

**BREAK-
THROUGH
IN
BURMA**

BA MAW

**MEMOIRS OF A
REVOLUTION, 1939-1946**

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Dr. Ba Maw speaking on Radio Tokyo as Head of State of Burma, March 27, 1943.





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Ba Maw

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Foreword by William S. Cornyn

Dr. Ba Maw, first Burman to be Prime Minister of Burma under the British in the thirties, Head of State during the Japanese occupation in the Second World War, member of the British Bar, practicing lawyer and leading politician and statesman in Burma for more than forty years, gives us in this book an invaluable record and analysis of the struggle of an Asian people against foreign domination and their search for a way to freedom and independence. The record is invaluable because it is unique. It is unique on two counts: there is no one else who for so long a time has been so thoroughly involved in the working out of the patterns that unfold in these pages; and it is also the highly personal account of a sensitive, intelligent, and humane man who for a time exercised total power within the limits of a military occupation of his country.

To most Americans the events of World War II are becoming dim and are being obscured by later concerns, and to many of those who remember, the China-Burma-India theater has faded in comparison with the war in the Pacific, in North Africa, and in Europe. But even to those who can recall the campaigns in Burma there will in the reading of this book be a certain sense of unreality and even disorientation. Familiar names are missing: General Stilwell and the Ledo Road, Admiral Mountbatten, General Wingate (except for a passing reference), Merrill's Marauders, and all the rest are absent. The slogans and notions of Allied and Axis propaganda are barely mentioned, and then only to be dismissed, the categories of the Cold War oppositions as we are accustomed to them now are absent, and the focus is steadily maintained on the struggle for an Asian solution to Asian problems. It is in this that the great value of the book lies.

In times like these when American involvement in the affairs of peoples all over the globe is growing, it is of great importance

that we learn to understand what it is that we are doing and what the reaction is on the part of the peoples we are trying to help. It is in this connection that this book is of the greatest interest. It is a clear and compelling statement of a deeply patriotic emotion and of a sense of history of a nation that goes back to the time of the Norman Conquest of Britain. Feelings like these are not confined to Burma.

There are passages of great eloquence when the author speaks of these emotions, there are passages of simple elegance when he describes the surroundings in which he found himself, and at various places in his account he is direct and brusque, but always the style is personal and unmistakably his own. The portraits and vignettes with which these pages are filled are often fine and subtly drawn and tell much about both the author and his people.

Breakthrough in Burma has been twenty years and more in the writing and it was not until 1966 that the manuscript became available to the West. The author at this writing is again in prison, this time with his eldest daughter Tinsa, who had her first baby during the escape from Rangoon to Bangkok.

We have a lot to learn from this book.

W.S.C.

New Haven
May 1967

Foreword by U Myint,

Former Justice of the Burma Supreme Court

I am in a real fix. In a reckless moment I undertook to write the introduction to Dr. Ba Maw's war memoirs. But now that I am actually writing it I find the subject getting bigger and more complex till I almost find it too much for me. Meanwhile, I recollect that Dr. Maung Maung, a distinguished writer and jurist who is now a judge in our Chief Court, once in a public debate said of Dr. Ba Maw that he was "not a person, but an institution." And U Nu, a former prime minister of Burma, who worked most closely with Dr. Ba Maw throughout the whole difficult war period and so should know Dr. Ba Maw at his best as well as his worst, has described him with so much admiration in his *Burma under the Japanese* that *The Nation*, our leading English-language daily newspaper in its day, described the book as "nothing if not a deep tribute to Dr. Ba Maw's leadership and courage."

Before I proceed to say anything about Dr. Ba Maw himself I want to give you the reasons I consider the present war memoirs so historically important that they should be read and studied by all with the slightest interest in the way the world, and especially Asia, has changed since the last world war. Firstly, it is the only account of the war period written by a Southeast Asian wartime head of state and leader and consequently the only firsthand account of the period in Southeast Asia. Next, it is the first time the Burmese side of the full wartime story has been told by one who actually played the biggest part in it. Also, it is the first serious attempt to analyse objectively some of the biggest psychological problems as well as the consequences created by the Pacific war—for instance, the relations between the Japanese and the other peoples of East and Southeast Asia. At a time when a good part of our continent is in ferment anyone who is capable

of seeing a little ahead will know how crucial these problems are going to be in the future. One more reason is that the memoirs are a study of the course of an Asian revolution by an Asian leader who actually led such a revolution in his own country, and thus they give a basic pattern which all such national struggles will tend to repeat. There are many more reasons for reading the book which I will not mention here; the reader will discover them as he goes on.

A different sort of reason is the inimitable way in which these memoirs have been written. Dr. Ba Maw's style of writing reflects the man, for there is an indefinable personal touch to it. It is as if he were speaking to you. His pen-pictures are delightful, and his lucidity of thought and expression is hard to beat. At times his language is more vigorous than polite, but never vulgar.

Actually, no Burmese has so far published in English such a detailed panoramic account of any particular period of Burmese history, especially the critical period between 1935 and 1945 when Dr. Ba Maw was shaping Burmese destiny. As I have said, the present book partly fills the gap in a certain personalised way, but there is far more still to be done. The episodes the memoirs describe are as thrilling as any adventure story—Dr. Ba Maw's imprisonment and eventual escape from Mogok jail, the attempts made on his life by the Japanese militarists, his miraculous escape from a plane crash near Saigon and from two deadly air attacks, the long, perilous retreat from Rangoon to Moulmein in the last days of the war, the breathtaking wartime flights to Japan, his long months of hiding in a Japanese Buddhist monastery in northern Japan after Japan's surrender, and finally his experience in Sugamo Prison in Tokyo.

Perhaps I had better mention a few background facts about Dr. Ba Maw. He first became Education Minister and then Prime Minister in 1937-39, the first Burmese to hold that office. In February 1940, Dr. Ba Maw made his famous speech on the war resolution, which appears in this book. Soon he resigned from Parliament and became the leader of the Freedom Bloc, which consisted of the Sinyetha Party, the Thakin Party, and the Students' Organisation. He was eventually tried, convicted, and imprisoned under the Defence of Burma Rules and Regulations for making a seditious speech in Mandalay. Just before the British

evacuated Burma in the middle of 1942, he escaped from Mogok jail. When the Japanese arrived Dr. Ba Maw took over the civil government under the military command in 1942. In August 1943, he became Adipadi, or Head of State, as well as Prime Minister of the new state after it had declared its independence. Thus he saw his great dream of a free and independent Burma fulfilled, as much as the realities of the world war permitted such fulfillment. Hemmed in by those realities no one anywhere could have achieved more.

Going back even further to the earliest years, I remember that at the very beginning of this century when I joined Saint Paul's Institute, in Rangoon, I saw for the first time a very fair boy with bright roguish eyes and unruly hair. Except for his fairness and delicate features and capacity for mischief, there was nothing striking about him. He even spoke with a slight stutