Burmese freedom during the last Great War were made early, but H.M.G.'s response to them came only in 1923. The then Government had either forgotten all about it or did not care. When it did come in 1923 in the form of "Dyarchy", the leaders even among the co-operators found that their followers no longer were satisfied with anything at all. Procrastination or neglect was the cause. After a trial of Dyarchy for nearly a decade the Simon Commission came in 1927. It received a better welcome than it had in India because of the "separation issue". Then again after the excitement of the Simon Commission, it took eight years to get the Government of Burma Act 1935 complete and another two years to make it function. When reforms came the discontent was great, but major parties co-operated and gave the Constitution a try-out in spite of professions to wreck it. What followed in the next three years does not need elaborate clarification. Twenty years had passed and the net results were

(1) a measure of self-government with which the people were dissatisfied and which the British Government considered to be more than what Burma was legitimately entitled to and (2) what is more important--there was an almost complete distrust for each other. The bogey of the Dobama Asiayone (the Thakin Party) which British bureaucracy in Burma considered to be a subversive movement and a menace to the British Empire, loomed large. It was apparently the Red Bogey in Burma as elsewhere for the Thakins took for their flag the "hammer and sickle" with the Tricolour--the hammer and sickle being quite foreign to Burmas. It was the suppression of the radical parties and Thakins and the students that destroyed the last shreds of hopes for conciliation, adjustment, a proper outlet of healthy National feelings. The demands of the parties even including the moderates did not stop at the old home rule or Dominion Status formula. It was complete independence or nothing. Then the war came and the radicals took up the cry of "Britain's difficulty--Burma's opportunity".

That was the background of independence before the East Asia War. The Burmese people are anti-foreign in many ways, but they are not a people who can nurse grievances and develop them into an everlasting hatred. Foreigners who have lived and mingled with the Burmese will understand that, just as they will understand Burmese hospitality and impulsiveness. They had been disappointed enough and often; and when the Japanese came, saw, conquered the country and smashed their dream castle, the disappointment had even been greater. Now things were changing. The dark clouds that hid the dream castle had blown away leaving the vision of the castle realistically near--Utopia was just a couple of months away. Recently the Japanese were comrades-in-arms of the Burmese. They had shelved Burmese independence, but now that they were redeeming their broken pledges, the old friendliness revived. It was at this juncture that the desire for collaboration with Japan to build up a New Order and Economy in the East was at its height. It was genuine. It could not have been otherwise. Most of us including (with all due respects to the traditions of the Indian Civil Service), the Burmese members of that service thought over the disappointments of the last twenty years of British rule--how different the Japanese were--of how in spite of their harsh ways they meant what they said. And the Japanese who are not all of the Gestapo type, rejoiced in the overflow of Burmese gratitude. They felt sure of one sincere ally at last. They were proud that they, as leaders of Asia, were unshackling the chains of slavery forged by British Imperialism. It was genuine pride. Those of us who could not forget Japanese brutality and dishonesty said, "Well--the big shots in Japan are O.K. so things would also be O.K. with Burma." Any talk of British willingness to provide for the establishment of a self-governing dominion was listened to with amusement. And British radio propaganda fell on deaf Burmese ears. Just during that period of preparation (it was June and July) Allied air activity had decreased considerably; their offensive on Burma had failed. The thought that Allied Forces would again come to Burma did not enter the heads of the people almost drunk with the happiness of anticipation of the fulfillment of a lifelong dream.

There were also amongst us those who considered that jubilant as we were it was necessary to assume a sober appearance and that it would be indecent to exhibit extreme joy which might be exploited by the Japanese, who after all though friendly were powerful and could do just as they pleased. Others retorted that days of distrust were over. Trust begets trust and all that. Soon announcements were made of the appointments of the leading men of Burma for the moulding of Burma's future. Delegates came into Rangoon one by one and the Burma Independence Preparatory Commission was at work.

To begin with, this body was in no way representative of the electorate. There were no electorates now. It was considered that Burma did not need electorates and votes at this stage of her political development. It was no time to revive her old political quarrels. Democracy was considered out of date because it brought along with it the unnecessary evils of the party system. This was a New Order which believed in a single leader with a single purpose. The reception to this kind of argument was naturally warm, because it was not so long ago that public opinion had railed at the graft, the maneuvering and the pulling of wires by a Government whose first business appeared to be to keep itself in power all the time. The party system involved the selfish scrambles for office which was not at all healthy. The offer of the New Burmese Government was--trust and follow the leader; if he failed a united people could always overthrow him. The public at large could not be bothered about the details. They believed that some good was emerging out of 'leadership' rule. In the circumstances the Burmese watched the appointment of the members of the Independence Preparatory Commission by the Commander in Chief of the Japanese Imperial Army in Burma, on the recommendation of the Prime Minister, Ba Maw, Chokan Kakka. The members included every shade of political opinion in the country except that two old veterans of Burmese Politics, U Ba Pe and U Pu, were not amongst those appointed. The Commission was to function immediately and deliberate upon the type of Government suitable to an Independent Burma. Free expressions of views regarding the subject under discussion, whether for or against the Japanese, would not be interfered with by the Japanese. This point was emphasised. The Japanese Government would be represented by staff officers of the Imperial Army in Burma, but would not participate in the deliberations. They would be present only for the purpose of elucidating the Army's views in connection with its military interests in Burma. The Army, it was explained would not and could not dictate to the Commission in matters relating to the choice of an air constitution. That was entirely a Burmese business. So far so good. The choice of the members was fair enough. The Committee met and unanimously elected the Prime Minister Dr. Ba Maw as President. He was the only obvious candidate. The President was all powerful as all decisions rested with him. It was largely a matter of trust in the leader, who would from time to time carry on negotiations with the Japanese Army on all matters arising out of the deliberations of the Commission. That trust was not abused. There were to be several sub-committees for negotiations with the Japanese Military Authorities.

The majority of the Commission were old politicians who had had years of dealings with the British and were justifiably wary and suspicious of the Japanese offer of independence. They made a thorough study of the whole problem at hand and were not particularly satisfied because many of the promises of the Japanese were vague or were not backed by documents in writing. There were also a dissatisfied element which harboured intentions of throwing the President of the Commission out of the Independent Government. Proposals for the restoration of the Monarchy were also made. I have a suspicion that they were made with the secret backing of a certain section of the Military Administration in Burma. The progress in the beginning was slow and as the sessions were secret the public stood badly in want of news. Burma has learnt much to her cost that secrecy of proceedings of affairs about which the general public has a right to know, arouses curiosity and makes the public mind receptive to rumours. Burma is a land of rumours. And for the next two years, rumours played a vital part in Burmese life. In the course of the deliberations rumours of the dissension in the Commission spread like wild fire. There were rumours of the President of the Commission being threatened with a loaded pistol by

Major General Aung San over some obscure argument. There were rumours, from the horses' mouth as it were, of the return of Setkya Min, a new Burmese King of old lineage. But the younger element were solidly behind Dr. Ba Maw.

It was during this period that a correspondent of the Mainichi, I think, asked me questions about "Monarchy in Burma". It appeared that books had been written on the possibilities of the restoration of Burmese Monarchy. This was interesting because the Military Administration had during the past year been handing out feelers. There was definitely a section in the Japanese Military Administration headed by Mr. Oseku which seriously considered following the Manchurian precedent. The Burmese of Royal descent apparently did not know anything about it, although some political renegades did. Burmese political opinion at that time however did not even show the slightest tendency towards Monarchism. It only dreamt and speculated in terms of Presidents and Republics. I pointedly asked this man whether the Japanese Government wanted the "restoration" in Burma. The answers were evasive but he did somewhat extol the advantages of Monarchy generally. He had with him a book written and published by a Japanese on the subject of restoring the old Burmese Dynasty. Reaching out my hand I asked him for the loan of the book, which he, with some confusion abruptly snatched away from my grasp and told me that the Burmese Government would not be too pleased to read the contents of that book. I do not know what it contained, but it must have contained something which the Burmese public would not have relished. I did not press for the loan of the book and the gentleman in question never referred to the subject again. The Japanese Press and the Monarchist section of the Military Administration may or may not have been playing a concerted game, but it was suspicious, because the incident took place at the time the Commission was enlivened by the presentation and subsequent debates on the three points of view on the nature of the New Burmese State. Besides he was not the only Japanese who was asking the same question.

The three points of view were (1) a constitutional monarchy; (2) a democratic republic; (3) dictatorship. Interested speculators received 'smuggled out' news with avidity, and were even eager for rumours however wild, of the events taking place en camera. Bets were offered and taken as to the type of Government likely to be introduced, but as they were all on the three alternatives mentioned nobody won. While the debate grew hot on the subject, the Japanese Army in Burma informed the Commission, in no uncertain terms, that whatever form of the head of the Government they chose, whether they called him the Head of the State, or President of the Republic they could give any term in any language except in official Japanese. His Imperial Majesty's Japanese Government were prepared to recognise him only as "Koka Dai Hyo" which they said meant "Chief National Representative". Not knowing the Japanese language we could not go into the niceties of the interpretation of this Japanese term. Members were disgusted and crestfallen. The Imperial Spectator who had undertaken to stay aside had jumped into the fray. They had been told off. And that was that. And so the word "Adipadi" as an alternative came into being instead of the much wanted "Thamada" which means "President". The word "Adipadi" means the biggest of the big. It sounded like a panjandrum to us at the beginning but in course of time we became accustomed to its use. The Japanese Military was impatient of the time taken by the Committee to discuss Burma's future. They did not appreciate the fact that it meant something big to us--that choosing a constitution was not like a housewife coming to a decision on the daily bazaar. Everything was cut and dried. The orders were that independence should be declared on the First of

August and they were here to carry out those orders of His Imperial Majesty's Government. The deliberations could not in any way finish within the appointed time if the problems connected with real independence were to be settled. Indications of the success of the Commission's work were neither known nor evident. The majority felt that they were being hustled into a decision without sufficient opportunity for discussion and elucidation on vital questions. In spite of handicaps, the members and Burmese leaders worked day and night giving their best so that in the framing of the temporary constitution there might be a way open to carry on the fight for Burma's legitimate rights up to the very end. It must also be said to the Commission's credit, that it did not fail to point out to the Japanese Government that it was not satisfied with the arrangements, although the people of Burma knew that they had obtained what they wanted, culturally, politically, and economically. The ultimate achievement of these goals and not the immediate gains were most important. Although the Burmese Independence Preparatory Commission was not anything like the original Burmese idea of a Constituent Assembly, it was in the last analysis, not only representative of Burmese opinion but, despite professions to the contrary, also democratic in its background and outlook. The members were mostly old parliamentarians whose beings were soaked with British Parliamentary institutions. The Commission's Memoranda later became the bible of Burmese policy for the next two years. Burmese gains were obviously insufficient and the policy was clearly the acceptance of the inevitable present with a way open for future efforts to substantiate Burmese rights.

The settlement, on the whole was unsatisfactory, but it was apparently the best available at the moment and if we did not like it, what else could we do? Was there still a chance of improvement with the passage of time on the net results obtained? Was independence coming as a whole? Or was it after all like the instalment system wherein ownership rights are only acquired after full payment of price and interest? What was the price? It would have been very interesting if Burma had refused to declare her independence on the fixed day and thus upset a programme so elaborately planned by Tokyo to be executed by the Burmese people under the guidance of the Japanese Military Administration. I wonder whether the leaders had considered the non-cooperation technique when the spectator had jumped into the ring with rude gusto and whether non-cooperation would have been good statecraft--how it would fit in with or clog the Japanese system. Would it be realism to try out a basis provided by a Commission which received the legal sanction for its very existence from the Japanese Commander in Chief? Were the leaders letting down the people? If the independence was likely to be nominal, then was there a fighting chance to substantiate it sooner or later? The vision was still vivid and attractive, and a vision was after all better than none. Tempus Fugit and soon it was August 1, 1943, the First Waxing of the Moon of Wagaung, 1305 B.E.

CHAPTER VI

THE NEW UTOPIA

The Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary had arrived to discuss the terms of the alliance to be signed between Burma and Japan. Everything was going according to plan. News was given rather sparingly and the people hardly knew what was coming to them, but they were satisfied on the whole. Preparations were made for the change-over from a military controlled administration into a Government under the complete control of the Burmese People! Officers of the Government were counting the days when their Japanese counsellors would leave them a free hand in the running of their respective departments. News of changes in the Cabinet personnel spread. We dreamed of the near future, which in spite of the war would provide the opportunity to rule our own country. A Special Committee to organise and conduct the Independence Declaration Ceremony was formed and the Committee eagerly set to work. The old Government House was to be handed over to the Burmese to be used, it was said, as the official residence of the New Head of the State. This was only a small part of the independence business, but it was something symbolically important to us, because we had regarded this as the stronghold of British Imperialism in Burma. The manner in which this house was handed over to the Burmese was only a forerunner of things to come to Independent Burma. It was one of the first proofs that however willing and genuine the Government in Tokyo, the Japanese Army in Burma were bound to set difficulties in the way of the Burmese peoples in their attempt to establish a new and independent state. The local Japanese felt that they had done the fighting in the conquest of Burma, they had made the sacrifices, and now that the treasure house was in their possession they were loath to part with what they considered were their lawful possessions and rights. They had also liked the 'whites' whom they professed to hate, come to Burma with an equivalent of 'the white men's burden'. Even in the small matter of the transfer of this bit of property, there were innumerable petty obstructions, evasions and arguments. All sorts of difficulties were created. One day news would come from the Japanese High Command that the building had been evacuated, and following the message representatives of the Burmese who would go there only to be driven out like cattle by the ignorant soldiers on guard. The hitches that attended the transfer of this building were characteristic of the whole period of the Japanese stay in Burma on all problems, great or small. When the higher-ups of both sides met, everything of course was smooth, spick and span. Conclusions are reached and orders passed by the heads on both the Burmese and the Japanese sides. Then the trouble starts, for it is the subordinate Japanese official who carries out the orders on the Japanese side and there is nothing in the world as obstinate, as rude, as ignorant, and as cantankerous as a Japanese N.C.O. The Japanese Military Administration was like an unwilling parent, who had been forced to give the hand in the marriage of a young daughter, whom he considers ill-equipped to lead a life beyond parental control. Many of the Japanese in the Military Administration were indignant and sent protests to their homeland that Burma was not fit to rule herself.

All arrangements for the ceremony were soon complete, but a hitch occurred at the last moment. The question was where the Japanese guests were to be seated at the ceremony. They refused to face the ceremony dais, and if they had to, they wanted the front seats. Then when the ceremony started who was

to take precedence in entry? The Head of the State Designate or the Commander in Chief of the Imperial Japanese Army in Burma? The Japanese were not even bothered about the Ambassador. There was a compromise. The Japanese guests faced sideways, while Burma's New Head of the State Designate and the Commander in Chief of the Japanese Forces were to enter the Hall simultaneously by different routes, walking at the same speed.

The Si-Daw (Royal Drum) echoed through the Hall heralding the approach of the Head of State Designate and his train as the strains of the stirring music melted into silence. The declaration of independence. The investitures of office. The oath taking, the treaty of alliance and the declaration of war in rapid succession and the chains of slavery were broken--so we thought. Although an inward exultation surged within us, instead of the bubbling joy that we expected to feel, there was a certain sadness about it all. Many surreptitiously dried their eyes and thought of the comrades who had fallen in the national struggle. Others viewed the future with anxiety. There was a certain lack of confidence in us. Some thought that we felt a little lost, because we had been accustomed to bondage. One however does not learn to swim without getting into the water. We would get into the water. In fact we were already in it. We would flounder, no doubt, but floundering through was the only way of doing it.

We now had our own ruler--the Naingandaw Adipadi. He would, before the framing of a permanent constitution, rule according to an interim constitution drawn up by the Burmese Independence Preparatory Commission. All sovereignty was vested in the Adipadi, who would be assisted by a Cabinet of Ministers to be appointed by him. The Adipadi was to be concurrently the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister and Cabinet were responsible to the Adipadi. There was to be also an Advisory Body, called the Privy Council, the members of which consisting of all leaders of public opinion, would owe their appointments to the Adipadi. Three new ministries were created, namely the Ministries of Defence, Foreign Affairs, and Co-operation. The last named is interesting because it was created for the purpose of war co-operation and the adjustment of civilian and military needs. Besides the Cabinet and the Privy Council, there was still on the political side, Dobama Sinyetha Asiayone, which had been founded in 1942. This political organisation had branches in every town and village in Burma, over which there was a Supreme Council comprising of members of the organisation including some ministers of Government. The head of the state was also the Arnashin (Dictator). The system provided for no expression of the will of the people through the vote and the elective system. This political organisation exercised considerable influence on the Government. The form of quasi-democracy, which was in existence during the British days was gone. This political organisation was under a Chief Executive with ministerial rank and the National Services were under the control of the Welfare Ministry. Both organisations did the same kind of work and the mutual interference and clash of personnel was astounding, to say nothing of their attempts to supervise the District Commissioner. Whatever the defects, it brought the people in closer touch with the Government services. The people were Burmese, the Administrators were Burmese, and all organisations in the country were Burmese. There was not a single foreign boss in the administration. This gave a close unity between the so-called bureaucrats, politicians and the people. Celebrations of the great event were countrywide. The people on the whole were pleased and were prepared to make further sacrifices to make Burma a strong independent state and to mould her destiny with their own hands. On the very day following the Declaration of Independence, the Japanese counsellors came to bid us

farewell. They had been ordered by their High Command that their services were no longer required by the Burma Government. Many were sad at the thought of leaving us to ourselves, others were indignant that they had been thrown away like old boots. The state servants however had seen enough of them and the Preparatory Commission had insisted upon their withdrawal. We were so overjoyed with this event that our Government had done what was considered by the Japanese Military as an indiscretion, lacking in taste. The Government in its independence publicity had laid too much stress on the exit of the Japanese counsellors and the abolition of the Japanese Military Administration in Burma. The country however must be told that the 'independence' was real, and the Government set to work in earnest.

The pre-independence government had managed to save its face. The leaders could now say: "Well, we promised to get you independence and now that we have got it for you, it is for you to play your part to substantiate that independence and make it lasting. We want your trust."

Indeed they told the people in no uncertain terms. From the "wait and see" attitude of 1942, even the sceptics began to have more confidence in the leaders. They even conceded that the peoples' right of expression through the vote could be justifiably curtailed at least during war time. The Privy Council which was appointed by the Adipadi was in every respect like the former Legislative Council and the House of Representatives, except that the lobbying, the wire pulling, the vote buying, and the usual political graft did not form part of its functions, legitimate or otherwise. Even the personnel, mostly men, who had spent their lives in the lobbies of the old Legislature, were very much the same. Although it acted as an Advisory Body its influence on the Government was considerable, for though it had no statutory right to make and unmake Governments, in actual practice its advice was listened to and acted upon. Some of the younger generation complained that this council would remain an ineffective body. It could obstruct legislation by its dilatory tactics. They were not satisfied with the 'old elements' who they said had made such a mess of politics in the parliament in Burma. It has to be admitted, however, that the Privy Council had a sobering effect upon the Cabinet which with the absence of such a council might have become undesirably powerful.

The Burma Defence Army, which since its formation had no connection with the Burma Government, was now under the control of the Defence Ministry, and the Adipadi was the Supreme Commander of the Burma Defence Army. This is important because a considerable part of the Burma Defence Army considered themselves almost as a parallel Government and independence had brought a proper relationship between the Army and the Government. The existence of an army which held the Government in ridicule was a danger because it could at a moment's notice transform into a political army. The army elements contained men who in the earlier days of 1939 were students who brought about the downfall of the coalition ministry under Dr. Ba Maw, and who still could not forget the events of that most impressionable part of their lives, and were generally hostile to civil servants. The army was now a well disciplined army and the relations between the army and the older politicians were now amicable. Independence certainly brought a new unity. But behind this new unity there were unfortunate incidents which puzzled the people, and caused some discontent to those who were in touch with political circles. Two former Ministers had been left out of the independent Cabinet. One of them was one of the Thirty Comrades and the other a prominent member of the First

Thakin Party in the country. This section of the Thakin Party however gave no subsequent trouble and both these ministers soon left the country for Singapore.¹ It is not known among the people why they had gone to Singapore and who sent them there. Opinions differ greatly on the subject. There were those who believed that the Japanese Army sent them so that there may be no political trouble and rivalry in Burma. Others believe that these ministers themselves wanted to go away. One of them was later an Executive Councillor under the Governor. His leap from the extreme left to the extreme right is now considered shockingly acrobatic.^d The other was expected to be in Rangoon. What he would do only the future would reveal.

Mass rallies and demonstrations followed in the wake of Burmese independence. Thousands of people streamed into the State House to hear the first ruler of Independent Burma. From now on ceremonies always opened with the National Anthem, the salute of the Burmese National Flag and the head of state. They were told that this triumph of the Burmese was not the end of the Burmese duty to the country. There were other things to be done. The war must be won, for we were at war with our erstwhile rulers, and that only when the war was won, would our independence be complete. There were many important affairs still in the hands of the Japanese, and that unless we worked and proved ourselves to be strong and capable of looking after ourselves, we would not remain an independent state for long. We could not depend on others. It was our own job. The past sacrifices had not been enough, and that we may have to make further sacrifices to make independence a reality. Looking back at all these now, one again lives through those days, when there was a mad rush of work to complete the first part of our task before independence. There were things though only the symbolic part of an independent state, such as the National Anthem and the National Flag to be worked out. The National Anthem was of course the Dobama song, which was the song of the Dobama Asiayone (the Thakin Party), a song which before 1942 had to be sung at the risk of arrest, except in a few districts, where the Executive Officers were more liberal minded. It was the song which almost everybody had learnt and did not forget. It brings to mind the prophecy made by Mr. Barreto, one-time Deputy Commissioner of Pyapon District, that one day it would be the National Anthem of Burma. He had even taken the trouble of reproducing the music for the same in his "History of Burma" with the assistance of Mr. Heaton Renshaw. This song will remain Burma's National Anthem, and any alteration will meet strong opposition from the Burmese people.

The National Flag was a tricolour of yellow, green and red, with a symbolic peacock in the centre. We were very proud of these symbols of our freedom and are still proud of them. We carried our heads high. The Flag used to cause a lot of friction between Burmese and Japanese officials. The Japanese were very particular about how they kept their flags on occasions. When there were joint ceremonies or social occasions, the argument always centered on whether the Burmese Flag should take precedence over the Japanese Flag in Burma. The Japanese insist upon the placing of their flag on the right, and that 'right' depended upon whether it was the 'right' behind you. The resultant confusion over this makes a glorious mess in the decorations. It sometimes led to quarrels.

1. The reference here appears to be to Thakin Ba Sein and Thakin Tun Oke. Cf. John F. Cady, A History of Modern Burma, p. 455.

Recognition of Burmese independence came from all Axis countries, and the new Foreign Office was busy with telegraphic replies to congratulations conforming to the demands of Diplomatic Etiquette. There were hunts for books dealing with Diplomatic Practices and courteous Japanese Embassy officials were always willing to help. Language classes were opened to train young embryo diplomats. The Foreign Office started learning the early lessons of being a Foreign Office. Questions like 'who should be given precedence? The Commander in Chief of the Japanese Forces or the Japanese Ambassador?' Worried diplomatic officials, new and young, whispering from Japanese circles indicated that right or wrong, military officers preferred the Commander in Chief to be given precedence. All these formalities, forms and symbols, though not the most important began to play a considerable part in the new regime.

Among ourselves also the question of how the Head of the State should be addressed in public and in private harassed young officials. There was clearly a danger of creating antagonism among the naturally democratic Burmese people if too many high sounding titles were used. Earlier bureaucrats of Britain had in those 'good old days' before Burma had been 'contaminated' by the influence of Indian politics expected as of right from the Burmese, both official and non-official, to take off their shoes and 'shikkoi' before the sahib. So when Burma became politically minded, young nationalists started a campaign against it with what was known as "The Shoe and Shikko" question, protesting that it was not healthy for the dignity and self-respect of the Burmese race. After a lapse of some twenty odd years, one of the first things that the 1942 Government did was to rule that the word "Phaya" -- Buddha Incarnate -- should not be used by subordinates in answering officials in court or in office. It meant 'My Lord'. This measure proved very popular. Now with independence the word Adipadi alone was considered inadequate and after much confusion in argument between officers, a circular was issued, giving details of how the terms of address in the first person, in the third person, in newspapers and references in official papers, to the "Naingandaw Adipadi". There was a circle of flatterers and sycophants, like Elizabethan courtiers, always assiduous in their efforts to gain the favour of the first citizen of the state by persuading him to accept all sort of grandiose terms which did him unlimited injury.

The early days of independence were days of pageants, shows, symbols and forms; and amidst all these came that great patriot of Bengal, Subhas Chandra Bhowse. The life of Bhowse had thrilled the hearts of young Burmese. He was in our midst. He was present at the Independence Ceremony and had congratulated Burma on her achievement in her struggle, in which India had also played a parallel role. He was enthusiastically welcomed and with his arrival, the new trend of thought was that since Burma had struggled against the British, they were bound by a common cause and ties of friendship with India. That the future of Burma was linked to that of India. The cry was "There could be no Free Burma without a Free India and there could be no Free Asia without a Free India." The fighting on the India Border had gone well in the summer of that year (1943) and the Indian Independence League was formed with its advance headquarters in Rangoon. We were to fight together -- India and Burma -- and the other millions of Asia, forming a formidable army of a thousand million liberated Asians, destroying the evil forces of Anglo-American Imperialism. The slogan 'On to Delhi' and new methods of greeting by Indians with a semi-Hitler salute accompanied by the words 'Jai Hind', became the fashion in Rangoon. The Indian Problem seemed to have disappeared from the face of the earth. Rangoon, which normally had a large Indian population,

began to receive in its hospitable arms, more and more Indians. But they were now in khaki. They were the patriots and public spirited men, many adventurers, pick pockets, thieves, and released prisoners of war in khaki. More exchanges of formalities, courtesies, dinner parties, tea parties, garden parties, mass meetings ensued.

Things were rosy and the one doubt that had assailed us on independence was cleared by a treaty, which coincided with the return of the 'International Settlements' to the Chinese Government of Nanking. The second treaty with Japan satisfied Burmese opinion to a great extent. We had been disturbed some time before the event because the treaty between Thailand and Japan was announced three days previous, giving away the States of Mongpan and Kengtung, of the Shan States, to Thailand. Japan had been carving out territory for Thailand at will. We realised that Thailand was making a good bargain with Japan. She had achieved by treaty with Japan three portions of territory from South East Asia, without the free consent of the peoples from the territory concerned. Thailand had received two provinces from Indo-China, four States from Malaya and two from Burma. But this treaty with Japan again set some doubting hearts at rest. The Shan States had come back into Burma again.² The Shans were glad indeed. They had been disappointed when they were left out on the first of August and were getting impatient of the Japanese Military Administration in the Shan States. It was much more autocratic than in the Burmese Plains. It was quite understandable that it should be so, considering that there was no organised mass opinion, except the youth movement started by the students of the Shan States. The Shan States for a considerable period in Burmese history had formed an integral part of Burma. We have common traditions and religion and manner of life. The Shans are as much Burmese as the Scots and the Welsh are British. As part of the Burman Empire they enjoyed an autonomy greater than in British Burma days. The princes were as Maurice Collis rightly translated 'The Lords of the Sunset' and the Burmese Kings were the 'Lords of Sunrise'. The Sawbwas, as the Shan princes are called, did not know of the treaties until the last moment, and had the terms of treaty been contrary to the wishes of the Shans, it would have impaired the friendship between the Burma Government and the Shan princes at a time when unity was most desired.

A former member of the Indian Civil Service was appointed Assistant High Commissioner. He was a Shan and was warmly welcomed by the princes and people of the Shan States. He was practically the High Commissioner for the initial period. To a larger extent, at least in the sphere of civil administration, we were completely independent. We were treated with more respect and deference by the Japanese; but soon we were not the only independent people in the country. Parallel Utopias in the form of the Provisional Government of Azad Hind (Free India), the Japanese Military, the Japanese firms, and the hangers-on of the Japanese, grew up and Burma found herself in the unique position of a country ruled by several Governments.

2. The Dyarchy reforms excluded the hill areas (including the Shan States) from their provisions. When in 1937 Burma took a major step forward to parliamentary self-government, the new Prime Minister and Cabinet had no jurisdiction in the "excluded areas". Under the 1943 constitution, the whole of Burma (excluding the ceded Shan States) was nominally under the Ba Ma Government (Ed.).

CHAPTER VII

PARALLEL UTOPIAS

The hospitality of the Burmese is well known to those who have lived in this country. The Provisional Government of Free India (Azad Hind) was welcome to establish its advance base in Rangoon. The Indians were now comrades in arms. The so-called Indian problem in Burma, about which many Indians are so vocal, had disappeared--with the disappearance of that particular class after their evacuation from Burma. The Indians in Burma are roughly divided into four classes. First, there are Indians whose stay in Burma has been so long and the intermingling of blood with the Burmese so great, that they are Burmese in every way except in their religion. These Indians are generally known as Burmese Muslims or Zerabadis, the latter name being now discarded. Second, there is a class of Indians whose blood has remained purely Indian and have made Burma their homeland, without the slightest intention of ever returning to India. They are completely severed from their motherland. Then there is a third class of labourers whose lot is poor in this country, but poorer in their own. They have practically no rights in the Indian community in Burma, but are given greater protection by the Burmese and the Chinese. Finally the most vocal of all Indian opinion in Burma as well as in India are the vested interests whose connections with either Burma or India are not severed but closely connected, having both countries as alternative homes. It is this class which creates all the noise and stirs up the other classes because it is its interest to champion the Indian community in Burma, representing their own problems as those of the Indianseas a whole. They are people, who expect as of right, two domiciles--special privileges in India and special privileges in Burma also--a dual citizenship. With the establishment of the Provisional Government of Azad Hind, non-resident Indians became the subjects of this new government. They are at the same time British Indian subjects and now that Burma and the New Indian Government were at war with the British they became 'enemy nations' in Burmese territory. They were at the same time subjects of a Government friendly to Burma.

Things then took a new turn. It was no longer the case of special privileges for a minority whose allegiance lay with British India. With those who became the subjects of the Azad Hind Government, their so-called special privileges were forgotten, because they were subjects of their own government enjoying the hospitality of the Burmese. On the other hand, the Indians who identified themselves with the Burmese became naturalized Burmese subjects. This was the right course for them. Subhas Chandra Bose warned that they could not expect special privileges, but that equality was sufficient and that it was the only way to settle differences with the Burmese and urged them to identify themselves with the Burmese if it was their intention to settle down in Burma. It is noteworthy that during this period there were no communal troubles between the Burmese and the Indians, as in the days before 1942. All questions rising out of the presence of Indians in Burma were settled on terms of friendship, equality and reciprocity and there was nothing to be vocal about. It seemed that with the end of the British Era in Burma, the Indian problem had been solved for good. But there was a big snag. The Indians were not very happy for long. For that matter neither were the Burmese and the Chinese. It was the case of the Burmese Government ruling too many nationals who owed allegiance to too many countries. The

Indians owed allegiance to the Burma Government, also to the Azad Hind Government, another to the Nippon Masters, yet another to the Netaji Fund Committee, who could stretch their long hands into what matters most to the thrifty Indians--their purse. The Chinese had to profess pro-Wang Ching Wei sentiments, owing allegiance to the Burma Government and working in accordance with the dictates of the Japanese Military Police, with whom they were on the friendliest of terms. The rest depended upon the Burma Government, but were in continual fear of the Japanese. There is yet another class, which worshipped a new hierarchy of Japanese interests represented by the Nippon firms, and the various commodity unions which were totally responsible for the economic collapse of Burma. This class includes parasites of all nationalities in Burma, not excepting Formosans and Koreans, who not only exploited the might of Japan, but made the best of cutting the throats of both producers and buyers for their own selfish ends. And over and above them like 'the very colossus' strode the Japanese Army. Unfortunately in the welter of parallel Governments, which were laws unto themselves, there was also an undesirable group in the Burma Defence Army in the country which because of its immense prestige and popularity, often took the law into their own hands. It was very difficult indeed for the defenceless civilians to please and be on good terms with the powers that hung on them. Theirs was somewhat like the lot of the district officer. They were like the frog of a story which was told in the University about people trying to please everybody.

In the old days, the frog was not the ugly creature that he is today. He was handsome to look at and possessed such talent for singing, that his fame spread far and wide and away from the frog pond which was his home. He had to sing to the fish in the water as well as to other animals on land, like the tiger and the lion. Having to please everybody was a hard task, but it had to be done. So day by day, he roared with the lions and the tigers on land, which of course pleased them, but when he came back to the water there were the fish to sing to. And so by and by he not only lost his musical tone of voice, but his mouth began to stretch and stretch, until it extended from ear to ear. Thus today the frog is just an ugly little creature with an ugly little croak and a still uglier stretch of mouth.

Everybody became 'independent' of one another and did what he liked.

The "Free India" in Burma did not please many of the Indians. The Burmese Muslims naturally came within the fold of the Burma Government, the Memans and Khojas applied for naturalization, because they did not relish the idea of being under two governments; they followed the injunctions of H. H. the Aga Khan.¹ They dressed in Burmese clothes and adopted Burmese names, spoke the Burmese language and refused to have anything to do with the Indian Government in Burma, but all others who retained their diverse allegiances could set off one authority against another. Attempts at neutralising measures for the public good for the sake of individual interests were numerous, because selfish people knew that they could always rely upon the Japanese to sabotage the Burmese Government. The Japanese countenanced and encouraged such people and assisted them in creating circumstances which would enable them to flout the authority of one and seek the protection of the Japanese. Although the Burmese Government was unfettered in operating its own machinery, the whole of which was purely Burmese and devoid of any foreign elements, this menace to

1. The reference is to the Ismaili community (Ed.).

authority remained until the end of the period of Japanese occupation in Burma. If the Burmese Government undertook any task which was purely of a civilian nature, the Japanese Military would likewise do the same and encroach upon the Burmese Government's preserves and thus bungle the whole job.

There were hangers-on to the Japanese firms and the local 'butaisi' or battalions, who lorded over the village headmen. This privileged class would issue orders to headmen and the people, threatening them with dire punishment in the event of failure to comply. The language used by these scum of Burma was that of a medieval despot. Such abuses could be checked provided they were brought to the notice of the District Commissioner; but in the majority of cases villagers and headmen dared not report for fear of immediate reprisals by these gangsters who were prepared to sell their souls for revenge. A glib lie would easily lead the gullible Japanese, thirsty for any form of violence to beat up any complainants.

If the aggrieved party desired to seek redress, he had to go through the endless details of an enquiry to fulfill the demands of red tape. This of course meant repeated visits to Government offices and much of his earning hours would be wasted giving evidence and waiting upon the whims and fancies of the none too scrupulous clerks of country offices. The Indian would be harassed by the Netaji Fund Committee which collected subscriptions for the Indian Independence League and under cover of patriotism and Subhas Bhowse. The practice was to tour the district, with an armed guard ostensibly to escort the honourable gentlemen of the committee and the treasure donated by patriotic Indians, and make collections in the name of Indian Independence. In the process, violence or a show of violence by the escort would force the Indian tradesmen and moneylenders to donate the necessary quota fixed by the committee. Incidents of patriotic Indians donating to the Netaji Fund were much publicised and although there were a considerable number of patriotic Indians who gave willingly and with a true spirit of sacrifice, this committee was a terror to the thrifty community. In attending to his numerous duties as a great revolutionary leader, it is not possible that Subhas Chandra Bhowse would have known of the racketeering that went on under the name of Indian Independence. Many Indians complained to the Burmese Government, but they were nationals of a free government of India. On the other hand these Indians, when they were dissatisfied with the Burmese Government, would also go to the Indian Government for assistance. The Indian Government in its first flash of enthusiasm of power arrested Anglo-Burmese and Anglo-Indians and other half castes, who were subjects of independent Burma and threw them into prisons, although it had no legitimate right to do so. This was not known until the retreat of the Japanese when released prisoners came and told the story. The Japanese Military Police (Gestapo) were also doing the same things according to its whims and fancies, but only on a larger and cruder basis. Only the Japanese were the privileged class. They were not subject to the laws of Burma. They could not be arrested by the Burma Police. Victims of the Japanese Gestapo were seldom reported to the Burmese Government, because in most cases all their spirits had been beaten out of them. It was only when the Government made it clear that it would do all in its power to protect the people who would come forward and report on their sufferings that some sort of response was returned by the public.

A Government faced with the huge task of reconstructing and rehabilitating a war torn country saw the need of the confidence of the people before

it could undertake the job. It also saw with despair that before it could gain that confidence and start on a positive programme, the task of seeking redress for the people who were robbed at will and killed at leisure by the Japanese was so great that it saw little hope of ever achieving its task. This task of seeking redress and easing the friction between the Japanese and Burmese was likely to take up the whole of its working time. It was a cheerless prospect. Nowhere in its history has Burma ever been faced with such trouble. There was no prospect of an early termination of the war, the economic situation was getting from bad to worse, the people were in want of the bare necessities of life in a land of plenty. Speedy and effective action was what was required. The New Order Plan was the answer.

CHAPTER VIII

THE PLAN

Burma was at last independent and out in the front line. Her independence was born out of the war. The whole world was in a death struggle--no one could deny the paramount needs of the military. The circumstances under which the infant state of Burma lived during her first days provided an ideal situation for the Japanese Military to reduce independence to a mere nominal freedom giving the Burmese no control over her own properties. From the British days, the control of the mines and minerals and natural resources had been a sore point with the Burmese to whom the 'Yadanas'i-treasures--of Burma were dear. Exploitation of these resources by the British had formed the main basis of political propaganda along with the race and religion. Burmese freedom could not be limited by the nearest military pretext for the successful prosecution of the war. On the other hand because there was actually a war on, her national leaders, who had won that independence for her could also provide an excuse that it was because of sheer military necessity such limitation of her freedom were imposed, which, of course, was true; but no leader who loved his country could at the same time remain idle and wait for Japanese policy to change without the slightest effort on his part. It had been clear from the Preparatory Commission days that the struggle for real independence was just beginning, and that we had gained a lien and reputation. Burma was technically and at law independent which could be substantiated by sound international morality of Japan on the one part and a ceaseless struggle by the Burmese on the other. The choice was merely of method; force or negotiation. It was, of course, the latter method. The people after the first excitement of pageants and mass rallies, and of forms and symbols, began to look for concrete manifestation of Burma's independence. The capital was not so badly off, because it consisted mainly of people from the services, the army and the parasitic class of middlemen, who grew fat on inflated currency issued at the expense of the masses. The attitude of the Japanese, particularly of the higher strata, changed towards the Burmese officials. According to Japanese usage all Heads of Departments and upwards were addressed as "Your Excellency" at formal occasions. Officers were not intimidated or threatened. But in the areas which was Burma, where the 'productive' population lived there were no visible changes. The same infringement of the liberties of the people, the same cruel conscription of labour and the same poverty remained; and the Japanese Army detachment and the unscrupulous firms were the powers that remained. The New Order Plan was to provide the remedies, subject to such limitation of war as are within limits of human reason. Not only was a plan wanted, but action was to follow the plan 'in these break neck days'. The first task obviously was to set our own house in order, in the midst of a war, in order that Burma may be fit to put into execution this front line policy of the New Order Plan. Thus Burma entered the New Order with a plan which not only gave her real independence, but also strengthened her to be a worthy partner of the Asiatic nations in the Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere which could not survive unless each of the constituent nations were free and powerful. That was the idea. The basis was human labour--the primary wealth of a nation--without which its material riches would be useless. The objective was real independence; in other words a substantiation of the claims set forth in the memoranda of the Independence Preparatory Commission, which had been forwarded to the Japanese Government

in Tokyoi The Tokyo Government had indicated its intention of retaining its hold on the new state, while acknowledging the principle that the Burma Government would control all civilian matters and that there would be no unnecessary infringement of civil rights unless the war situation demanded such action necessary. Winning votes was not the basis, it said; a "Real Plan must be built on labour value whether it gets the votes or not--the votes must wait till the work is done and the peril averted, when the people may go back to their old political play acting if they still wished to be amused that way."i The 'majority' was to be won not by counting, but by 'action'! It was a departure from the usual desire from democracy towards authoritarianism, but it was clear that the departure was not to be permanent if the people so desired. The emphasis on labour as the primary unit of a nation's wealth was not only a step in the right direction, but at the same time it cleverly provided the way to make people forget, at least for a time, the actual material losses. It was the beginnings of the lesson of how to take care of ourselves. The underlying note of the policy was that if we slept over our future, there was no future coming to us. The initiative was to be on our side.

To begin that it was necessary to have the organizations utilise the driving forces of human energy, and for that purpose national units were to be formed, covering the population from top to bottom; and once this total mobilization of human energy was achieved, efforts were to be directed towards (1) maintenance and strengthening of the military front, (2) ensuring the people of civilian requirements, such as food, clothing, shelter, employment, transport and communication, health, education, publicity service, security, justice, a clean, fair and competent administration, fair economic opportunity and encouragement. Thus it was set to work and the people, through the political organisations of the Dobama Sinyetha Asiayone, the national services and the Government servants, began the process of setting order to their own house. The politically minded began to harbour hopes for the future. Surely the Japanese Military would appreciate a real honest to goodness effort by the Government for the people of the country. To those in Rangoon it seemed that there was nothing in the way of progress towards the desired end, and in the mofussal,* apart from the news that the Government were coming forward with a plan to provide a panacea for all the ills of the country, the conditions were very much the same as in the days of the Military Administration. Communications were bad, and we were sure that with the operation of the plan, things were bound to be better. In order to facilitate co-ordination between the departments of Government, there was a secondary provision for the adoption of a board system, with the National Planning Board as the radiating centre of our national programme. The board system which came into being must be mentioned. The original purpose, for which this system of the boards introduced, was for co-ordinating all departments of Government. It was an experimental measure of adding an additional ministerial function of 'group action' to be restricted to more important matters of state. More work could be done by personal contact between ministers, leaving the Secretaries a free hand in the conduct of day to day business. As the work of building the state became more and more difficult, the ministers found themselves solely occupied with attending Cabinet and board meetings. It has to be admitted that there was improvement all round, but it was unfortunate that all the good work done was in the end brought to a dead end by the lawlessness of the Japanese Military in Burma.

* "Mofussal" means in the areas outside the capital and other large towns.

These were the long range reforms in addition to the three important war tasks. We were at present concerned in war waging and state making. Burma's national development therefore was to keep closely parallel to the war by first attending to such matters as war administration, war finance, war industries, war communications, war health measures, war labour, war civil defence measures, war supplies and economy generally, and the long range reforms would consist of the principal fields such as the administration system, including village administration, law and justice, education, revenue, finance including insurance banking and currency, labour, industry, agriculture together with the land system, communications, general economic development, foreign relations, etc. Meanwhile there were the three most important tasks to overhaul the administrative machinery, to create a national war structure and to attend to immediate and essential war tasks.

The state wanted to be assured of the loyalty of its services, and then efficiency by a proper study and re-orientation of government policy regarding its treatment of government servants by the introduction of a new system of procedure for the efficient conduct of government work without red tape, by ensuring service integrity and discipline, and the introduction of the system of personal contact and co-ordination through joint boards to meet at regular intervals. It was said that if the government expected good work of its servants, they should be amply rewarded. Secondly, the national structure was to be composed of various organisation units of which the political Asiayone was to be organised and its members trained for leadership. Labour was for the first time put on an organised basis. National service was to be compulsory so that man power should be utilised for national service, or to form a reserve force for the Burmese Army. The Sangha (monks) was to be organised and used as a medium of propaganda for the state, and for national unity. A Special Central Karen Board was to be formed to restore amity between the Burmese and the Karens after the brutal massacre of the years 1942-1943. The immediate essential war tasks were more or less to secure for the people the basic civilian necessities of rice, cotton, salt and by-products, vegetables, transport facilities; to provide for the people a land distribution system either by sale, lease or rewards for war service, so that the people may have a material stake in the war. This turned out to be one of the hardest tasks of Government. Then there was the question of recovering all properties taken over by the Japanese Army for "war" purposes, of which a major portion formed what was loosely termed "enemy property". "Enemy property" had always been a very elastic term, and the interpretation by the Japanese Army meant everything of any value to the country, from pins, screws and nuts to steam rollers, locomotives and ships, no matter who owned them. That briefly is the first part of the New Order Plan, drawn and reviewed just before the Adipadi's departure for Tokyo, where a new Charter for the freedom of Asians was to be drawn up. The East Asiatic Assembly was to be a happy augury for the future of Burma along with other Asians, but it was difficult to see with what expectancy the people would view the forthcoming events, for the plan plainly indicated that the "independent" Government of Burma was to start substantiating its "independence" by trying to obtain its sovereignty in bits. Where was the independence won on the first August 1943? When the so-called historic declaration of the Assembly enunciated the five principles, the people were neither assured nor glad. What really did matter to them at large were not charters and declarations, but the bare essentials of life and the means to survive the war, so that the tyrannies and abuses connected with war may be done away with. The peasantry was not

bothered about the 'moral and ethical' principles of Japan, which would give 'co-existence and co-prosperity'. They did not even understand them. Those of them who did shrugged their shoulders and again adopted that 'wait and see' attitude, which had prevailed in the earlier days of Japanese promises. They understood that they were being asked to do things, which they did not want to do; that they were being prevented from following the ordinary pursuits of life. Homes were broken up, commodities forcibly seized, their bullocks confiscated and slaughtered, because the Army wanted them. State propaganda proved ineffective because the promises of the state in words were not followed by concrete results. So when the head of the state came back enthusiastic over the Joint Declaration of the East Asiatic Assembly, the response of the people was confined only to urban areas where mass approvals and resolutions could be engineered. Only a certain section of the political and Government circles, who were lucky enough to get the 'dope' of what had happened in this second visit to Tokyo, were somewhat pleased to learn that the visit had enabled the Adipadi to put before the Tokyo Government the evil doings of the Military in Burma and to obtain the assurance of the Imperial Government to remedy wrongs. It was said that the Burmese delegation fully warned the Japanese Government that if the existing conditions and the methods of the Japanese Army in Burma were allowed to continue, the Burmese could not accept the responsibility if Japan and Burma came to grief. It cheered us up and gave impetus to the struggle that lay ahead in our attempts to make Burma a truly independent state.

The people and the state were working against enormous odds. It was war time and Japanese Military glory was at its peak. The New Order Government consisted of purely Burmese personnel. It was not in any way fettered in its planning and day to day work, either in theory or in practice but it was ineffective in dealing with Japanese lawlessness. The people saw plainly that the Japanese did not respect the rights of a people of a so-called independent state because they had the arms. They therefore did not doubt the sincerity of the Government. It was not therefore strange that even when they saw the Japanese sabotaging Government measures, transforming the Burma Government as it were into a 'Logocracy', disappointed as they were, instead of losing faith gave all the sympathy and support it required. At no time in the history of British Burma had Burmese Ministers enjoyed such confidence. For three, six, twelve months the efforts of the Government went on ceaselessly, and when it reviewed the past at a very critical stage of her three years' history, the New Order Plan took definite shape. The situation of the home front deteriorated with the military situation and Burma was faced with disaster. She was in a veritable mess and was as in an old Burmese saying: "Proceed to front and there is a tin pot. Step backward and there is also a tin pot." Thus what was known as the 'Four Front' plan for joint civil-military action with regard to the war situation came into being. The very name of this second part of the New Order Plan is sufficient proof that things were not going well between the Japanese Army in Burma and the Burmese Government. The Four Front Plan was an assertion of Burma's rights and provided a fairly accurate chart illustrating the actual state of affairs in the country.

The political front revealed officially for the first time that all was not well with the Burma-Nippon Co-operation and that the Japanese had been doing "what the devil they liked". They were having their own way in the economic rape of Burma. The need was a strong and popular Government,

unhampered by a large and threatening foreign army, who could give concrete instances of Burma's independence to the people. The Army had to be accepted and according to the plan it needed four measures by which this could be achieved. First, no Japanese subject should on any account, either directly or indirectly, be allowed to mix himself up with any Burmese political affairs or parties; secondly, there should be no polling of Burmese public opinion by Nippon subjects in a way which was likely to unsettle that opinion by showing distrust of any member of the Government or doubt that the Government is independent, unpopular or stable. Thirdly, as for those in the service of the Burmese Government the Nippon Army should recognise their rank they hold respectively in the service as being equivalent to a certain military rank, to be settled by agreement for the purpose of their dealing, with the Army; and fourthly, Burmese liaison officers, who are either supplied or approved by the Burmese Government should be employed wherever possible by all Nippon Military units and commercial concerns to ensure better war relations among the parties, and further should an Army Unit or concern need Burmese Government interpreters, commercial agents, etc. other than those employed by the Burmese Government, the Government should wherever possible be consulted in selecting them so as to prevent the wrong type of Burmese from being employed and thus be given a chance to create trouble. Then there was a proposal that the Burmese Government should control all forms of mass mobilisation of labour, goods, etc.

The second 'front'--the economic front--is but a continuation of the political front on which everything rested. According to the policy there were seven basic necessities for the people on the civilian front. Briefly speaking the people were not getting those seven necessities in sufficient quantities because of the war and Japanese lawless methods of purchase. What was required was a war time civilian structure to undertake, organise and control either partly or completely, according to requirements all activities relating to these commodities either home produced or imported and to distribute them under a co-operative scheme. The first task of this new structure was to do away with the rubs and snags, which came in the way of our war work and relations with the Nippon Army, over the Army's demand for cotton, dry crops, seed oil, carts, bullocks, boats, labour, weaving, transport vehicles and commodity distribution. There was also a demand for a manufactured goods, the volume of which was fast diminishing and the Japanese had not been able to replenish the fast depleting stocks in Burma. It was a drive towards self-sufficiency. Building materials, transport vehicles and vessels, medicines, cattle, clothes, which were to all intents and purposes a Japanese monopoly. Added to all these was the "currency" over which the Government had no control. Beneath the veneer of apparent prosperity of some classes of people, an economic collapse was coming quickly and surely. This plain was the Burmese awakening to the dangers about which the Japanese Army in Burma had been continually warned against, without much success. Government set its heart to avert the disaster. How it did and with what results will be told later.

The third front--the psychological front--dealt with war propaganda and publicity. It is an attempt to explain to the Japanese that they were pursuing a wrong line of policy, which was detrimental to their own country as well as to ours. The new independent Government which had repeatedly asserted that it was a totalitarian state could not withstand the restrictions and interferences exercised by the Japanese Army. Burma now had neither the

control of the radio nor the presses and if there was any it was ineffective.

The fourth front envisaged a joint advisory board for East Asiatic Co-ordination politically and economically.

We had turned towards the East for emancipation. The answer had been a grand display of good intentions for the future "Co-existence and Co-prosperity and a place in the Sun". These flourishes of high sounding words and phrases came to us at regular intervals beating as it were a tattoo on our minds with such persistency that the people were almost convinced by 1943. The East Asiatic Nations Assembly, which issued the Charter of Freedom for Asiatics, was symbolic of the Rise of Asiatic Nations, giving promise of a world of equality and justice to all mankind irrespective of race, colour or creed. It remained only a symbol, but it was a symbol that stirred us to further efforts to force the issue with the leading power that had brought the New Asiatic ideal into being and thus get to the goal of real freedom. It brought to us with vivid reality that technically, verbally, as promises go it was 'all there', but that would always remain an ideal beyond our reach, if we did not stir and if we were not up and about. Those were the thoughts of a people, who were following the events of the world, with a scepticism born of bitter experience. These thoughts could not be exchanged except among trusted friends. When the Burma delegation came back from Japan and told us with enthusiasm the new principles of Asiatic Freedom, we did not have the heart to dampen their spirits. But there were some who still believed in those 'moral and ethical principles' which in independent Burma meant ruin and misery. The final blow when it came was greater to these believers, for they too loved their own country. The 'war' excuse was getting thin, and in course of the operation of our plan to substantiate indeed our newly won independence the tone of Government pronouncements changed. A heaven on earth was not promised without the purgatory of intense suffering. Early in 1944, we were convinced that our task was to transform this 'independence' of ours from the 'phony' to the 'genuine' whatever the costs. It was heartbreaking to know this and to know that we were weak, for the weak in this world obviously have no rights.

CHAPTER IX

THE POLITICAL FRONT

It was the policy of the Government to give the Burmese people every proof that they were engaged in this war for their own Independence. The only way was the creation of a nation-wide personal stake, and to make this Independence as real and visible as possible by leaving everything to the Burmese Government and the people, except things which cannot be so left, owing to the most imperative military reasons, which are in accord with the Nippon Burma Military Treaty as well as the Nippon Burma Military Pact and Memorandum. This was fair enough and it was in the interest of the Japanese nation that the military in Burma should fall in line with Burmese policy. Part of this plan was clearly a request to the Japanese Military to refrain from taking any measures affecting the civilians without previous consultation and the consent of the Burma Government. There were consultations when it suited them, and there were none when it did not and when they did consult it was generally too late, for the Japanese under the excuse of Military exigency had more often than not did not bother about the Burma Government. Thus the task of making the people see for themselves that Burma was an independent nation was bound to fail. The masses do not care for theory and principles but for the every day life of earning a living and getting it in the normal way. The cultivator produces his crops, and for those crops he expects a modest return which would clothe and feed him and his family, leaving something for charity and festivals. In peace time, he was continually in debt, and sometimes lost his land through these debts and became a landless agriculturist, who could not obtain permanent tenancies with landlords, but he did not have to serve more than one master. In wartime Burma, his conscience dictated that he should play a part in Village Defence, Air Raid Precautions and other Civilian Defence Measures, whenever necessary. If his conscience did not urge him to take up these pursuits, there were always numerous organisations which could bring him into their folds. Then there was the labour conscription which meant exile or even death. Consequently, most of his time was taken up by overzealous and officious minor Japanese officials, who came to the villages to teach them how to fight parachutists with sharpened bamboos. For the thousand and one things which she was either forced to do or was willing to do, all he had was a life of insecurity and want. The prices of his crops were small and prices for all essential commodities were high. He had imagined that independence would have brought him plenty. If the Japanese bullied him and forcibly dispossessed him of his property and he reported this to the Burmese officials whom he had always relied in the past, he found that the officials of the Independent Burma Government were afraid of the Japanese. He could not understand political principles, but he could see that even the officers of the Government were beaten up by the Japanese, who he knew were numerous and better armed. If that was Independence, he did not like it. He may not have loved officials in the peaceful days, but now he sympathised with them. The Myooks (township officers) and Wundauks (sub-divisional officers) of those days were great persons who in his eyes could do wonders. They were now collectors of grain, cattle and other produce which he could ill spare. He knew that they were forced by these little Japanese who called these officers 'big cow master' for collecting cattle and hides and 'big cooly master' for collecting labour. When even the 'big cow masters' and the 'cooly masters' did not believe in the

reality of Burmese independence, much less did his ignorant brother cultivator, who could understand independence only in its simple fundamentals of ko min, ko chin (Our King--Our State). The Government and the political organisations connected with it worked very hard to impress the people that they were independent and that it was for them to assert their independence. Also that it was a New Burmese Order with a purely Burmese Government. It was a purely Burmese Government no doubt; all the officials were Burmese, it was true; but to the villager what he saw was a predominance of Japanese force so he always called these three years of the Japanese in Burma as the 'Japan-khit', that is, a 'Japanese Order'! The failure of the Government and the political organisations to bring relief to them or to redress their wrongs adequately instead of making them hostile to the effort to substantiate our Independence, brought them closer to Government. Ties of blood and kinship were telling on them. However much ignorant the villagers were, they knew that once upon a time for thousands of years they had their own ko min, ko chin. They also had no respect for the Japanese soldier, because they had had the opportunity of observing the defects of Japanese character. They were afraid of him and his bayonet and the Army behind him. They even despised him; for they had seen him do the most barbarous things. Walking into the monasteries with boots on and asking for women from the presiding monks! The villagers also delighted in stories of Japanese ignorance. There were many stories repeatedly told and circulated, and enjoyed at every repetition, because they were true and at the expense of the Japanese. Apart from that the Burman always enjoys a good joke. One day, three soldiers of Japan were passing through a village. One of them was stung by a Russell's viper. When the bitten soldier fell, the other two turned round and in their curiosity, one of the two captured the snake which of course bit him on the wrist. Even then the third fellow, with more rage than prudence, and after several efforts managed to hold it without harm. The viper began to hiss and struggle. What was that sound? He was curious and held the ugly creature too close to his ear. The creature slipped through and bit him on the ear. All three died. Incredible but authentic! Then there is the unsightly custom of the Japanese soldiery bathing at village wells in what to the Burmese came to be known as Wut-lit-sa-lit or Japanese bathing. The word Wut-lit-sa-lit means stark naked. To the old fashioned Burmese mind which has been trained for centuries to regard such things as flagrant breaches of decency, it was shockingly barbaric. Such things in the daily contact of life with the Japanese soldier effected changes in the Burmese mind more than the efforts of the Government in its attempt to prove to the people that their independence was real. Contempt for the Japanese soldier was no good to Japanese prestige in Burma. The Burmese saw these soldiers, whom they despised, ill-treating their kind, and had to bear these injustices for fear of reprisals; but soon the Japanese soldier could not safely go about unarmed. The people had hitherto seen Government officers assaulted in public and put to shame by subordinate Japanese officers and it was now time to put a stop to these. The Japanese Home Government had been informed and the Military agreed to recognise Government officers according to their rank. The life of the average district official was unenviable. He served several masters and was a victim of schemes prepared by all heads of departments in Rangoon. Every department was coming forward with its New Order Scheme, to substantiate Burmese Independence. Many of them were sound, but most of them did not take into consideration that district officers' duties were so numerous that these schemes could hardly be put into operation. If things went wrong the district officers were responsible. In spite of all these difficulties, the Government at last managed to force the local Japanese officers and men to respect officers of the Burmese Government.

It had to be done through a series of reports and discussions. The equivalent ranks for the civil officers were as follows: District Officer - Colonel; Headquarters Assistant - Lieutenant-Colonel; District Superintendent of Police - Major; Sub-divisional Civil Executive or Police Officer - Captain; Township Officers and Inspectors of Police - Lieutenants and so on. This had a salutary effect. Reports of assault on Government officers decreased, although there were some unreported cases. It is of interest to note the origin of the use of force by the Japanese Army on Burmese officials. In the first place the subordinate Japanese officer in the district area usually belongs to a type which cannot be complimented for intelligence or for knowledge. He is always in a hurry and cannot be bothered about rules of procedure of the Burmese Government. Being generally stupid, he suffers from an inferiority complex when he meets a Burmese officer who has been trained a life time during the British days under the British system, and therefore starts off by asserting himself with the whole might of the Japanese Empire, and in the process does not understand the language which the Burmese officer understands. He literally 'rattles off' in Japanese and expects the Burmese to understand him through an interpreter, whose educational standard is so low that he understands nothing of official business. This stands in very striking contrast to what happened at the centre of Government where the interpreters were from Yale or Harvard or from U.C.L.A., and the officers courteous and truly Japanese in their behaviour. Except in one instance during pre-independence days, there were no cases of assault on Government officers while on duty. The War Co-operation Bureau served the useful purpose of settling these disputes.

In the building up of this political front, although ostensibly for the ultimate objective of a strong stable Burma in union with the Japanese, we were beginning to learn the hard lessons of a real political struggle behind superficial avowals of friendship. It was different from the political struggles of the British days when it was confined only to the politicians. In this case everyone of us Government servants had a political stake.

The position of the Government and the Burmese people has not yet been clearly explained to observers, who were outside Burma at that time. After 1st August 1943 Burma was technically, symbolically and in its domestic administration totally independent, run by Burmese with a genuine desire to put Burma on to her feet. There were no foreigners in the Government. The Japanese in Burma just carried on as they liked in spite of Japan's obligation to respect Burmese Independence.

When the Government, in its early eagerness to do away with the evils of the pre-independent Military administration, found itself balked in every practical application of all its own plans and measures and the Japanese continued to mobilize Burma's man and material power in their own brutal way and the only course open was that, if men, money and materials were to be given to the Japanese as Allies in any case, it was the Burma Government's duty to mobilize these necessities with humane methods and put an end to all Japanese lawlessness committed in the name of Greater Asia. The Government was telling its people of its power and independence and what the people saw were the same old evils which the National Flag, the National Anthem and the National Government failed to cure. Every one saw and the matter was something which politicians alone could not settle. In our peril we were forced to unite. It was no longer left to the politicians alone. We were a unified

body, long disciplined by our life in the services. The Civil servants of Burma have in the past often complained with some justification, that theirs is a thankless job, and often the most difficult. The Burmese people owe a tribute to the Civil servants who with their training, their patience and endurance in handling the endless details in the affairs of state, have proved during the troublous years, that they could serve the state, perhaps not in the glamorous way of the politicians or the military commander, but in their own careful steady way, always following the lead of those in authority with an unswerving loyalty, which cannot be changed even by public opinion. In the old days the official class enjoyed certain privileges in the country by reason of their influence and official positions and secure of their reasonably sufficient incomes. Although they were not rich they certainly lived comfortable lives. The life of the Civil Servant during these three years was anything but enviable. He did not mind the hardship which he suffered in common with the others in other walks of life, but for two-thirds of the period, his was one precarious existence on an infinitesimally small salary at a time of wild inflation and scarcity, in return for which he gave his 'all' for his country. In the strengthening of this political front from the humblest to the highest, there was a patriotic motive behind. The people were in suffering, and it was their duty to ameliorate that suffering. Their duty was towards their own country-- they could not have several loyalties and they do not have two loyalties. It is something which, not only our people, but also the British ruling over us again should consider in their treatment of these loyal men, who have sacrificed their individuality and everything that gives a kick out of life, in exchange for one-track lives which makes them so uninteresting to the rest of the world. In the Japanese days the permanent services were suspected of pro-British sentiments, many of them were insulted and interned, and some have died unheard and unsung. Now that the Japanese are gone, they are again suspected of being pro-Japanese. Ceaselessly these men toiled for the welfare of the people with a steadfastness which could not be shaken by Japanese threats of the sword and fire. It was not an infrequent thing for a judge to be stopped in the middle of a trial by the local commander that the accused should be released because the local commander believed him to be innocent. There were cases of lawyers being assaulted and beaten up because they had won their cases. There was one very interesting case from Thaton District in which one of the leading criminal lawyers appeared in a robbery case, in which the accused was acquitted because of his successful pleading. A few days later, one minor Japanese official went to his house and demanded why he was encouraging, aiding and abetting robbers to commit crimes. The reply naturally was that he had worked in the interests of the client for the fees he had earned. The Japanese was so enraged at his reply and outrageous conduct in defending a prisoner under trial, that he assaulted the old lawyer who was about sixty years of age. Such crass ignorance of the laws and customs of the land in an officer of the Greatest Empire in the East is not exceptional, and therefore provided a perennial cause of friction.

The Political Front was not working out according to expectations, but common worries and dangers brought Civil Servants, political traders, labourers and sometimes even criminals together. From now on, the Government and the people became a unified body which spent its time struggling by peaceful means against the Japanese who only knew the law of jungle in the satisfaction of their wants. It was a case of the Burmese trying to make the Japanese Military see the mote in Japanese eyes. But for the fast deteriorating war situation in the Pacific and the Burma Front, it would have been a

futile task. The Burmese resorted to obstructionist tactics and played the same game of prevarication, evasion and postponements, making as in the old days of 1940-41 the rulers' difficulties our opportunities. It was good leverage: it worked!

By the middle of 1944, there was an appreciable change of heart on the Japanese side. The Imphal campaign had been lost. Burmese hands were strengthened. Whether this change was due to Japan's sincerity, or Burma's persistency, or the military situation no one can say. There certainly was a change. Many Japanese knew that such a change was necessary. Time had arrived for some plain speaking on both sides, and for many months the two committees of the War Co-operation Board exchanged frank views. The Burmese Government pointed out that unless the abuses of the Japanese officials in the districts were eradicated, wrongs righted, and Burma given full responsibility in what she considered to be civilian affairs, she could not guarantee for the cooperation of the people in the war effort. That Japan was driving Burma to an inevitable collapse was also a point. The Japanese staff officers, on the other hand, assured the Burma Government of the sincerity of Japanese intentions as regards Burma's independence and economic assets, which would be utilized only for the purpose of winning the war which after all was for the common good. All material assets would be returned after the war. It was also pointed out that Burma was also to remember that it was a life and death struggle, and that the delays and inefficiencies on the part of Burmese officers in the collection of materials and mobilisation of labour were fatal to the war. The principle that civilian affairs were solely the business of the Burma Government and that the military were not to interfere with the sovereign rights of the Burmese people to govern themselves, was accepted. The exception was that if for Military reasons connected with the actual operation of war such interference was necessary, it should only be with the previous consent of the Burma Government. So far so good! Greater contact was required both socially and officially between the Japanese Military and the Burma Government. These were followed by a period of conferences which attempted to bring about an agreement on fundamental principles of schemes to cater to the needs of not only the military but also of the civilians. The framework consisted of joint committees in every district, subdivision, township and village tract. The District Officers were to be the controllers with complete authority over these joint bodies. They represented the Burma Government and would be instructed to act according to the plans agreed to at the centre. This gave the District Officers power, provided they were not afraid to use it or were not prevented from doing so by the bayonets of the local Japanese. The extent to which the District Officer could exercise this power depended upon his courage to brave Japanese brutality, and upon his personality. The system began well, but like all other joint undertakings with the Japanese Military, the underlings got out of hand. These Japanese underlings had lost face because their High Command had agreed to giving all the power to the Burmese officials and did what they could 'off their own bat's. The idea of cooperation on the basis of equality and reciprocity again lost its meaning. Public spirited men and Government servants alike, who had devoted all their time and energy, arguing, adjusting and compromising, studying the endless details of the problems and thrashing them out, felt that all their labour had been wasted. There had been so many meetings over these problems that these meetings became the subject of humorous discussion at the club, where 'shop should creep into conversation. Frustrated ministers, politicians, merchants and Government servants often met at the club to forget the interminable bickerings and arguments with the

Japanese on the War Co-operation Boards. When asked what they had been doing for the day, one often heard the remarks in Burmese, which when translated into English means: "I have become a professional committee or board man"

The War Co-operation Board and the Military which handled it became the butt of our jokes and complaints. In the midst of these worries was born a story in lighter vein telling us all that the word "co-operation" meant.

There was a sick man, a very sick man, and only a painful operation would cure him. There was a doctor, but owing to the war there were no anesthetics. Along came the doctor and said: "Sorry old man, no anesthetics--very painful and I must operate to save your life, but for a successful operation, I also need your co-operation--well?"

"Sure Doc. I'll play my part. Go straight ahead."

Operation over, and the doctor cleaning his hands and smiling glanced at his patient and asked: "I hope you co-operated?" "I don't know much about this. YOU operated and I was co-ing all the time," was the prompt but tired reply. A few Japanese appreciated that.

CHAPTER X

THE ECONOMIC FRONT I

When in 1941 the British Propaganda machines circulated a warning that Japanese military notes issued in Japanese areas were worthless it was considered British propaganda to prevent Burmese co-operation with the Japanese. Politicians had told the people that Burma should also be politically and economically independent to take her rightful place in the comity of nations of the world. The mines and the oil wells of Burma had not given the people visible material benefit. The unthrifty Burmese could not compete with foreigners who had established a firm hold on Burmese commerce. Business minded Burmese had not the wherewithal to start businesses and those who had the money were not business minded. There had been attempts by patriotic Burmans to found joint stock companies in many industrial and commercial spheres, but they were more patriotic than efficient. The Burmese people have the unique distinction of being the worst organiser of big business and may be for that reason one of the happiest. When the Japanese came they dreamt of a new world, wherein the Burmese with necessary encouragement from an independent Burmese state would be rajahs of commerce. They visualized the immediate and real liquidation of the Burmah Oil Company, the Bombay-Burmah Trading Corporation, the Burma Corporation, Steel Brothers, the Rangoon Electric Supply, and all other firms, and their displacements by Burmese undertakings. The small traders thought that the way was now clear for them. When the Japanese came they promised shiploads of manufactured goods, cheap and durable. These dreams disappeared with the advent of full control by Military Administration and the various unions of Burma's trade. The people were pleased to accept at par, a currency which was to give them a taste of co-prosperity. Three important unions worked by the Japanese firms were under the control of the Japanese Military Administrations. They were the Commodity Distribution Association, the Nippon Burma Rice Union and the Nippon Burma Timber Union. They worked towards the complete monopoly of all essential commodities in Burma. These firms completely disregarded the interests of the Burmese people and were beyond the ken of the Burmese Governments. These Japanese firms, which operated in Burma numbered approximately between one hundred and fifty to two hundred. The Yokohama Specie Bank which opened up with the arrival of the Japanese was for a time a Central Bank in Burma drawing its notes from the Southern Region or the Nanpo Kahato Kinko, until the latter came to Burma. About one hundred firms banked with the Nanpo and all these firms were permitted overdrafts of about 100 to 200 millions rupees, while there were about 150 firms which banked with the Yokohama, where they could overdraw any sum between 10 to 50 million. The military notes put into circulation by the Japanese were neither documents which promised to pay on demand at any office of issue nor were they sufficiently backed by bullion or other reserve. The policy of the army contractors was "pay any amount so long as the materials required were obtained for the Army". The quantity of manufactured goods in the country was limited to the supplies left by the Allied Armies and firms in Burma, apart from which with the exception of arms and ammunition, sake and comfort women Japanese ships could not bring anything into the country. Army requirements were generally fulfilled by a new parasitic class of brokers, pimps and prostitutes,

1. £ 1 = \$.21. Rs. 1 mil. = \$210,000.

and other hangers-on to the Japanese Army and firms in Burma. With the fast diminishing supply of goods for which fantastic prices were paid, and the limitless supply of military notes, the velocity of money circulation began to increase helped both by the Army and war profiteers. British Burma currency was withdrawn from circulation by two effective methods. The banks retained whatever British Burma currency they received while the Military Police arrested as spies people found in possession of British currency. We were not having any foreign relations in commerce except through the Japanese Military and as the money was good internally, people could still purchase their necessities with the money in circulation, but it was clear that they were losing faith in money and the more business minded began to invest in goods and gold, while those who lived hand to mouth, carried on somehow. That briefly was the position of the country when the Independent Government took over.

Paddy prices upon which Burma had in the past depended so much for her economic stability dwindled down to Rs 15/- per hundred baskets of 58 pounds each after a bumper yield in 1940-41 and in 1942 and the Nippon Burma Rice Union made the most of the opportunity and collected a considerable store for the Army. Agriculture no longer became a profitable occupation, because of the prices and the more profitable means of livelihood as labourers at aerodromes or as small middle men. The demands of the Army for cattle and hides, and the destruction of cattle during the invasion, and the transfer of two important cattle rearing areas of Kengtung and Mongpan to Thailand combined with the peremptory demand for cart transport by the Army reduced the cattle strength to almost half. And the mainstay of Burmese prosperity began to break down. Meanwhile the Nippon Timber Union had taken control of all the forests. The mining companies took over the mines. The Commodity Distributing Association took over all food and clothing. Vital transportation lines and means of transport were also in the hands of the military. It gave a complete start for Burma's ruin.

The people were badly in need of rice or substitute grain, salt, vegetables, clothing, building materials, means of transport and medicines, and conditions demanded that there should be state control of those basic requirements. The idea was that there should be a central agency which would have the sole right of purchase, either by free or forced sales of all goods listed for the purpose. To begin with the Japanese Unions had during the first year of Japanese occupation in Burma laid the foundations of a thorough monopoly of all factories, food, oil, vehicles and vessels. The Burmese Government was powerless. Matches, sugar, salt, food oil, petroleum and petroleum products, vessels and vehicles for transport, minerals and ores, timber, etc. were almost out of our reach and we were completely dependent on the generosity of the Commodity Distribution Union. The object of the Government was to reverse the order of things.

The Nippon Burma Rice Union had considerable stocks of paddy accumulated in 1942-43, but the cutthroat method of purchase by the Japanese firms on behalf of the Union with more profits to themselves and the middlemen made producers wary of Japanese agents. On the whole Burma still had a surplus of rice, which could not be exported because of the war. The agricultural labourer was not willing to till his fields for a small return. The main body of Burma's population was losing purchasing power, commodities were getting scarce and prices were soaring to unheard of heights and the shortage of cattle and disturbed conditions of the country brought down production with a crash. Unless something was done it was clear that there was going to be serious food shortage

in Burma, a thing unheard of in all her history. To encourage cultivation of paddy, Government with the consent and co-operation of the Military Administration launched a paddy purchase scheme, wherein the Military and the Government were to be the main purchasers of rice, at a guaranteed price of at least Rs 60/- at the talins (threshing floor), to help rice and paddy prices to rise. Income from paddy cultivation had always been the main source of income for the Burmese and unless that income was sufficient to provide them with the bare necessities of life, total economic collapse of Burma was certain. A further scheme for increased cultivation of paddy was launched by the Independent Government which allotted quotas to each village tract to ensure a production of at least 7 to 8 million tons in the years 1944-45 since Burma was not only feeding her own millions with her reduced stocks of food, but also two other armies at full strength. The cultivator found that only large amounts of money could buy him the essential clothing and food and agricultural implements. What he wanted if he were to cultivate his land was not money but food, clothing, cattle and agricultural implements. This was promised to them. The paddy purchase plan in spite of its evils brought good results in that the Government had by the year 1944 purchased so much rice that the Nippon Burma Rice Union had not enough rice in its possession to make rice a Japanese monopoly. The evils of rice purchase made many Junior officials of the Government rich with commissions earned or on speculation based upon inside information. Advance information of the price to be offered gave opportunities to buy up stocks which could be resold to the Government still under the names of the original sellers. It was like the system of making money rampant in the big firms of the old days. Enormous stocks of paddy accumulated in the godowns of sellers, never reached Government godowns and mills in Rangoon or at District headquarters granaries. There were cases of the same man selling the same stock to Government as well as to others. The records showed 'to stock' for the next two years, although it had long ago been sold to outsiders. Soon with the shortage of rice in Upper Burma due to breakdown of transport lines, price of paddy and rice began to rise. By the middle of 1944 it seemed that the Nippon Burma Rice Union could no longer supply the needs of the Japanese Army which at the time appealed to the Burma Government for help from the stocks purchased by them in 1942-43. In rice, yes! We had got them where we wanted. It had begun with a short lived Japanese monopoly. We had the rice but we could scarcely do any effective distribution even if we had wanted because we did not have the transport to send the rice to areas where it was most needed. Burma was almost starving in the midst of plenty. What was true of rice was also true of other essential commodities. It was the same old story of unequal distribution of essentials, fast printing of currency whose reserve was force of arms, and diminishing transport facilities. There was oil where oil was plenty, there was rice where rice was plenty, there was cloth where cloth was plenty, but there were none where the needs were greatest. The solution was therefore a coordinated transport plan. Shortage of rice in Upper Burma became pressing and claimed first attention.

The Burmese plan was to depend mainly on manually propelled forms of transport as most automotive transports were in Japanese hands. Steamers and motor boats and trucks of all types had gone into Japanese hands by way of Demand Request purchase. Ferry boats like the "Ava II" belonging to indigenous owners were leased to the Yamashita Kisen Kaisha for the fabulous rental or hire of Rs 500/- per mensem. Smaller craft which the Irrawaddy Flotilla Company, even in its infancy had not even bothered to cast its eyes on, were also taken by this demand request method. Everything was made to appear above

board because the sale deed would show a voluntary sale and Japanese could not be sued in a Burmese Court of Law. Sampans and other native craft were taken with not even a show of the demand request method. A motor launch would come careening into the midst of all river junks at any river station, and the renegade interpreters, similar to those of the Military Police, would order on pain of severe punishment in the name of His Imperial Majesty the Tenno Heika that all cargo should be immediately unloaded. And most of these renegades served in similar capacities with the British Army. It was entirely the boatman's business to see that he got rid of his cargo somehow. It did not matter whether he lost the whole. Hundreds of boats were lost in this manner. The boatmen ran away, leaving their boats, or they scuttled them secretly rather than give them up. In the old days these boatmen had led peaceful lives on the Irrawaddy and the chaungs, and the Irrawaddy had never known any disturbances except occasional storms which took its annual or half yearly toll in wrecks. The toll of storms in 1944 swept away about six to seven hundred boats, each with the average capacity of about 15 tons and delayed hundreds of other boats from proceeding up the river. This disaster at a time when all indigenous transport was practically in the hands of the Japanese was a very bad blow to Irrawaddy traffic. Although the figures do not compare very well with the usual tonnage transported by the Irrawaddy Flotilla Company in pre-war days, it was sufficient to cause distress during the war years. To come back to the Japanese Companies, the Yamashita Steamship Company was the only agent for the Japanese Army for riverine transportation. It had taken over all the steamers from the Senda Company, the latter having appropriated almost all private owned and all Irrawaddy Flotilla owned steamers when the Japanese occupied Burma. There was the Marine Bureau which controlled this company and all boats on the river except those belonging to the Burma Government which did not have more than three or four motor boats. The Marine Bureau was a sort of dual customs and port and police authority defacto. It registered all type of craft and delegated full authority to the Yamashita Company which did what it liked. Government pressed for full information regarding the functions of the Marine Bureau and its status in Rangoon and other outside ports in Burma. For reasons perhaps known only to the Japanese Army the Burmese Government was not informed of the real functions and status of the Marine Bureau. According to agreement between the Government and the Japanese Government, outside ports which included Moulmein, Bassein, Tavoy, Mergui, Victoria Point, and Akyab were to be controlled by the Burmese Government, the local customs officer in charge being the ex officio port officer. Rangoon was under the Japanese Military. Nowhere did the Port Officer exercise any authority as delegated to him by Government. For coastal traffic there was a racket called the Burma Boat Owners Union, members of which never really did own the boats because the Boat Owners Union was run ostensibly by the Marine Bureau but actually by the N Y K. Membership was forced. No coastal vessel could sail to any port, but only to the port directed by the Union for which arrangement there was a compulsory membership fee of ten per cent of the takings. Cargo was carried in the following proportions. The Japanese Military 30 per cent, the Japanese firms 30 per cent, which means Japanese Military 60 per cent and the Boat owner 40 per cent of the total. All freight to be paid in advance to boat owners Union before sailing including payment by the master or owner of the vessel of the freight on his own goods. The Boat Owners Union would then pay the master when the boat arrived at the destination. At least it was said so, but in actual practice freight charges were seldom received and if received at all only after a cut of Rs 50/- for the compulsory flying of the flag and the usual "tea money" or, to put it more bluntly, extortion tax. The reasons for advocating this system

are probably full utilisation of cargo space by the Army and prevention of Burmese nationals leaving for British territory without the knowledge of the Japanese. The Japanese however could not utilise all available cargo space and results were disappointing to them because most of the owners either destroyed or hid the boats in far creeks and chaungs beyond the reach of the Japanese, rather than join the Boat Owners Union. Other boats which ran the gauntlet of the British raiders in the Gulf of Martaban did not make sufficient money to keep the boats running for the rates fixed by the Union were low. Casualties from air activities were high. One boat had an interesting experience, so rumour went, for the master and crew of the boat are now believed to be in India. Their course was set for Penang with a cargo of rice, but the story relates that a storm drove the boat out of its course right into Madras harbour, where its cargo of rice was welcomed. The point is, there was practically no coastal service for Burmese cargo. The Yamashita and the Burma Boat Owners Union and the Marine Bureau were subjects brought before the War Co-operation Board in the Second Committee, the Burmese side of which pointed out that the interests of the Burmese people had been affected by the system adopted by these bodies for control of civilian shipping, both riverine and coastal.

Guarantees were received for riverine shipping that in future all requirements of the army would be obtained through the machinery of Government, but as regards coastal shipping which the N.Y.K. and the B.B.O.U. were having much their own way, the military first delayed their reply in the matter and then sent a reply which did not in any way improve the conditions of coastal shipping which did harm not only to the people of Burma but more so the Japanese shipping. Together with these problems was the question of registration of all vessels and vehicles under the Burma Defence Act and Rules. All vessels and vehicles were required to be registered with the Burma Government. They were not allowed to travel along roads and water ways except those specified in the Restriction Order. This controversy was never concluded because most of the Japanese firms which had vehicles and vessels in their hands, had either seized them or had procured them under the New Order Demand Request system. These were legally not their properties and had they agreed to comply with the restriction order which included all Nationals (not excepting the Japanese) Government would have been able to utilise these properties in the interest of the people. As the Japanese Government declarations repeatedly assured Burmese integrity and sovereignty, we pointed out to the staff officers that a special exemption of Japanese civilian firms was not in keeping with the Greater East Asia Declaration. A fatuous argument was advanced that if the Japanese firms submitted to the registration and restriction order, it meant that it was giving the Burma Government the secret of Japanese transport strength. The negotiations were dull enough, but suffice to say that they ended after a futile argument on the meaning of 'direct' or 'indirect' for three months and again it has to be repeated that Burma's attempt to safeguard civilian interests ended in another dismal failure. When the matter reached the supreme councils of the Burmese Government and the Japanese Government, there was a deadlock. A scapegoat had to be found. He was the Director of Civil Transport. Every time I see the thousands of empty transport vehicles of the British Army lumbering along the roads, they bring back memories of those schemes which could not work because we had not the 'stuff'.

CHAPTER XI

THE ECONOMIC FRONT IIt

On land conditions were much worse. The Township Officers and headmen were collectors of carts in addition to being collectors of labourers. The Army used all available carts and bullocks for transport, by a relay system of stages of about fifty miles for each group. Each group of carts had a group leader, and from each cart a certain percentage was taken for payment to the headmen. Such payment was justified because the headmen in those days did not get any remuneration for their services to the state; one of the defects of the period. The contractors, who catered to the needs of the army took an overhead charge from the cartmen. There were on the whole only about 400 trucks and lorries in the hands of the Burmese people. They were of the most mongrel types. There were no sources for supply of petrol and oil and spare parts for civilian trucks, not even for the Government Transport Bureau, which was a proud possessor of ten derelict trucks. To be in possession of petrol was a war crime, but crime or no crime the civilian bus service in the land was not only profitable but it was in itself an epic of improvisation, bringing out all that make-shift genius of Burmese fitters and truck drivers. The normal journey of a truck fully loaded with foodstuffs would take about ten days from Rangoon to Mandalay, some 400 miles by road. The petrol was either manufactured from the sap of the Kanyin trees or rubber or rice or was stolen from dumps which the Japanese had appropriated. The distillation of synthetic petrol was crude but it served its purpose. No scientific organizations conducted experiments for these first Burmese producers of synthetic gasoline. Their experienced was distillation of rice wine, generally known as country spirit, which burnt anything with a blue flame. There were two qualities: the first quality which is distilled twice and the second only once, their prices being about Rs. 18/- and 12/- respectively per gallon. The gasoline from country spirit was useful in that, it also served the drivers as stimulants which were so necessary in their life. Air activity, which had been of no consequence in the beginning turned out to be very deadly. Yet these drivers kept on contributing to Burma's distribution of commodities. High risks meant high profits. Crude distillation meant greater wear and tear of engines, already corroded with age and service, and spare parts were getting more scarce than gold. The engine oil generally consisted of a mixture of peanut and old engine oil which in peace days would have been discarded for oiling the springs. A few were compelled to use improvised bamboo gearings just to get to any place where spare parts would be available. These mongrel trucks are a tribute to both the manufacturers and the driver-owners. A Ford with a Chevrolet chassis and Dodge radiator grille, with springs from any car at all, the instrument panel of a Buick, picked up from the scrap heap. The feed pumps were done away with. The tank was taken on to the roof about ten feet high and the synthetic petrol allowed to rush down into the carburetor with a direct feed pipe. Soap and caked mud served to block up damaged pipelines for the brake or for the feed mechanism. Water and Japanese rice wine called sake served as hydraulic brake fluid. These mongrel monster derelicts would clank and rattle their way through the pot holes of the main road, lurching, groaning, creaking, clanging, slipping, skidding their way through. Sometimes like obstinate beasts they just refused to move. The passengers, about one hundred to a three-ton truck, hanging on from the fenders to the roof would then get down, sleep or get

drunk while the cursing and swearing driver would get out his gadgets and get going again. There was a fine new trick, which should interest motor car manufacturers and salesmen, and which to those uninitiated in the ways of the war time motor car, appears a marvelous wonder. A car would stop. Any amount of cranking and pushing or even rolling down a hill would not get it started. Suddenly the driver remembers and shouts to his assistant, who in Burma is known as a 'spare', the factotum of the Burmese bus, who gets down with a small hammer and starts hitting the carburetor, the engine head; the car is given a nasty push, a couple of explosions, reluctant jerk or two and off it goes like a temperamental mule on its wayward journey. These truck journeys bring to mind Peter Fleming's description of truck journeys in China, but it is more exciting here because the people are more temperamental and have not that philosophical reasonableness of outlook characteristic of the Chinese. These overloaded buses are bound to be the forerunner of double deckers in Burma. There may be four different-sized tyres on four different-sized wheels, but the bus goes on. The load does not allow for a simple picture--nothing so commonplace--a picture in wartime Burma on wartime roads just meant a full blow up. The method of mending split tyres together was a simple nut and bolt affair. Two gramophone machine springs are criss-crossed and rivetted to one side of a nut and bolt combination, which in turn is taken through the thickness of the tyre itself and fastened with nuts from the outside. It was found to be a more durable form of tyre repair and cheaper than bad vulcanising. The smoke and the dust of the car provided opportunities for allied raiders to shoot cars by dust trails at night. The engine is overhauled every four hundred miles or so. Piston rings changed as often as clothes. When the genuine parts were not available, water pipes were cut into piston rings. No car was considered safe travelling unless it had a spare set of pistons, bearings, carburetor, plugs, dynamo, bad oil and bad gas. Old plugs of worn out engines were strengthened in their electrical energy output, so it was said, by short circuiting all the plugs. Plug baking was a special luxury which could only be indulged in during day time, because at night fires attracted what in Burma was known as the "Reminders of Nirvana". They were the raiders of the sky who when they appeared always forced a prayer on the lip of those on the ground.

The Burma Railways which had been a state-owned railway was not run by the Military with their own experts. It had carried in peaceful days about three million tons of rice and paddy. The actual tonnage railed by the Military is known only to the Japanese. The Railway system on which Burmese indigenous transportation had been so dependent was almost completely prohibited to the Burmese now. A man who could travel with some sort of comfort on the railways of Burma during her independent days must have the luck of a winner of a sweep stake--a winner to get a permit to travel. The 'Lordst of the railwayst were the five yellow starred, or the white starred semi-civilian and semi-military employees of the Railway Butai or the Military Railway division. Former railwaymen were re-employed but none of them were given any positions of responsibility. The engineering staff had to do all the work, officers of the other section of the railway were kept at the railway offices classified as "superior labour"! with the express sanction of the Southern Regime Command at Singapore. They sat at the offices and were paid for their daily sittings, during which they acted as interpreters. During their leisure they were asked by the Japanese to collect all materials required by the railway. Some of them were suppliers of firewood for there was no coal and others dealt in generating engines, lathe machines, etc. The locomotive and permanent way men were the only men who were utilised for useful purposes. The Railways

had never been a strong point in Burma. It was as corrupt as any railway could be in the world but Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere management broke all previous records.

If one wanted to make a railway journey it was advisable to consult a doctor to see whether one is fit to make it. A railway journey deserves a permanent record in any book on wartime Burma. In the first place, a man is not permitted to know the time table of the trains. If he does or if he does not and is foolish enough to enquire from the great "Railway Master" who is probably the equivalent of a ticket collector or a brakeman, he is marched off to the police station on a charge of "espionage". One does not know on what sort of thriller the average Japanese feeds his imagination, but this 'spy mania' of theirs has no equal in the world. A couple of days of the usual detention or in the event of the prospective passenger answering all questions truthfully, a couple of months, after which he may, if he dares, have a chance of making another attempt of boarding a train. We Burmese have always been on the easy side of things, especially in public places. The queuing up habit has never attracted the Burmese. It is the most repugnant thing to the Burmese--like standing sheep going into the slaughter house one by one. A little push to the side, a heave to the front, laughing, joking, shouting, gesticulating to the despair of the booking office clerk, clutching like a drowning man to that little yellow cardboard which gives him the right to a seat in the carriage, where he would as sure as not, claim enough accommodation for five persons, was something which the average traveller could not forget. And then once seated, a glorious smoke or an equally glorious cup of tea or lemonade from hawkers who sold anything from tea and cakes to baby's knickers--those were the old days. The Burman looked back with yearning. To continue the story, the traveller queues up--he had to. The Railway Master or his Burmese satellite sees to it with a stick in hand. Queuing up was all right, but the Japanese in Burma had acquired the habit of making the people sit down on their haunches on the ground and nothing was more humiliating to the travellers than this. The traveller felt that he was in the court of law tried for a criminal offence. The average queuing period was anything from twelve to forty-eight hours. If he went away to do all the normal things that man has to in private and cannot perform publicly in the course of day, he loses his place. In addition he may be slapped for "disorderly behavior". Eventually when he is just about to get a ticket after braving the elements for about three days, he may be told that there is no train and he is just left to take care of himself anyhow. In the meanwhile, he may see a man with tons of luggage strolling along chatting much too obsequiously either with the policeman or the railway master and going off on the journey a few minutes after his arrival at the station. The traveller cannot complain to any person, because there is no one in authority who could do anything about it all. The Burmese Government were not allowed to have anything to do with the railways. After heroic effort, when a passenger does have the unheard of privilege of getting into a train, he finds hundreds of others going towards about one or two small carriages, passenger coaches for soldiers and cattle trucks for the civilians--everything on Co-prosperity basis. Once in the carriage, there is no earthly chance of getting out of it anywhere, except in the event of the carriage being required by His Majesty's troops, in which case he is carried along with his stinking struggling fellow men, having a hundred to one chance of retaining any luggage in possession; then on to the platform of a god-forsaken station, which does not even have the usual railway 'master'. He waits there for another couple of days or even seven days, by which time he is so desperate that he tries to get accommodation on the buffers of the freight cars and finds to his amazement and chagrin that others are there

already no less practical and imaginative. The continual air raid scares and air raids make him lose his place every time. In the early stage of the opening of the railways to civilian passengers there were tickets—to be precise, these tickets—one for small pox, one for cholera and one for plague. Japan was looking after Burma's health. Indeed! But there were no tickets for itch or Japanese sores as they were known to everyone then. This ticket system was later replaced by the ingenious system of chopping a seal on the person of the passenger, which meant that if by chance the person has a bath, that is if he can, or the marking is rubbed off by continual bodily friction with his fellow passengers, he is likely to be apprehended for travelling without a ticket. This personal seal-chopping was introduced, it is believed, to do away with the professional queuers up and ticket sellers, who did the job for those who could not stand the strain of waiting for a train. These gutter-snipes were generally allied with the policeman on duty or were procurers of women for the rail master. The bigger the station, the greater the evil. Heads of departments of Government and ministers had to give previous intimation of their intention to travel, but even they with their reserved accommodation on a cattle truck were likely to be turned off unless they had some Japanese officers with them. Their lot was better than that of the masses, for they had the former railway servants and the railway police who in their own timid way, did something to save the face of officialdom. That is the true to the life picture of the passenger transportation by railway, it is the truth and nothing but the truth in all its bareness.

The following true story illustrates what a subordinate Japanese official can do in every sphere of Burmese life during those three years. It happened at the time Government was doing its utmost to send rice to upper Burma. It is based on official report received on the death of two members of the Transport Bureau in a railway disaster. The train was proceeding towards Taungdwingyi and Kyaukpadaung, when at a bridge on the line, the Burmese workers on the permanent way stopped the train and warned the engine driver that a certain bridge which they were about to negotiate, was unsafe to rail traffic. The subordinate Japanese railway official who was in the train was quite indignant that the train should be stopped. He therefore walked along the line and tested the bridge by jumping on it, and said "See--Good Kai!" and ordered the train to cross the bridge which of course collapsed. Many lives, including two wagon inspectors from the Transport Department of the Burmese Government, were lost to say nothing of the loss in goods and rolling stock of the already depleted railway.

The transportation by rail of goods on the other hand provides no saving grace. Government had tried to protect civilian consignors of goods from the very beginning because very much of the same corrupt conditions prevailed as before, but then traders can pay money and money makes for convenience. To begin with, contractors supply to the Japanese firms were even given special trains for their goods while the private trader for Burmese consumption was never considered. A Japanese firm, known as the Tsuun K.K. functioned as a forwarding agent for the Military railways but in actual practice they were almost a department of the railways. Freight cars were allotted in order of the following preference. Priority one - military goods; two - Japanese firms' goods; three - private traders. The last class depended on how much a trader could pay to the subordinate official and clerks of the firm and the railways. The struggle between Burma Government, on the one hand and the Tsuun K.K. and the railways on the other, will be explained later. All forms of transportation were clearly in a hell of a mess. To set it in order was one of our

tasks, but vitally linked up with this were two others, which a virtually bankrupt government must tackle with boldness, promptness and with sanity.

They were to procure adequate supplies of essential commodities and to ensure a stable currency.

It is relevant to mention in passing that when the Government prior to independence had made an effort to control commodities, the first flouters of authority were the Japanese Army units and Japanese Army contractors, who adopted two methods of getting their supplies. The first method for buying fresh vegetables, eggs, meat and other daily necessities, was to outbid indigenous traders with a complete disregard to price control orders which had been issued with the consent of the Japanese Supreme Command. The second method of purchase was utilised in the purchase of materials of greater value, such as vegetable oil, cotton, oil seeds, potatoes, wheat, etc. It was on the "demand purchase" basis. The history of price control in Burma is but one disastrous failure. It began exactly on the same lines as the First Civil Affairs Control Order of 1945 in Rangoon.¹ The control order came into being before there was any machinery to control black-marketing and the order was applied only to the Rangoon Town District. None of the sources of supply of commodities were controlled. This was found out too late and when the control of the sources was attempted, there was insufficient co-ordination between the rural and urban districts. District Commissioners on their own initiative started controlling prices without co-ordination with other districts. Commodities were stopped in transit at a time when internal civil transportation was already breaking down. Traders who were bent on making profits stopped trading and even if they wanted to transport facilities were not readily obtainable.

To begin with, the control of the transport routes and vehicles and vessels were first necessities. Government introduced a system whereby all essentials could only be purchased through a central agency, but it was doomed to failure because the Japanese Army would not give in in the matter of purchases by the Japanese firms. This central purchasing system envisaged registration, which meant that with the exception of properties owned by the Army and Navy other properties within the definition of "necessities" were to be registered. No reason was given why an exemption was required for the Japanese firms, except that the firms were operating for the military. Suffice it to say that the main body of purchasers who neither cared for the Burmese people nor for their destitution were the Japanese firms who with their almost unlimited credit with their own banks were getting all the materials they wanted in exchange for worthless currency. Neither side gave in and the deadlock was never solved both to the detriment of the Japanese and the Burmese.

The Burma Government pressed the point that the railways and the riverine transport systems, as public utilities should be placed under control of the Burma Government. The answer was "by and by" and when the Government said at least there should be civilian representation and a civilian body under the control of the Government to safeguard Burmese civilian interests, the Japanese gladly agreed to the principle, but by the time a system was introduced after the usual bickerings, arguments, splitting hairs on the rights on either side, Allied air activity made it impossible to utilise railway transportation either for goods or for passengers. The Burmese Government Transport Department had to depend upon the whims and fancies of the subordinates of the Tsuun Company

1. A British regulation.

and the Nippon Railwayss Railway freight cars were given in dribs and drabs to the Government, while those who could pay the highest to the clerks concerned received wagon space for shipment of rice to Upper Burma, where there were already signs of an impending famine. Burmese junior officers who worked for the Tsunn K.K. were also corrupt, the retailers of rice were corrupt, everybody on the whole length of the railway system was corrupt, but the Burmese Government was powerless except in regard to its own servants.

Meanwhile Japanese printing presses were turning out daily something like four and a half million rupees worth of money. The CDAB continued with its tight hold on matches, sugar, oil, petroleum products, cloth and sundry goods of all kinds, which they doled out to the public in small quantities. Civilian transportation broke down. This breakdown was accelerated by a bedlam currency, war profiteering, and Japanese demand purchase mobilization of Burma's goods. Allied air activity completed the picture. The Government was bankrupt to all intents and purposes, for whatever money it had was in the form of Japanese currency and former British Burma currency left behind in Burma, something like a hundred crores either disappeared or were in Japanese hands. The Department of Forest and Mines of the Burma Government became known at the Club as the forestless, logless and mineless department. Japan, it was said, was preparing for a long war. A priori, one would have expected the Japanese who were world famous for their thrift, to work out a system which was waste proof. The forests of Burma which have for years been maintained by a huge staff of highly trained officers and men were something which Burma could be justly proud of. There was a time when even possession of a small piece of teak or pyinkado meant conviction at courts. The Japanese believed in the Japanese saying that the Japanese mind was like a bamboo. It was always straight like the bamboo when cut. So, straight they went into the forest, cut any old tree for any old purpose. Young teak trees from the nurseries were taken for wood fuel for the railways. Forest officers informed the Japanese officers that there was a system of planting teak trees to make the plantations a rotating and inexhaustible supply centre, which required that wood should only be felled in compartments marked for consumption. They were insulted, assaulted and told that the Japanese could not follow British methods. Anybody who was on friendly terms with the local Japanese officer could go into the forests at leisure and cut whatever tree he liked, and Japanese firewood contractors made the most of the opportunity. Local mine owners from the Tavoy and Mergui mines were driven off from their mines after the usual "demand purchase" method. When the Forest Department needed timber for the Government, it had to write to the Nippon Burma Timber Company time and time again. Only in the salt monopoly there was early loss of face for the Japanese CDAB.² The Japanese attempt to complete monopoly of salt to be sold through dealers appointed by the CDAB was countered by the Government measure of widespread boiling of salt free of duty for domestic purposes and as the salt factories were in the hands of the Government, salt manufacture in a short space of time was as normal as it could be in the circumstances. CDAB dealers did not find it profitable to deal in salt and soon gave up. But the Japanese in Moulmein, the CDAB branch, the Marine Bureau and Boat Owners under the control of the N.Y.K. all acting together, stopped any boat with salt coming to Rangoon without the CDAB permit on the plea that they were stopping the boat and not the salt, which of course they quietly ordered should be dumped at the nearest CDAB godown. This went on till the very end. In Upper Burma, cotton was "demand purchased" on pain of immediate assault. Vegetable oils and oil seed was necessary for the Army and it became a war necessity. Bullsacks for their meat and hides became war necessities,

2. Commodity Distributing Association (Burmese).

followed close on heel by potatoes, onions, wheat, beans, almost everything in Burma. Local Army units decided on what their needs were, fixed their own prices or not at all and purchased them at the point of the bayonet, assisted by renegades.

Government at last did the only thing left open. It informed the Japanese Military that the basis of co-operation was out of joint and was doomed to failure, because of Japanese delinquencies and that it could not take further responsibility for its people. So at long last as in the case of so many other problems another understanding on the principles was reached mainly on the basis provided by the New Order Plan. The Government understood everything on the basis of equality and reciprocity and there began a series of discussion for the Burma Government to take over the responsibility of the CDAB. The Government had a co-operative department which should act as collector of produce and distributors of goods which could function more efficiently than the wholesaler and retailer system provided by the Japanese CDAB. First appearance showed that the Burmese people were about to have the first real control on their own produce and while discussing the share of capital of the New Distributing System under the Burma Government, a deadlock as to whether Government could take 60 per cent occurred, shortly followed by a counter proposal by the Japanese side, probably at the suggestion of the Japanese firms, that it would leave everything to the Burmese, but that there would be a new Japanese Traders Association which would give the goods to the New Government Organ for distribution thereby turning the Government into a mere wholesaler. Just then the Military situation got worse and the end came before there was sufficient time to thrash out these problems.

CHAPTER XII

THE ECONOMIC FRONT III

• Printing presses of Japan, the general shortage of manufactured goods in the country and the mad economic policy of the Army gave birth to the Khit thit pwe-sa--the New Order Broker, the Nouveau Riche of New Order Burma. It was the greatest upset of Burma society throughout her history. It is common knowledge that in the first interregnum everybody magistrates, lawyers, doctors, clerks, politicians, soldiers, labourers, became at some time or other shopkeepers who depended for their stocks of goods on any person who had the goods. Like exceptions to every rule there were honest people who made use of their opportunities to amass a fortune by honest methods but generally this new class of people consisted of rogues of all variety, whose god was the riches they gained out of the ruins of a war shattered country. Money was plentiful and goods were scarce and they were in such demand that prices were rising hourly as it were. There were cases where a man while bargaining would suddenly find himself outbidden by another purchaser. The notices at shops were generally in the nature of "Today's price is today's price--and tomorrow's price will be tomorrow's--Hesitate and you will repent--Buying now your money will be well spent." The demand for goods was so great that the new order trader could earn money without either using his wits or his money. A walk on the streets he meets a friend, a casual chat, a bargain is struck. The goods are brought and within a few minutes a couple of thousand rupees earned. There was the customary cut on the price or the usual brokerage. Prices rose a thousand times in some of the goods and the best example of wartime price-rocketing can be found in emetine hydrochloride, the holy grail of the New Order Broker. A pound of emetine hydrochloride was at one time Rs. 26,000,000/- or ~~25~~25,000,000. There is no record that it was sold.

Insolent of countenance, with a new shine of prosperity too new to his once poverty lined face, he throws his weight about from place to place, carrying the inevitable Shan bag or the leather brief case, the trade mark of the broker of wartime Burma, a wad of notes above his pockets almost up to his nose--he is the Khit thit pwe-sa. A new parasite of a new regime, living on his fellows, cutting their throats whenever opportunity offered with the help of the Japanese firms and their none too honest clerks; he buys and sells, drinks and spends, and quarrels and goes to gaol. He deals in pins and motor cars, onions and potatoes, junk and opium, women and wine for in his time everything sells and buyers are none too discriminate. Coming, as he does from that urban group of people who are half literates and are mostly responsible for the stigma against the Burmese that they are a lazy and indolent people, that parasite class brought into Burmese business circles a new business morality. "More throats cut--more money earned." And thus was money made. They could pay a hundred rupees for a packet of cigarettes, spend a couple of thousand on their dinner, pay another hundred for theatre seats, keep several mistresses, who came in useful for his business associates or for bribing the Japanese "Mar Sa Tars".¹ To this class the Japanese Interlude in Burma was a paradise. They were the people who worked for the speculators and the war profiteers who dealt in large sums of money investing in goods and gold, cornering the market and smashing it to suit their purpose, and growing fat on the land. They prospered, went in and out of Japanese or Burmese prisons, and prospered again ad lib.

1. Burmese version of English "Masters".

While on the other hand, the peasants and the Government servants lived on the margin. While their former servants sported silks, Government servants' clothes were getting threadbare. While these Nouveau Riche dined and wined, the humbler producer of rice went to the slave labour camps, died or lived a living death, in order to substantiate Burmese Independence. Money was plentiful, clothes there were with the Army and the stockists, food there was, but food was not their own. The goods and money went round the mulberry bush in an unending rush, while the rich got richer, and the poor got poorer. Young girls could not leave the house because they did not have clothes to cover their virgin bodies decently. There were hundreds of cases where only one member of the household could go out of doors to work. The untold suffering of the poor agricultural labourer is not known until one goes into the countryside. It was he who bore the whole load of tyranny of the New Order in Burma, but the Burman lives, he suffers and weeps, he laughs and forgets, "for after all", he says, "all things are impermanent--we have suffered and better times shall come--we have served the state and some day perhaps there will yet be prosperity". He is still the Burman of Fielding Hall and Furnivall, except in that he has awakened to a New World of suffering and has now learned to make shift for himself. He did not want money for the work he did for his landlord and master. He wanted clothes and if in his spare time he made little baskets or mats from straw or bamboo he would send out his wife to the towns to exchange these for old clothes. He was poorer, but he still retained his self respect, for when he wanted a thing he asked for it plainly and did not, like the hangers on to the Japanese, grovel before the new conquerors to gain his ends.

The Government servants, officers and clerks alike had to resort to investments in goods which brought them an additional income and those in authority had to overlook these things, for Government servants too must live. In spite of these sources of additional income, signs of their hardships soon became apparent in their clothes and in their homes. Most of them had lost their all--modest fortunes and homes built in a life time of hard work. They were now living in huts in what they considered to be safety zones--safe from air activity. It was almost a whole three years of camp life. Many daily necessities now became luxuries which only the Nouveau Riche could afford. One day a District Judge who had hired a trishaw, that is a bicycle side car combination, stopped at a fruit stall and was bargaining with the vendor for a bunch of bananas which he wanted for his children. Ten rupees was too much and the trishaw men intervened and said that if "Uncle wanted them for the children" he would make that bunch of bananas a present to them. Toothpaste cost Rs. 200/-, a cotton shirt Rs. 900/-, a silk longyi Rs. 2000/-, a former anna loaf of bread Rs. 3; childies Rs. 600/- per viss, meat, fowl or pork rose to Rs. 600/- per viss as compared to Rs. 1/- pre-war, a motor car which was once a necessity to the average Government worker sold at about Rs 400,000/- second hand. The Government was most unhappy about this, but it could do nothing except tackle the economic question as a whole. Special war allowance, dearness allowance and increase in salaries could only be made up to a limited stage. Many left the services, while the more patriotic elements continued to struggle. The humiliation at the hands of the New Order brokers and shopkeepers whose salesmanship originated from service and price of purse, was hard to endure. You were told not to touch the articles displayed on the tables unless you had the wherewithal to buy the stuff. It was not merely a take it or leave it affair. If one went away disappointed at the price, one had to hurry to be out of earshot of the rude remarks made by the shopkeeper. There were even stories of the once humble and down-trodden "rickshaw wallah" who once judged

his fare from his looks and clothes, now looked whether the possible fare had the Government 'arrows' on him. Government servants had arrows and stars of different colours to indicate their ranks for the benefit of the Japanese Army. A man with an arrow badge on his chest seldom got a rickshaw or trishaw without a protest. They were not good fares.

People generally became undernourished owing to the deteriorating quality of the goods sold at the markets at exorbitant prices. Scabies overwhelmed those who once turned up their noses at pimples. Vegetables were luxuries which not many could indulge in, especially potatoes and cabbages and cauliflowers. Everything went to the Japanese Army. Currency was one of the many root causes and when Government and the people really got down to business to avert a disaster this was what happened. Government had according to the New Order Plan got down to business and it had already been seen how that worked. The institution of the planning board for the rehabilitation and strengthening of Burma's economic structure was being started and a special research commission was sent to Japan, Manchukuo, Wang Ching Wai China, Formosa (Taiwan), the Philippines, Java, Borneo, and Thailand to study the conditions of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere and among its recommendations there was also the obvious suggestion that the Burma State should control its own currency.

There was a currency committee to study and deal with this problem. Burma had her own bank, but it was only a commercial bank. It could not or did not issue banknotes as currency for Burma. It was said there was an arrangement that the Japanese notes would be withdrawn from circulation as soon as the Burma Bank notes were issued, but the Burma notes which had to be printed in Japan never came to Burma with the exception of the samples which graced the notice boards of the three banks in Burma. There were talks that the Japanese did not mind the issue of fully backed Burmese Government bank notes, but that they would still continue to use their military script. From this result it seemed that, for reason known only to the Japanese, they did not want a stable currency in Burma. If there were other reasons for the failure in the printing of the Burma Notes and in the inability of both sides coming to an agreement on the currency issues it was never known to the public who judged both the Government and the Japanese from what they know and not from what they should have known. Increased production, efficient transportation, contraction of purchasing power, organised system of supplies and control organisations which the Government wanted were dreams which never materialised.

In her attempts at building up a sound war economic structure, there was one significant fact which did not escape the notice of the Burmese. The Japanese Army in Burma had many former civilians who had accompanied the staff as experts, but the advice of the experts were seldom listened to. It was always the Army which knew best. The so-called experts occupied a subordinate position and therefore dared not offend their superiors. If sometimes their advice was taken, plans generally went wrong because, as has been repeatedly mentioned in these pages, of the subordinate Japanese Army officer. In spite of the stern discipline of the Japanese Army there is a certain looseness of control over such affairs which gives the observer the impression that either the organisation is bad or the indiscipline which has been illustrated in almost every Japanese dealing with other Asians in the East Asiatic Region is studied and deliberate.

The patience of the people with the Government was stoical but they did

not lose faith in it, because even if it was weak they knew that the Government was the only organised body to fight for their rights. This was the first lesson that the people learned in their swimming lesson at Independence. And so we floundered on.

CHAPTER XIII

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL FRONT

Yoroshi! Yoroshi! Splash! Ha-ay-! Hay-ay--! Girls and boys--water glistening on their brown faces under bathing rubber caps, clothes sticking to the slender bodies of the girls, singing, laughing with pure joy--the joy of being splashed and sprayed with water underian April sun, the joy of being alive, of living in a world of death. Some lucky ones were on open trucks and cars, the less fortunate on bullock carts and others still less fortunate on the foot trail alongithe road, with more boys and girls and small children grouped at water points, stopping here and there purposely, inconsequently, carelessly, taunting those on the road with "Yee Dar Paw--Yee Da Paw"! a battle cry recently introduced for water festivals. It means "Laughable! Laughable!" indicating that the water throwing could be tossed off with a i laugh. Drums beaten. Songs sung to hoarseness along the procession of decorated cars, trucks, carts, tongas, rickshaws, cycles, the whole day--for three whole days--a carnival of water, flowers, beauty and youth. A happy people whose happiness finds expression in the pure joy of being wet. This water festival knows no distinction of race, colour or creed in Burma! All races, dressed or naked, are expected to share this joy of being wet. The joy of tauntingione another in that pure humour characteristic of the Burmese race and laughing it out. The elders look oniamused and reminiscent, too mellow for the exuberance that is the prerogative of youth, thinking of the days when they were young. They keep sabbath and observe the eight precepts of the Lord Buddha. Peacetime festivals meant elaborate preparations, fleets of cars, special costumes and all the paraphernalia of beauty, artistry and decoration, but war did not curb the outburst of feeling. Materials were scarce and improvisations with palm leaves, leaves of all kinds of trees were good enough for there was still some water, isome people, a lot of fun and laughter; and theyi more than made up for the want of materials. The 1944 festival held a lot of fun at the expense of others. And why not? On with the show. It was the most perfect natural outburst of public feeling. It was more perfect because it was not engineered and rehearsed. It was true to Burmese tradition--spontaneous! It happened everywhere, in all the territory that was 'Independent Burma'. The limericks caught on like wild fire:

"Go Slow - Go Slow - Oh Master - Yoroshi! Yoroshi!
Be quiet, Oh Master or mother will hear - Yoroshi! Yoroshi!
Jewels! Jewels! - Oh Master! Yoroshi! Yoroshi!
Are you going back to Japan, Oh Master? Yoroshi! Yoroshi!
Co-prosperity, Oh Master! Yoroshi! Yoroshi!
Are you taking everything, Oh Master? Yoroshi! Yoroshi!
Beat that awful fellow, Oh Master! Yoroshi! Yoroshi!

These and many more bearing the same context were uttered. A word of explanation on 'Yoroshi!' It means 'Good'! It was the ironical tone in which these and other more unprintable limericks, bearing three or four shades of meaning, with only the irony to provide a clue to the real import of the words, rang throughout the whole of Burma. The main theme of these improvised rhymes was the Japanese failing for women and the good things of Burma. The first part of each limerick forms the verse and the two Japanese words which follow form the chorus! There were also little verses on the Japanese style of bathing in Burma. The whole thingyan was one huge joke at the expense of

the Japanese and of those who fraternised with them.¹ This spontaneous outburst was a disclosure which the Japanese did not relish because the Burmese had learnt to despise them from their manner of life in the country. The Japanese Military police sent its agents everywhere to trace the origin of these songs and it is not known whether there were any people victimised, for it was something which could not be traced as it was something which had no origin, except in the bottled-up beings of the Burmese nation. It was in such an atmosphere that Japanese propaganda had to fight through to Burmese hearts. From enquiries made by those in authority in the Burma Government, it is presumed that the Japanese Military may have drawn its attention to these episodes of the water festival. In spite of the early successes of Japanese Propaganda the Japanese could not understand why the people had suddenly become hostile to them, why they had withdrawn within themselves and why all that frankness of Burmese character which they had seen for themselves in the early years disappeared altogether.

According to the New Order Plan it was the business of the Government to show to the people some real and concrete evidence of Burmese Independence. The explanation that the Burmese were a people who like to think for themselves, before they make up their minds on anything connected with their life, was never understood from the Japanese side. It was also hard to convince them of the part played by public opinion in Burmese life in which freedom of thought and speech was essential. It is not really known whether they did understand or whether they refused to understand. The warnings of the Burma Government had been ignored.

The two main items of the secret military agreement between Burma and Japan were (1) to hand over the control of the police and other armed forces to the Japanese Army in Burma if war necessity demanded; (2) to hand over to the Military the censorship of the Press if war necessity demanded. It is interesting to study this second condition especially with regard to the Psychological Front. To an outsider it appeared that the struggle of the Burma Government for the control of the Burmese presses was won with independence. When the first administration came into being the Japanese Propaganda Department controlled all newspapers and censorship. The papers were already in publication before the formation of the Government, which when it came into being desired to exercise some sort of control, but the Burmese presses under the Japanese Administration did not relish the idea of being controlled by their own Government. It is hard to trace the reason for this for the Government was always, as they later found out, more liberal in its views than the Japanese Propaganda department. For the first time the Government was publishing a newspaper of its own, completely on different lines from the Headman's Gazette and the Shwepyidaw. The paper was to be in every sense an everyman's paper, not different from other newspapers in the country. Military administration had agreed at the time that if Government ran short of newsprint it would undertake to supply the deficiency. But as the newspaper was about to be born, there was a proposal by the Military that there should be only one newspaper in Burma and that was to be achieved by the amalgamation of the newspapers in Burma. Independent of the Burma Government, the Military advised the other newspapers to get together and pool all the assets and to publish one really good daily on modern lines with a very big circulation. In the meanwhile the preparation for a state newspaper was almost completed. It seemed that the state paper would have to be dropped and that the state was to supervise and subsidise the new amalgamated paper. It was easier said than done. The news-

1. The Water Festival is always the occasion for topical lampoons and satirical comments on authority. (Ed).

papers misunderstood the whole position and the Government paper on the other hand was delayed because the Military Administration it appeared did not want the Government to publish a newspaper of its own. The newspapers thought that the new government wanted to stifle public opinion. Government could not wait and therefore on its own authority published the first State newspaper on a full scale. This created a commotion. There was the question of censorship prior to publication, for the Government then was still subordinate to the Military administration. The first night on the eve of the publication of the newspaper was a nightmare for the new editorial staff. The Military censor refused to censor the paper on the ground that its publication had not received the permission of the Military administration. After mediation by a third person it was censored late at night and by midnight, the first issue was got through but more troubles awaited the unfortunate paper. The counsellor to the Publicity Department threatened the Director that he committed an offense which the Military Administration would not like to overlook, but on the other hand the paper was published with the permission of the Prime Minister. From the outset it was found that the issue of news was niggardly and the public were not being given a fair deal. The first effects of a rigid system of controlling public opinion, began to be felt not only by the people but by the very officials who were running the news services of the Burma Government. Everything was censored and the censors were only interested in the Japanese Army and there was no representation of the Burmese Government among the censors. At last one Burmese Advisor was admitted to the military censorboard very reluctantly and the officer was so rudely treated that he refused to attend any more censorship meetings. The Government protested and refused to censor or give advice in any capacity. When the Burmese officer pointed out to the military censor certain commentaries in the paper which affected Burmese interests, there was deadlock because neither side gave way and the Japanese subordinate wanted to decide the issue with a sword. Then came the plan for amalgamation, in which what the Japanese wanted was a paper financed by the Government and controlled by Japanese at the top. Naturally enough this brought the Burmese papers and the Government together and the scheme was smashed in its infancy. The amalgamation never took place. Its failure was never forgotten by the Military Propaganda Department as an example of non-cooperation by the Burmese Government. In all fairness it must be said that in the control of the news services the issue of news both to the Japanese Army and the Burmese public was equally niggardly. The censorship was rigid and when the Burma State became Independent the Joint Censorship Board, which consisted of the Japanese Censor and the Burmese Advisor changed, and the censoring initiative fell into Burmese hands while a member of the Army Propaganda Bureau acted as Advisor representing Japanese Military interests. It was only towards the end that censorship became more or less a formal affair. The muzzled press however was a little more free as far as domestic matters were concerned. The position of Bamakhit, the state newspaper, was anomalous.² It was issued by the Department which censored all papers. The control of the papers in the country was divided as follows: All papers run by the Japanese were censored by the Japanese and all papers run by Burmese were under the control of the Burmese Government.

The control of the Broadcasting Station never at any time was placed under the Burmese Government. From the very outset a small two hundred watt station was set up by the military and while the Burma Government was trying

2. The editor of Bamakhit, U Tun Pe, later wrote Sun Over Burma, a notable study of the occupation period. (Ed.)

to negotiate with the Military Administration to set up a station of its own, radio work was handed over to the Broadcasting Corporation of Japan. The programme for the Burmese section lengthened and the Burmese Government was consulted in many matters, but were never given the right to act on its own initiative. After a series of negotiations the control of the broadcasting station was placed under a joint board consisting of officers of the Japanese Military Propaganda Bureau, the Broadcasting Corporation, the Japanese Military Police Deputy Chief and representatives of the Burmese Government. The Burmese Government drew up its own programme which after censorship was executed by the studio staff under Japanese management. What annoyed the people was the restriction on listening in on short wave sets. The general dissatisfaction of the people, over this measure, which came on the eve of independence was sufficient proof that although democracy in those days was not at a premium, the people still cherished the rights enjoyed in democratic countries. To question, to ask the reason why and wherefore, to search for the truth with one's own judgment and to be free to form one's own opinion--these rights of the individual were denied to the people and the Government was helpless in the matter. Even the Radio News Service System which provided the Cabinet with world radio news daily was stopped. The indignity of ministers having to apply for special permits to listen in to short wave broadcasting was greatly resented. Ministers listened in if they wanted and hundreds of radio sets were hidden and not submitted to the authorities. The Japanese refused to believe that the general public had been allowed to listen in to enemy broadcasts in the pre-independent days when the country was to use a Japanese phrase--"at the mercy of the Anglo-American Imperialists". This ban on the radio was countered by All India Radio with its relays from Dacca on the 261 meter band. Punishing for listening in was drastic, but secret listening in went on in the country and every morning there were general exchanges of the latest news. Some person or the other always came in with news. The rigid system of news issue and control instead of giving confidence to the masses on the invincibility of Japanese arms only brought resentment and hatred. Every bit of official news was viewed with suspicion. Dame Rumour ruled the roost in Burma, because every time a rumour spread, it had the uncanny character of being confirmed by later events. Rumours are officially denied and then at some later date admitted. One fine day in spite of all this elaborate system whereby the Burmese "would be prevented from being tainted or influenced by enemy propaganda" certain radio booths for the general public caused panic in the Japanese Broadcasting Section and the Japanese Military Police. On that day there was no radio broadcasts from the Burma Station because of some technical defect in the transmitter, but at about broadcasting time many booths in the town blared out Burmese music followed by a series of news announcements from Delhi. Crowds collected at the booth, had a good laugh, got the news and went home. Frantic policemen rushed to the scene to find out whether there were enemy agents at work. To their chagrin they found that it was purely an accident. Several people were arrested all for nothing.

There took place in this anti-short wave campaign the greatest destruction of radio sets. All the sets were taken by the Telegrams Section of the Japanese Army and thrown into damp warehouses, trampled upon, manhandled in every way and then left to rot. Very few people ever received their sets back in workable condition. The so-called experts knew nothing but destruction. The best sets were appropriated for their own use. Japanese officers and civilians enjoyed the short wave broadcasts, while the Burmese were severely punished if they attempted to listen. Any Japanese soldiers who understood no other language besides his own, would enter a house in the district and ask

for permits, seize the sets and the owners for no reason at all.

Under these conditions the Independent Government was to prove to the people that their independence was real and concrete. It was under these conditions that the Government was expected to create a state of mind which was to regard Japan as a saviour. The Water Festival had shown that public opinion had formed itself and no power on earth could change it. The nation was turning anti-Japanese and their manner of life in the country only intensified national feeling. The Government itself was in the last analysis anti-Japanese, for the functions of Government consisted mainly of fighting for the rights of the Burmese against the Japanese. It was a weak Government because the Japanese Army neutralized most Government measures by counter measures using force and brutality as the weapons. A strange thing was that seeing the Government powerless, the public in their sympathy placed greater confidence in the Government and Government fought tooth and nail against all injustices, but unfortunately in the last stage the Government in trying to win public faith went astray in its propaganda. The Publicity Ministry made prophecies which did not materialise. Anti-Anglo American propaganda became mere abuse, the Laynatha was proving a success. These were British propaganda leaflets air-dropped over Burma. Scurrilous articles with absolute lack of taste turned the State paper into a yellow tabloid. State propaganda was getting mixed and involved with the less religious type of pongyiss. State propaganda became a curious mixture of all the abracadabra of necromancy, fortune telling, and magic quite unrivaled in its charlatanry. The New Policy was Ta-Thway, Ta-Dah, Ta-Ah--that united Burma should cut as one sword with one strength.³ Union gave strength, and only with strength could the nation wield the sword for a Greater Burma. This move for a Greater Burma had mass appeal only to be spoilt by the tardiness of the news service and the monkish trend of telling the layman in what path his duty lay. The distribution of some eight hundred thousand yards of cloth to relieve the people and at the same time give them a concrete proof that there was some good in the independence gained, gathered the hearts of the very needy. The only flaw in it was the claim that the cloth was imported from Japan. The claim was made by the Japanese Military for the benefit of the people. Unfortunately the story was not believed, because in actual fact the cloth was part of the huge stocks which the Japanese Army had seized when Rangoon fell in 1942. The gift was accepted with good grace and would have relieved the people but for the delay incurred in the distribution. The news service was the laughing stock of the people who depended on rumours and the Laynatha. Traders from up country brought in news of the fighting fronts. Bombing was breaking up thousands of homes although it was very intense and accurate, and carpet bombing took along with it civilians who lived near the objectives. The Blue Print on Burma⁴ created a diversion for the people, but thinking people were sad because they were fed up of Japanese and as an alternative the return of the British according to the Blue Print on Burma held no hopes for Burmese aspirations. The six years of Military Administration, and the payment of compensation to allied property destroyed during the war provided good instances to convince us that unless we made ourselves strong and knew how to take care of ourselves and defend our own rights, we could depend on neither side of the nations at war. The Japanese were already ruining the country and the return of the British meant greater ruin--at least that was the

3. Seesp. 15 antes

4. Issued in 1944. For details see M. Colliss, Last and First in Burmas (London, 1956).

impression of the people after studying copies, sometimes complete, sometimes not of the Blue Print. That the tide of the war had turned after the Imphal campaign was clear to even the most ignorant. It seemed that even the curtailed independence that had been won by the people at such sacrifice was to be lost with the return of the British and at the same time there seemed to be no hope to get out of Japanese clutches. The people as a whole were tired of the war. The future was black. The masses did not know what was taking place behind the scenes. All they knew was that in spite of all the money in the country food and clothing were expensive, morals were degenerating, lives cheap, in fact, they knew that they were in a hopeless mess.

CHAPTER XIV

THE LEAN YEARS

The New Burmese Society was divided into the "givers" and the "takers". The "givers" were all rural and "takers" all urban. If the Burmese Army wanted soldiers, it was the peasants who gave; if the Japanese Army wanted slave labour, it was the peasants who gave, while on the other hand most of the urban population, mainly non-producers, were engaged in the parasitic and non-productive occupation like canvassing for goods and human beings, and were living on the toil and sweat of the farmers. Between these two classes were the intelligentsia--a class which had always lived on the line between starvation and affluence. Many of them had been absorbed into the services and the professions, and a few remaining had joined the band of war profiteers living the life of the New Order Brokers. Of the takers, the nouveau riche, like all nouveau riche formed a class by themselves. The degree of refinement and social status among them was measured in terms of money, jewelry, dowdiness. The more dowdy in dress, and the more jewels the woman loaded herself, the more loudly she claimed social attention, the greater her popularity. War business, war morality, war currency, brought the genteel and the vulgar on the same level. Ex-prostitutes, by reason of their catches of husbands, and their ability to make use of these catches to make money earned for themselves the right to so-called polite society, and had cabinet ministers and leaders of learned professions at their tables. When these women went out shopping, currency notes were carried along in packing cases. People who once upon a time, were so finicky and exclusive, took their children to elaborate social and charitable functions held by these nouveau riche. Wanton women, who showed off their Japanese husbands, did not mind the vulgar wisecracks to which they were subjected, because money could silence wagging tongues and Japanese husbands gave them all the money they wanted. Pimps were privileged to handle revolvers, especially issued by the Japanese Military Police after these revolvers had been confiscated from respectable license holders. The ordinary prostitute sported gold, diamonds and silk, while her less fortunate and honest sister had to be content with a rough homespun. The Japanese interlude gave the biggest boom to prostitutes and pimps. The morality of Burmese women sank to abject levels. Thousands of girls sold themselves for the love of jewelry and money to become mistresses of the Japanese. Besides these voluntary moral degenerates amongst Burmese, there were also young women who lost their chastity while they or their relatives were in the vice grip of the Japanese Police. A Japanese Gestapo agent on seeing a pretty girl would on the merest pretext arrest or beat up a brother or a father, and the release of the poor unfortunate would only be effected after the "virginal sacrifice" had been offered as desired. Some hangers on to the military police grew rich in engineering what they glibly called "Co-prosperity alliances". It is amazing how the very poorly paid Japanese N.C.O. could shower extravagant gifts on young ladies of easy virtues. It would have been an interesting study to trace backwards the original source of ownership of these gems and jewels, with which wartime Magdalenes were loaded. Rich Indians compared their riches in terms of viss of gold and cartloads of currency notes. Restaurants which could cater to the New Order Brokers made a roaring trade. As much as Rs 2000/- was paid for an old bottle of Carew's Gin, and a night's dinner might cost about Rs 10,000/-. The intelligentsia was disgusted with the way in which this new class was making money; but he could not bring him-

self to amass money for himself in quite the same way. All this was at the expense of the Nation. There were so many trades which depended entirely on stolen property, to say nothing of the Allied property left behind. The Japanese Army is not free from responsibility in this matter, especially in the trade in hardware. A gang of beggars and thieves operated in the deserted city of Rangoon, fully armed with weapons and Japanese protection cards, taking down all iron and steel fittings from buildings, to be dumped at Pagoda Road station, from which Army contractors collected and forwarded the stuff to the military or its firms. This is one example. Burmese society was contaminated with a feeling of indifference to stolen goods. On the other hand there was little or nothing available beyond stolen properties. For the valueless paper, friends cut the throats of their greatest friends with impunity and immunity.

The younger generation was losing its education. The money madness drove immature young men and women into the sordid business of making money by fair means or foul. There were no schools worth their name. Mushroom Japanese language schools sprang up and produced renegade Burmese who lost themselves in this new process of japonification which took them to the Kempetai or the Japanese firms. None of the school buildings were returned to the schools to which they belonged and schools did not function. Beyond the sending of state scholars to Japan and the local vernacular primary schools, the work of the Education Department was not edifying in spite of its pious professions of a sound educational policy. The ignorant derided those who spoke English as being pro-English with a narrowness of mind so dangerous in the growth of a nation. While the Japanese also wise-cracked about the enemy language, people who spoke and wrote English were respected by the Japanese, who in spite of their prejudices thought a great deal of Yale, Harvard, Oxford and Cambridge.

In official and political circles, former political offenders and so-called gaolbirds who were now in power hobnobbed with the official class and better understanding was created. The barriers were breaking down as has been mentioned in the relation of Government servants and public. The Government servants who did not continue their services in the new government joined the band wagon of the new commercial class and became suppliers to the Army and Japanese firms. I wonder whether the Civil Affairs staff who are "vetting" old Government servants because the latter served in the Burma Government during the Japanese regime consider the fact that those Government servants now accused of helping the Japanese in serving the Burma Government served only Burmese interests,¹ while those who did not or could not join the services during the last three years served the Japanese more directly by being suppliers and contractors to the Japanese military and got rich in the bargain too. During those years these men who in ordinary circumstances would never become traders became commercial minded. The one good result is that when they retire in the future they would not be so helpless as to what they should do with their savings.

In the district towns the calls upon the people were so numerous that they scarcely had the time to sleep. There were civil defense units, fire fighting units, first aid units, anti-espionage units, the pointed bamboo units to fight paratroops, all alleged to be voluntary. The over-zealous petty Japanese officer, who spent his time spreading the East Asiatic doctrine with an unrivalled fanaticism was very trying to the local inhabitants and the

1. A reference to the policy of the British Military Government of reviewing the records of all Burmese government officials during the occupation, after the liberation, in 1945-56. (Ed.)

civil officers in charge. Then there was the slave labour recruitment. Everybody was busy doing things in the midst of a terrible war. The urge for recreation was great and in the absence of the cinema for which films were few, the new Burmese musical play was born. Because Burma was independent, the Japanese military which had got hold of all the American and British films in the country refused to lend these pictures out for the entertainment of the Burmese masses for fear that they might be influenced by what they considered to be American propaganda, while the less independent peoples in Malaya were allowed to see all American and British pictures, a fact which the Adipadi could not forget. The Japanese film companies and units when they first came into the country 'hired' all cinematograph apparatus which they never returned to the owners. When the Burmese firms got wise they sought the protection of the Burmese Government and when the Japanese film companies got wise of this, they tried to smooth the palms of the head of the Department with several dinner preliminaries. The offer was that if the Burmese requisitioned the premises and the apparatus, the company would undertake all cinematographic work for the Publicity Department. The offer was declined with thanks. Actors of the Burmese screen, faced with unemployment, started on what was known to them as "Human Bioscope" in Burmese. It started with short comedies in ordinary every day speech, interspersed with music, but later on with the encouragement of the new Government which allowed enterprising pioneers to build improvised theatre halls in "safety zones" the Burma pioneers of the stage play found themselves firmly established. The stage play has come to stay in Burma. The traditional Burmese Pwe it seemed had become obsolete overnight. Musical plays with a definite swing character were played, but not with the usual Mandalay Palace scene as the perennial background. Automatic scene changes effected by the revolving and travelling stages, coupled with the non-stop technique added to the attraction to solve the question of employment among Burmese cinema actors is likely to become a permanent institution which will in the near future bring out the best of Burmese historic talent. The cost of materials was so high that a single small scale production would cost as much as one hundred thousand rupees. Considering that it was meant to entertain the theatre going public of a wartime town of some four hundred thousand inhabitants, the cost was all out of proportion to its actual worth, but companies floated for the purpose although not properly run on business lines, found it a profitable business to invest sums of at least one hundred thousand rupees. It was worthwhile for the best seats fetched Rs 100/- and the worst Rs 2/-. Again it was a good going for the urban population.

All the "takers" of the towns who found themselves overwhelmed with mountains of currency notes, went into the districts and purchased whatever gold ornaments and precious stones they could procure for themselves. They did not mind the prices they paid, either for gold or for foodstuffs and thus the valueless paper notes travelled very quickly into the hands of the "givers" who were the producers. The volume of money for the goods sold was so large, that the size of the wads of money they received gave them a sense of security which was to cost them dear before long. And all the time the numerous so-called voluntary occupations lay heavy on their shoulders. There were the village defence units armed with pointed bamboos, anti-paratroop units, anti-espionage units, labour units, air raid precautions. For every form of national service there were petty Japanese officers whose zealousness sent hundreds of unwilling hands laughing and grumbling to work--a Burman cannot do without his laughter and acceptance of the inevitable as a huge joke--gleeful that the officious Japanese officer is found cutting a ludicrous figure with an

earnestness so silly in Burmese eyes. The Burmese people were not only losing their cattle, their crops, their cotton, their vegetable oil, their vegetables, their boats, carts, but they were losing a regard for the foreigner--there was no longer that curious awe for strange things and strange beings--a sort of contemptuous inferiority complex--that curious mixture of feeling which had caused so much trouble in their dealings with foreigners. They had seen (they thought) the might of the British Empire crumbling before those ridiculous Japanese who behaved in the most barbarous way, always asking and asking for the good things of this earth--the material things which their Buddhist Philosophy had taught them to despise. The Japanese soldiery did not provide good examples of the disciples of Buddhism but the claim of the similarity of religion and culture by the Japanese Propaganda Department was "taken in" without any bad feeling. If they pretended to be Buddhist it was not the business of the Burmese to interfere. Among the more enlightened classes the view was held that it was silly of the leaders to expect that a country like Japan, which had harboured designs on parts of the British Empire in Asia especially in Burma, would permit 'Independent' Burma to be independent. Both the Burmese Defence Army and the Burma Government were suspected by many of being pro-Japanese in sentiment and of being the tools of the Japanese militarists. There was also a section which considered the Burma Government and the Army to be Quislings and this contention was often countered by those in the know that a weak nation like Burma had to bide her time until a favourable opportunity occurred for the use of force. Their argument ethically would not be commendable--it was that unless the national leaders created a sense of trust and confidence of the Burmese people in Japanese hearts, it was not possible for Burmese patriots to make convenient use of the war situation for Burmese ends. But nations are not guided by ethical principles, even if they declare so. In spite of pious declarations of loyalty, good faith, enduring friendship and common destiny and whatnot, it was beginning to be clear that some day Burma would be parting ways with the Co-prosperity Leader. Rumours began to circulate as to the possibility of a resignation of the Government en bloc because of the unsatisfactory state of affairs in the country, especially with regard to the relations between the Burmese Army and the Japanese. Many officers in the Government who only understood the ways of democracies were not very satisfied that the Government was still continuing with the functions of Government when the Japanese Army was making it impossible for it to take any measures to safeguard Burmese civilian interests. "It should have been clear", they said "that Japanese intentions were only chauvinistic and that Japanese declarations of the New Order in the East, only pious declaration which had their evil designs. Why should not the Government resign and let the whole country know that the so-called Independence was only 'so-called'?" The answer against this was expressed in one unassailable argument that the Japanese were not people who would understand this democratic practice of non-cooperation. If the Government resigned and the Japanese Military took its place, what would have been the fate of the helpless Burmese people who in the present circumstances still had the same legal body to which it could appeal and which could appeal, and which could in many ways safeguard civilian interests although not to the same extent that might be expected of a truly independent country? If the military did not take control, what sort of Government would the next set of people who would be selected by the Japanese provide, would there not be a more pro-Japanese tendency? The intelligentsia argued, despaired, and argued again. The only idea was that something would be done and what that something was not clearly understood or defined. Government servants spoke of the frustration that pervaded all offices in the centre as well as in the district, where conditions were worse. There is one statement which need no reservation.

The pro-Japanese elements did not belong either to the services or the Army. There was often a question whether there was even a pro-Japanese element in the country worth the names. The service man and the soldier knew exactly what the relations were between the Japanese and the Burmese and for that reason alone could not have harboured any pro-Japanese feelings or to be more correct sympathetic feelings for the Japanese method of obtaining help from the Burmese people¹ in their effort to oust the Anglo-Americans from the Asian continent.

The Burmese Government was in a hopeless position. The police forces did not have the necessary arms to back up the Government in the establishment of its authority over all nationals alike in the country and the Japanese Military Police had a large finger in the Burmese home security pie. Only the Burmese Army had the arms. The tradition of the Army which through the short period, though still in its infancy, bore a tradition of patriotism born in the idealism of youth. Its origin went back to the thirty comrades who had dedicated their lives for the deliverance of their country and had fought through the campaign in 1942, which had brought nothing but disillusionment, and it was common knowledge that from the time of the Burma Independence Army that even in their personal relationship the Burmese soldier always stood on his rights. So anti-Japanese were the soldiers that at one time they misinterpreted the collaboration that the leaders of the army had offered to the Japanese High Command. Even the Government was viewed with some hostility. In spite of its shortcomings it was to this small army that the people looked forward to playing a vital part in the moulding of Burma's destiny. They were swayed by the glamour of the army, and the army was proud that they held out a hope to a despairing nation. Soon even the Army began to be sympathetic towards Government servants. The slogan was Ta-Dah, Ta-Ah.² One had to look through the veneer of prosperity of the nouveau riche into the desperate condition of the cultivators.

To make matters worse, the rice situation in Upper Burma became threatening. Burma which normally has an approximate production of about eight million tons of rice, with an exportable surplus of about four million tons had always had sufficient food. The production had gone down to three and a half million and the Government after a gigantic effort brought it to somewhere round the five and six million mark, but there were no means of transportation to send the rice to deficit areas of the dry lands of middle Burma which produce petroleum, cotton, wheat and groundnuts. The price of rice went up to something like two thousand rupees per bag of 22½ pounds. There was plenty of rice in Burma but there was a danger of an impending famine. This seriously affected the people on whose manual labour the state and army depended for its very existence, but the Japanese armies in the Imphal campaign actually used rice bags to ford rivers on their way to the front line and one of the reasons for the defeat at Imphal was "food". Shwebo District was blockaded from all neighbouring districts except to the Japanese Army. It was the case of rice everywhere and not a grain to eat. That was not the kind of world that the people were looking forward to. Where was the Co-prosperity, which everyone had begun to use as they had used the word diarchy in the earlier days of the national struggles, when Burmese politics in a modern sense were still in its infancy?

At the end of 1943 the possibility of the return of the Allied troops into Burma was not visualised. Japanese arms were in high esteem. The Allied

2. "One Sword, One Strength" Cf. p. 75 ante (Ed.s).

cause was dark. Accounts of the Arakan debacle had been driven home by the Japanese press. The independent Government was coming forward with a New Order Plan. There was still faith in the future when Burma's independence would be limited by necessity. To a naturally optimistic people, it was still early for them to realise the seriousness and gravity of the future for the people had not yet felt fully the effects of the thorough, systematic and brutal exploitation of Burma resources in manpower and materials. Things were certainly bad no doubt, but there was an even chance of recovery, but now the position was no longer the same. Imphal had been lost and Burma for the first time saw the invincible Japanese Armies struggling back to Lower Burma stricken by hunger and disease, some of them taking their own lives because they could no longer walk. The pinches of hunger and the need for clothes and all the horrors of an occupied country became glaringly and uncomfortably clear--the masses felt the lack of sympathy from the Japanese masters who took away their cattle and clothing and their children in their teens to make Asia safe from "The Anglo-American Enemies". Evidence of Allied air might grew more apparent every day. Government was being bullied into the effectiveness and failure. The Pan-Asiatic dreams dissolved. The present was more real with its sufferings. The Japanese were hated. They were no longer respected as heroic liberators and benefactors as in early 1942. They became monsters and ogres to the public. Those in the services knew how much faith the Japanese had placed on the Imphal campaign. The Military Propaganda Department had already asked the newspapers to prepare a special issue for the fall of Imphal and for the next six months Imphal was never mentioned by the Japanese even in conversation. The Indian National Army which had made itself so conspicuous by its Jai Hind and uniforms had not done gloriously at the front either. The Burmese Army was never placed at any real fighting front. Rangoon town itself no longer saw Zero fighters proudly zooming through the air. The Government was pledged to fight to the last man--it is presumed that every Government makes such pledges. Yet on the other hand the worse the situation became, the more brutal were the Japanese in the efforts to draw out the man and material power of the nation. The sky in the Burmese horizon was black indeed! Return of the British to the average man was the case of a Myaukhaung still being a Myauklaung--that is, the useless monkey, for the continued collaboration with the Japanese was pure slavery. The drinkers became more drunk, the profligate more profligate and the frustrated more frustrated. People spoke of another evacuation, but where? Where were transport vehicles, vessels and trains? In fact the nation had the jitters and had them bad. Those who had waited for the chance for three long years were getting impatient of the leaderst Why should we still adhere to the Japanese Cause when they did not respect the sovereignty of the Burmese State? We were also bound by promises to be loyal to the Asiatic Order. Arguments and reasoning still continued to assail us. Would we not be despised by the Allied countries by joining the winning side. Could we, as a small nation, be so bound to keep faith when the greatest power in the East did not keep her pact. Then there were also people who still believed that all the sufferings of the war, were totally due to the war, and that with the end of the war the Millenium was bound to come, but the horrors of the present were too disastrous and there was nothing but dread for the future. The British Blue Print held no promises which might have cheered the Burmese Nation. It spoke of a six year period of military administration, compensation for damage done to Allied property, in fact it seemed that Burma was to be soundly punished for having fought for her freedom because she had sought Japanese aid and had exploited the war situation in the East in 1941. The country knew nothing of the trend of world opinion. The conferences of the Big Three or Four or Five

always were announced with the Japanese Propaganda dressing that Russia, Britain and the United States had fallen out over some important matters of policy. The Burmese wanted to be free of the Japanese and also from the British or for that reason any foreign power--a fully legitimate desire that fulfillment for which we saw no hope. The question of fighting and driving out both the Japanese and British was an impossibility and was only looked upon with frustration. It was then, the heartening news reached the public that there was something afoot.

CHAPTER XV

THE STRUGGLE

The Mahabama or the Greater Burma Movement gave the people something to think about, coming as it did at the darkest hour of Japanese occupation.¹ This unity movement was what the people for so long had waited, and sections of educated opinion who had for so long remained aloof began to respond to this first practical and real appeal. Critics began to see the good behind this new drive. They saw that whatever the shortcomings of the Independent Burmese Government--it was homogeneously Burma; and, for that reason, in spite of its repeated failure at substantiating Burmese Independence, it had pursued its policies and programmes with consistency and tenacity of purpose. The Burmese Army was working with a determination born of frustrated National Effort. The people were, on the whole, totally anti-Japanese. A rising of some sort was expected, but nobody knew when, where, and how it was to come about. Burmese public opinion was expressed in the ta baung: "If the Japanese were to reign--It shall only be till the end of the rains!" It would have been folly to expect the naturally suspicious Japanese to trust the Burma Government and the people. It was necessary to prevent any premature discovery of the secret Burmese effort to throw off the Japanese yoke. And unless good faith and trust was established as far as possible, there would be a sudden breach in the good relationship between the leaders of Burma and Japan, which would have been disastrous to Burma. Latterly the Burmese Government's firmness in its dealings with the Japanese had won a new respect for Burma in official Japanese circles. The people could not understand why it seemed that when the Japanese Army in Burma had undermined the authority of the Burma Government so blatantly, the Ministers were still co-operating with the Japanese Army in Burma. It was the same with the Burmese Army, whose leaders were criticised as tools in the hands of the Japanese by the more violent and vocal cadres of its services. The danger to the country of the threatening invasion by the allied armies was becoming more real day by day. With the fall of Mandalay, rumours of two sorts began to circulate dangerously. One was that the Burmese Army was fighting for the allies against the Japanese. Time has revealed that this was perfectly true. The other was that the Burmese Army was determined to fight till the last against the British Armies advancing in Burma. The less discreet elements of the Burma Army had often declared that they would fight the Japanese.

The Government, the Army and the people were at one with the Mahabama idea of a new united front for a Greater Burma, which would fight to the last for her freedom. Unity was becoming real enough. There was a Karen battalion in the Burmese Army and the officers and men of both sections--Burmese and Karens alike--were of one mind. They had dedicated their lives for the freedom of their country. The Army was needing financial and material help and public response was great. Rich and poor alike contributed to the national cause. Whole fortunes were showered on to the Army. The East Asiatic Youth League which was the Youth Organisation in Burma of the three years and had stayed aloof and had concentrated on social services and had provided a training ground for future citizenship, now took a share in the administration of the country for its President became one of the ministers of the Government. There was now a war cabinet, which at the head of the nation was prepared to stand against any invasion which might destroy Burmese independence. The

1. This party merger actually took place in 1942. (Ed.)

declaration of this War Cabinet showed a resolve to stand by Japan in the war, but there were underlying notes, which betrayed an argument to thinking Burmese, that whoever threatened Burmese Independence was the enemy, and whoever defended Burmese independence was the friend. It was time for action and preparation for suffering and sacrifice. Old and young alike plunged into the last effort for unity and strength. For the whole period up to the Burmese outbreak in the month of March, the tone of speeches of the leaders of the Army and the Government was one. Enemies of Burmese freedom must be annihilated. These speeches fitted both ways. They pleased the Japanese and also pleased those who were hoping that one day the people, Government, Army and everybody would turn against the Japanese. The Burmese Army however purchased stores and transport vehicles which accumulated with the large sums of money spent on them. Then came the big parade² It came at a very critical period for the Burmese in lower Burma. The Fourteenth Army was knocking at the gates of Mandalay and Yenangyaung.³ Living conditions were wretched. Prices still went up higher and higher. There was complete dearth of news. The people who had experienced one disastrous evacuation started preparing for another. Rumours widely forestalled actual news.

The war was in a bad way, but we had an army of our own. It was over half a century since the Burmese men and women had seen their own flesh and blood going to battle. In the old Burmese days, it was to conquer fresh lands and bring back treasures and hostages, but now it seemed to the people that they were fighting for their very existence against the might of the allies. If Japan, the leader of the Co-prosperity Sphere could not protect Burma, it was Burma's business to preserve her freedom and integrity. Many were puzzled as to what part the Burmese troops were to play for it was illogical that we should fight for those who had broken all pledges and had stripped Burma of all her national wealth. The Burmese troops at last had received the arms which had long been withheld from them. The soldiers and officers were sending their families home and were busy making provisions for their well being. The emotional Burmese witnessed the Burmese National Army, when under the protective wing as it were of the greatest pagoda in Burma (the Shwe Dagon Pagoda) these men, once upon a time the rag tag and bobtail of the Burma Independence Army, took their oath as a disciplined army of Burmese patriots, bayonets glittering in the brilliant morning sun while the tricolour floated proudly in the breeze. Speeches rang through with feeling. Men and women who lined the streets to watch the march past either cried like children or remained stolidly looking on with sad eyes. Hundreds of people kept away from the parade because they did not want to betray their feelings in public. The Japanese Air Force which still at the time had some planes at Mingaladon Aerodrome, swooped down with Japanese recklessness in their "salute to the Burmese Army", stationed around Mandalay, Meiktila and Myingyan. Curious onlookers were shocked at the cryptic remarks about victory and independence, for at that time most of us knew that the war was going badly for the Japanese, to whom the Government was in treaty bound. It was almost the last confidence trick played by the Burmese Army. Even the onlooker believed that this army of her young sons were indeed on their way to fight against the allies. A few days afterwards events followed with such rushing madness that almost every one lost his balance. To celebrate the Burmese Army going out on its way to

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2. On March 27, 1945, the BNA paraded through Rangoon before (ostensibly) departing to fight the British. It then disappeared "underground".
 3. Mandalay finally fell to the 19th Indian Division, after fierce Japanese resistance, on March 20, 1945. (Ed.)

make or break battle, Japanese officers at all stations extending from Thayetmyo and Prome, Pyinmana right through the whole of Lower Burma, were invited to farewell dinnerst. The storm broke on the 28th March 1945.⁴ The camouflaged announcement by the Japanese Army that certain Burmese thieves and robbers disguised as Burmese soldiers had attacked Japanese posts in Pegu and Tantabin gave the newst. The people were asked to go on with their normal pursuits in life as if nothing had happened. There is one thing which the Burmese public can never be made to believe--a Japanese story. Close on the heels of this announcement rumour burst upon Rangoon that it would be taken in three weeks in such a manner as would astound the world.

The Cabinet was summoned in a hurry and messages criss-crossed between the Adipadi's office and the Military headquarters. On the same day of the announce-ment the Japanese Military Headquarters were wiped out by allied bomberst. For the "safety and security" of the ministers and high officials of Government, Japanese Military Police guards were placed in their homes and travelling ve-hicles. The War Minister of Supplies and Transportation had disappeared and despite all attempts to hide the truth from the public, it was found out that they had disappeared as leaders of a movement to overthrow the Japanese Army in Burma in concerted action with the approaching allied forces. Citizens of Rangoon began to recall the persistent rumour of the past eight months or so, of important persons disappearing from their posts. Highly coloured stories of how these men were smuggled across the front line or how United States planes landed right behind the Japanese lines to pick the men up became the usual topic of everybody's conversation in teashops and coffee houses in wartime Rangoon. Nobody knew exactly what had taken place except the broad fact that the Burmese had arisen against the Japanese and that reprisals were as sure as the sunrise on the next day. What was the Government going to do to meet the crisis? We had already seen what had happened in French Indo-China even though accounts came through the Japanese News Agency. And if the same line of action were taken by the Japanese there was a hell of a lot to pay in blood and lives of the Burmese peoplet. How far was the Government involved in this sudden outbreak. Some knew that many of the ministers had been approached to disappear and leave everything in complete chaos, but there had been a dis-agreement because such a step would have left the people in lower Burma at the mercy of the Japanese, who would then find every justifiable excuse for a general massacre. It was a crisis of the first magnitude. If the Government could still create confidence in the minds of the Japanese in Burma, then lower Burma would be saved.

The Burmese Army had seized all the arms at the police stations in the districts and one dark night even came right into the heart of Rangoon and took away the arms of the Taunglonbyan Police Station under the very noses of the Japanese. The Japanese began disarming everybody, including the police. Mean-while declarations of mutual loyalty between the Burmese Government and Japan were made with astonishing rapidity. News reached the public that the Japanese Army headquarters and the whole Burmese Government would be evacuating Rangoon. Then what was to happen to Rangoon? Work was almost at a standstill except in the hospitals, and casualty clearing stations where thousands of cases came in to drive the already nervous staff to despair, but these brave men and women carried on their work. The Ministers then made up their minds to take a firm stand about the cabinet's attitude in the event of a Japanese withdrawal. It

4. The BNA went "underground"t

was pointed out that without ordered Government over the people, the withdrawal of both the Japanese and Burmese Government would ruin the country as the result that inevitable anarchy would follow such a step. Thus it was that the Government split into two. Seven of the ministers would go along with the Japanese Army on its withdrawal into Thaton and Moulmein District. Every Japanese in Rangoon became an armed soldier overnight. At every street corner there was a Japanese sentry. Every man on the street was searched with the rudeness and inefficiency of the Japanese soldier which we had known for the last three years, except that now the last vestige of a smile on Japanese faces disappeared. Everybody with a soldier's crop-head was stopped, searched and arrested. As is usual, ninety per cent of the arrests were wrong. But the administration of law and order went on. We had learned through experience what it was not to be able to take care of ourselves. The Government that remained behind continued to function in the administration of law and order. The areas which had been taken by the Burmese Army, which now called itself the Burma National Army, were also administered by Government servants and sometimes by the Burmese Army itself. The destruction and disorder by lawless people, which characterised the 1942 withdrawal by allied troops had been a lesson. Thus it was that Burma entered a second interregnum which followed the removal of the Japanese Terror.⁵ Salaries were paid to state servants and the police force continued its functions after the Japanese left with whatever arms it had hidden while the Japanese were in control. Most of the men of the Burma Defence Army were in the fighting fronts and those who appeared in Rangoon were but a few. The Indian National Army remained behind, met ministers of the Burma Government to discuss methods of control until proper administration could take over.

Soon the people learned the truth of the sudden coup made by the Burmese Army which in the final stages before the fall of Rangoon crippled the whole Japanese Army behind the lines and captured twenty senior officers of the Japanese Army, including some Major Generals. It had started as long ago as 1942.

Amidst the confusion of the first year of war in Burma, events were taking place which was to bear fruit only after three years of blood and rapine. Incredible though it may appear, the Anti-Fascist Movement of the Burmese people was under way at a time when the Burmese Independence Army was fighting together with the Japanese.⁶ The undercurrent of the Japanese occupation period may have been known to the whole country because each and every one of us felt that we had been properly fooled, but it was not everyone who knew what was actually happening in the cause of Burmese freedom. The Anti-Fascist Movement, it is needless to say, was convinced that there could be no freedom under Fascist Rule, whether it be in German or Japanese form. At the time when the main youth of Burma were returning to their homes from the battlefields, disillusioned and doomed for life, young men already on the Japanese "wanted list" escaped to India and there continued the work of liberating Burma with the help of the allies, leaving behind the leaders to prepare the ground to drive the Japanese out of Burma.

5. The Japanese evacuated Rangoon on April 23, 1945. British-Indian troops entered the city on May 3. (Ed.)

6. The following paragraphs represent folk-legend rather than history. The earliest date advanced for the formation of the Anti-Fascist Organisation is August 1944. (Ed.)

It was before the escape of these young men into India and before the fall of Mandalay into Japanese hands that three Burmese leaders who had been thrown into jail by the British authorities, for the British authorities did not trust any of us in our offer to fight for the cause of the allies, approached General Wang of the Sixth Chinese Army. The general wanted guerillas and a better understanding between the Chinese and the Burmese public and the Burmese leaders were willing and prepared to persuade the Burmese Independence Army to join the Chinese and fight against the Japanese, which they were quite confident of achieving for already there was enmity between the Japanese and the Burmese Army, which early in the Burma campaign had found out that Japan had broken all her pledges. General Wang was confident that if the Japanese could be held up in middle Burma for the monsoons, the Chinese could stop them in Burma. He decided to take Thakin Soe, Thakin Nu and Thakin Ba Hein to China. It seemed as if something good and effective was being done. Some British officers probably with the orders of the Governor took the three of them out of Mandalay jail on 26th of April, 1942. General Wang was to wait at Lashio. But fate ordained otherwise; for before the car carrying the three prisoners could even reach Maymyo, another car came with an order that they were to be sent back to Mandalay jail. It may have been that Lashio was cut off and it may have been that the minds of those in authority had changed.⁷ Meanwhile the rest of the leaders like Thakin Than Tun were still in jail and the return of these three men and their being clapped again in Mandalay jail closed the chapter of the first failure to do something. Dr. Ba Maw was then in Mogok jail.

In the midst of arrests of the Burmese Independence Army by the military police of the Japanese Army and while discussions were being carried on between Burmese leaders about the formation of a new Government, one "wanted" man, who later contributed much towards the Anti-Fascist Movement for the overthrow of the Japanese was moving here and there until a couple of months later he was in India where the authorities very kindly had him arrested. This young man, whatever antecedents may have been, however bigoted his political opinions, whatever his political opponents may say, however much the pongyis of this country may hate him, has rendered a service to his country which should live in the memory of those who love Burma.⁸ Extremely short-sighted and handicapped by a terrible disease, he carried on the foreign relations side of the work of the Anti-Fascist Organisation. He went literally dabegging of the British authorities, giving them his plans, the plans of the Anti-Fascist Organisation, and the news that the Burmese people were anti-Japanese, although shortly a while ago they had helped the Japanese. He sought contact with the Indian Communist party and other Indian leaders. He sought contact with Chinese leaders, he sought the ear of the British authorities. It was a heart-breaking job to be asked offhand, especially by those who had once held some responsible positions in Burma whether he wanted a job and ^{to be told} that his compatriots in Burma were quite satisfied and contented because the Japanese had made them ministers. British officialdom understood Burma only in terms of jobbery and place seeking. At last he managed to get himself to Chungking and there to try further for the liberation of his country.⁹ Seven months of hope and despair and sleepless nights brought him back to India. Contact with Burma had to be maintained. The head of the organisation in Burma was a minister of the Burma Government¹⁰

7. Cf. The account given by Thakin Nu, Burma Under the Japanese (London, 1954) (Ed.)

8. The reference is to Thein Pe Myint, known as Tet-Phongyi, from the book of that name in which he criticised the monastic order. (Ed.)

9. Details of this alleged China journey are unknown. (Ed.)

10. Thakin Than Tun, then Minister for Agriculture. (Ed.)

The Anti-Fascist elements in Burma were in every branch of the administration, Army and the people. Their business was to create a confidence in them by the Japanese authorities in Burma. This they did with so much success that the leaders were sometimes accused of cooperating too much with the Japanese Army in Burma. A courier system was established through Arakan to keep the headquarters in Burma in touch with its organisation abroad. These men who went in and out of Burma for the next two years walked through the jungles of the Arakan Yomas through rain and sunshine, braving not only the rigours of the weather and malaria, but the Japanese military police and many of them laid down their lives. Proper contact with the South East Asia Command was established, but it was not until the end of 1943 and beginning of 1944, when one of the agents came back to Burma and returned to India with a bride and a comrade carrying with them all important documents from Burma provided by the leader in Burma that some confidence was established between the Anti-Fascist Organisation and the Allied authorities. But again a hitch occurred and contact was lost between the headquarters in Burma and the workers in India until July of 1944 when a renegades member of the Arakan National Congress turned informer. The Congress had all along played an important part in the underground activities of the Anti-Fascist Organisation. Soon, young men eager to free the country from the Japanese yoke volunteered and went into India by batches for training in the S E I and M E 25 and for parachute training at Jessore,¹¹ in Ceylon. Throughout the two years a total of about seventy Burmese crossed the frontier and soon feverish preparations were made by the whole organisation together with the Burmese Army for the final rising against the Japanese in Burma. Burmese officers of the Army and the civil Government went underground. It is interesting to note that some of these officers went underground with the full knowledge of the Burmese Government, which to all intents and purposes was still a government allied to the Greater East Asia cause. The head of the State was perfectly aware of what was happening. Advance group headquarters were established far behind the Japanese lines and some places where stores and parachutists were dropped were not more than a three or four miles away from Japanese camps. "Droppings" were received with whole villages co-operating: while a couple of aeroplanes would keep on bombing and machine-gunning the Japanese camps and thus keep them occupied with their own troubles. Thus came Force 136 into Burma with their jet [sic] teams. A request for arms was made by wireless and the Allied Command sent directions that teams of three allied officers and NCOs who would work with the Burmese guerrillas, their duties being first to train Burmese guerrillas, indent arms on their own responsibility direct from the Allied command and would act as liaison between the Burmese forces and the Allied armies operating in Burma. Thus was the stage set and directives sent from India that the leaders of the Anti-Fascist Movement should go underground before the 18th March 1945 and if one had been observant he would have noticed that all allied air activity was suspended for forty-eight hours along the road to Toungoo. The machinery of the Government, the Mahabama (formerly the Dobama Sinyetha Asaiyone) Organisation, the East Asiatic Youth League were used for the furtherance of the Anti-Fascist Organisation aims and objects. The people in the country--simple country folk--the sons of mother earth answered the call of the leaders. But for the whole-hearted cooperation of all sections of the Burmese people, it is unlikely that the plot could have been kept secret from the Japanese Military

11. The reference, is perhaps to Force 136, the British equivalent to OSS. For a balanced account of these episodes see F. S. V. Donnison, British Military Administration in the Far East, 1943-46 (London, 1956). (Ed.)

Police, who killed all suspects by the hundreds in the last stages of their flight from the capital, nor could either the Burmese Army and the Communist Party of Burma have succeeded in their plans. It is relevant to throw some light in this matter. The Head of the State, Dr. Ba Maw, the most maligned man in the whole of Burma, was not unaware of what was going on. It is difficult to say at the present moment what part he played, but it is known beyond doubt, that many of the important underground workers escaped the horrors of the Japanese Gestapo and certain death because of the protection provided by him. What is more important but for the show of Government that was put up by him, the Japanese reprisals on the Burmese after the "March Episode" would certainly have been greater.

Just as the peoples of Burma were misunderstood outside Burma during independence, so was Dr. Ba Maw, the then Head of the State. We have read in the papers of the so-called quisling Ba Maw. No Burman worth his name has ever been a quisling. In this connection it would be illuminating to point out that during the Japanese occupation, attempts on Ba Maw's life were made by the Japanese without the assistance of Burmese of any political importance. The first was at his residence when there was an air raid. It was the Defence Army body guards who caught the would-be assassins. Two were Japanese agents and one was a miserable Burmese thug. No one was punished. The second attempt on his life is still a mystery. It was in an air crash while the Burma mission was on its way to attend the Greater East Asia Assembly at Tokyo. The plane crashed five minutes after its take-off at Saigon. We, who were suspicious after the first attempt at Rangoon, were curious. The news of the crash was suppressed. The third attempt was after the Burma Government had passed laws forbidding foreigners to possess and own immovable properties in the country; controlling all business undertakings, and legalising all marriages of foreigners with Burmese nationals.²² These were things which the country as a whole did not know and those who know all these well will not disclose the facts. Perhaps history will pass judgment.

22. These "assassination attempts" are not corroborated by other evidence.
(Ed.)

CHAPTER XVI

AFTERMATH--THE SECOND INTERREGNUM

The uncertainties of the interregnum of the year 1942 had taught the Burmese people how to look after themselves. There was certainly panic in many sections of the population, but force of circumstances and the lessons learned during the three years of war and suffering showed more clearly that the whole of the transport facilities was in complete chaos, there was nothing to be done except to stay where we were and preserve the peace as best as possible. Half of our Government had to go along with the Japanese, more or less as hostages--it was up to them to play the game and save as many Burmese lives as possible. The other half which was left behind at Rangoon had been freed of their Japanese guardians, who had been provided for the "safety and security" of the ministers and had nothing but the police force and the city defence corps, which had hurriedly been formed after the disappearance of the Burmese Defence Army. But these were not adequately armed to prevent stray Japanese from taking reprisals on the people or to keep what was left of the Indian National Army in Burma from getting out of hand for already there was systematic looting under the protection of the soldiers who had been left behind by their masters for a second time during the past three years. It was no time for communal troubles. The Government continued to function nominally and close contact was established with the commanding officers of the remnants of the Indian National Army. The Japanese had almost all disappeared but Government servants continued to attend office keeping all records and properties intact and in order. Salaries were still being advanced and the markets still open. Besides the shooting, the only stir created was by some Indians in uniform who rifled the Southern Regions Bank and took away all the money that was intended for disbursement as salaries of state servants. Thanks to the efforts of the officers and the more honest elements of the Indian National Army, part of the money was recovered and the salary earners were paid in a currency, which in a couple of weeks, was to become valueless. What Rangoon then waited most patiently for was the departure of the last Japanese sentry. For the second time we awaited "liberation" Wondrous tales of the National Revolutionary Army or the Burma National Army as the Burmese Patriotic Forces were then called spread and with a new confidence the public waited. The atmosphere had cleared it seemed and Chinatown, which had "stayed put" for three years, in their exuberance hoisted allied flags, which had to be taken down as rapidly as they were hoisted, because a party of retreating Japanese passed through Rangoon. Soon they were up again. The allied planes were flying low over Rangoon in numbers and people rushed about the town to see the first liberating soldier or sailor. On May 1, 1945 there appeared notices on the streets that Rangoon had been taken by the Burmese Army. There was already a Burmese National Army Radio Station which announced the fall of Rangoon two days after some of the Burmese units entered Rangoon. And for the first time Rangoon saw the Anti-Fascist flag of red with a white star. Then British and Indian troops landed.¹ The first news that swept across the city was that the Burmese troops had been arrested by the liberating forces. It was something which the people could not understand. Soon rumours spread that the allies had no further use for the Burmese lads who had joined them in the fight for Burma, and that the allied troops were arresting all patriotic Burmese. There was real gloom. For three years we had suffered and for three years we had waited, and after

1. May 3, 1945.

three years when it seemed that we had at last seen the silver lining on the Burmese horizon, Burma was again reduced to slavery. The scepticism with which we had always regarded our erstwhile rulers returned to us with greater misgiving. Once a monkey, always a monkey. We had been monkeyed again. The masses did not reason or ask the reason for the first arrests that took place in Rangoon and it was not until newspapers began to function that the public knew that there was an understanding with the allies that Burma was fighting the Japanese with allied supplies and recognition. The Burmese commandos with their meager equipment and days of underground life did not look very impressive nor could they compare with the armed mechanised might of the 14th Army, but it was the only army we had and they were dedicating their lives for their country and we were proud of it. It hurt our vanity when some of them were made a laughing stock. It hurt me more when I had the occasion of meeting an English officer who told me quite innocently and without meaning any offence that he had met some Burmese in Japanese uniform quite suddenly somewhere in Burma where there was considerable fighting. "Blast me," he said, "these little fellers wanted to fight for us perhaps they received a rupee for each Japanese killed--The British Army should pay these fellers about Rs 5/- per head." It took some time to explain to him that we did not have professional soldiers. There must be thousands of others like him in the Army, Navy, Air Force and elsewhere who do not understand the fight for Burmese freedom and it is not the purpose of this account to argue a case for the Burmese, but it does reveal to us how ignorance of one another and of events and their significance can create misunderstandings. The first effects of the mistaken arrests and disarming still remain especially in the minds of the uninformed.

So Rangoon was taken without opposition. It was hard luck for the 14th Army. The battle honours went to the 15th Corps. We also knew that the whole of the area between Thayetwo in the north and Bassein and Rangoon, except the forest and hills in the south, were cleared of the Japanese before British troops advanced into these areas. The troops which came by sea had had a picnic.² Government offices were handed over one by one and again the first news about Burma was disappointing. The Ministers who had formed part of the Government under Dr. Ba Maw had been sort of placed under house arrest. Even the nominal independence that we had during the two Japanese years seemed better. It seemed that all our sacrifices had been in vain. Coupled with these misgivings came sad news from the Delta where not all the areas were immediately occupied by the allied forces. Some of the districts were still either unoccupied either by the Burmese troops or were occupied off and on. Remnants of Japanese forces, whenever opportunity offered, attacked Burmese villages and took away men and women and killed them by the most brutal methods. One particularly disquieting news was that Myaungmya, a district headquarters town, was occupied by Japanese troops for a short period during which forty-two persons, elders and youths, guilty and innocent alike were thrown into prison and then finally killed or half killed and thrown into wells. The villages in the Pegu Yomas paid the supreme sacrifice without a murmur. Women were raped and killed whenever Burmese guerrillas were away from villages. These villages paid dearly. Government servants had also been slaughtered, after having to dig their own graves. The price was in blood, property and humiliation. It

2. The 15th Corps landed from the sea, slightly in advance of the main 14th Army driving down from central Burma. For an account of the final operations in Burma, see Admiral Mountbatten's Report to the Combined Chiefs of Staff by the Supreme Allied Commander, South-East Asia 1943-45 (London, 1951)t

was worth while we had thought for independence was just around the corner. The Anti-Fascist Organisation banked upon world opinion and the Teheran Conference decisions regarding small nations who ranged themselves against the forces of fascist aggression. But now it seemed that nothing was materializing out of these sacrifices. There was no doubt that it was too early to draw conclusions that the British were bound to treat Burma shabbily, but it was not unnatural that the trend of Burmese opinion which had been built upon distrust of British policy towards her erstwhile possessions, indicated that there would be reprisals for having collaborated with the Japanese in the early stages of the East Asia war.

When the British Military Administration came the first thing it did was to enquire into the conduct of officials as to whether they conducted during the past three years under Japanese occupation had been loyal and proper. There was no organised body to reassure the people of Burma's future. The Burmese Patriotic Forces were busily engaged together with the Gurkhas in mopping up operations. There was insufficient news about the Burmese Army and its leaders. These were the early days of the occupation of the Capital. People began to think that after all it was just another conquest by the big powers. Then came the proclamation, declaring all Japanese-issued military notes valueless. It was but natural to expect that the war profiteers and traders who had benefited during the past three years would get hold of the news early and would take measures to get rid of their hoards of Japanese currency. Gold could not be bought at Rs 15,000/- per tola. The war profiteers again established themselves as military contractors and began to make more and more money, this time in hard cash backed by the Reserve Bank of India. Goods and sound currency flowed into their hands while the worthless paper of the Japanese passed into the hands of the poor. They were the givers again. People would not bother about the finer points of international law and its relation to issue of currency by belligerent countries and all its ramifications. What they knew was that for the whole three years they had paid in kind produced from the land, which was their own, and in goods which they had bought as investment in their daily life. The Japanese currency was the only legal currency during the three years and they had had to make a living with that currency which if they had not accepted in those dark days meant imprisonment, torture or death. What they knew was that they were not responsible. The argument was that the British could not hold Burma in 1941-42 and that what had happened to its finances afterwards was a Japanese responsibility, and that it was not right that the Burmese people should pay for it. Some informed circles knew that in case of hardship the British Military Administration would be prepared to pay at least three annas in rupee in kind as a relief measure. When the primary wants of man are not satisfied, he usually takes recourse to the most convenient method open to him and the Burmese people were no exception, when towns in Pyapon and Myaungmya district were looted by villagers who no longer had any means of purchasing their bare necessities. The British press was not the least impressed by the drastic measures taken by the British Military Administration. The people of course had to grin and bear it and make the best of the bad job. State servants of the former British Burma Government were also discontented. People who had remained behind in Burma became, it was said, objects of contemptuous rudeness for the

3. In fact, the Japanese occupation currency the "banana notes" were redeemed at values adjusted to the steady devaluation of the currency (i.e. 1942 notes were valued highest, 1945 notes lowest). This measure was exploited by profiteers, and was in turn resented. (Ed.)

"pips" and "crowns".⁴ Much can be said on both sides as to whether these officers or those who remained in Burma were right in their ideas of loyalty and what conduct is good and proper. If it was a question of duty to one's own country, surely Burmese officers' duty was towards Burma which they had loved too much to leave or were unable to leave even if they had desired, because in 1942 no provisions for their transport across the frontier were made. Thousands had died in that tragic trek across to India and one could hardly visualise what the evacuation would have been like if the whole of the Government officers and clerks and menials had also gone along. To the average British officer, he would naturally by reason of British suzerainty over Burma expect the Burmese to have two loyalties, one to the British Empire and the other to British Burma, both consistently uniform so that in the event of choice between the two the Burmese would choose loyalty to their masters. On the other hand the Burmese knew of only one loyalty and that to the land of their birth. If they had not served the Burmese State during the Japanese interlude, who was there in the country to look after the interests of the people? Serving the state is neither wholly altruistic nor patriotic. There is also the economic motive of having to satisfy one's wants. For these men it was more befitting their dignity and self-respect to serve their own people than to become contractors to the Japanese Army. It is something which the new administration could reasonably consider in restoring the country and all the administrative services to normal conditions. Many of us found the "liberation" without meaning.

Even when the White Paper was announced⁵ the action of the people, as the London Times said, was "obscure" because the people were not sufficiently informed of the context. Facilities for public information were very limited. Only interested persons foraged for information from all available sources. It was not until the Supremo (Admiral Mountbatten) and the Governor of Burma (Sir Reginald Dorman-Smith) and the Governor of Burma came to Rangoon and had had the opportunity of meeting the leaders of the country that people began to feel less apprehensive of Burma's future. These are the rubs and snags of the first measures taken by the British Military Administration, which in the early days was so reminiscent of the Japanese days that it seemed that even the relief that was felt on the withdrawal of the Japanese Armies was wearing out. It is very necessary that there should be frank criticism of the mistakes of the period. Experience with the Japanese and war conditions had taught us the valuable lesson of learning sometimes what is practical in practical administration. War-time Burma had experimented with all kinds of control and had not come out unscathed and when the mistakes which the Burmese Government of the past three years had made by the Military Administration, people only laughed up their sleeves and enjoyed the whole joke but said nothing.⁶ Proclamations dealing with enemy or Allied property, and the Price Control Orders for example. It was taken as a joke but it is no longer a joke because innocent people have been sentenced to long terms of imprisonment for having committed offences under these ordinances. The legality of the orders and the sentences cannot be contested or questioned, but as in all legislation a fuller understanding of the conditions in the country and a consideration whether the purpose for which a law is put into operation is achieved might have helped to prevent a feeling of dissatisfaction against these measures. Almost everyone in Burma lost property

4. That is, of army officers.

5. Burma Office, London, Statement of Policy... May 1945.

6. See F. S. V. Donnison, British Military Administration in the Far East.

during the war either through fire destruction or looting. It has been mentioned earlier in these pages that Burma became a glorious heaven for looters. The import of manufactured goods was nil. The issue of worthless currency was abundant. The allied armies left the country, abandoning all the properties which they could not carry back to India. Without imports all these goods became the only goods available for purchase and they were sold in the open markets and were bought both by Burmese and the Japanese. This of course meant that almost every home, including those of the most law-abiding and conscientious, possessed property which its owners could not legally call their own, except that they were obtained through overt purchases. The second interregnum came and with it an increase of looted goods which were the only goods to be sold in the open markets, mostly run by a floating population who disappeared after they had sold all their goods. Even members of the Allied forces and the CAS(B)--Civil Affairs Services(Burma)s--have bought their goods from these markets. There is not a single house in the whole of Burma which does not possess property which at one time or the other belonged to either the Japanese or the allied nations. If the law must be administered fully and efficiently, then it follows that the whole Burmese nation and quite a part of the allied forces in Burma should be convicted for having in their possession articles which the Ordinances of the British Military Administration considers contraband or stolen. In cases of stolen or looted property it is always the most respectable and law-abiding citizens who get caught and punished for in their good faith they use these properties openly and without qualms of conscience because they have paid for them with their hard earned money, whereas the element of the population who make money or loot usually get away with it by quick disposal or by clever hiding. The Police themselves are not willing to be very strict with these measures except those who wish to gain by illegal gratification and public reaction in this matter has not been conducive to a better understanding and co-operation between the British authorities and the Burmese, at a time when such understanding is so essential. To the average Burmese mind, British Military Administration is synonymous with Great Britain--the conqueror. Burma is entering upon a new period of her history--her leaders are prepared for a change of heart and understanding in her struggle for her national freedom and are eager to join hands with the allies in an effort to make the world a better place to live in; but at the same time her peoples still have that distrust for Great Britain and any measure, good or bad, is likely to be misinterpreted and may lead to undesirable situations. Her economic plight has been heightened by the scrapping of money which had to be exchanged for solid food and labour, and dacoity is rife. It is one of the defects and paradoxes of Burmese character that the populace is capable of the most lawless acts even though the normal lives of the people as a whole are of a peaceful and law-abiding character. An undesirable thing took place in the Delta area. In some of the towns the poor just walked in thousands and looted whatever they could lay their hands on. This looting was quite different from the looting of the interim period. It was done when there was a degree of peace and when order had been restored by the capture of Rangoon. The economic motive of these lawless acts is clear, although official reports may mention motives other than economic. It is very usual with the masses to expect a millennium with the cessation of hostilities. The public do not stop to think that there is such a thing as an aftermath of a war. It is in their very nature to expect miraculous changes which no Government in the world can either promise or perform, but it is very necessary that the people should be made to feel that the period of brutality and vandalism is not only over, but that the newcomers are genuine liberators. The old suspicions were resurrected and it

was in this atmosphere that news about the future of Burma was published. What troubles the Burmese mind most at this period of Burma's history is whether we had committed just another blunder leaving us where we were fifty years ago.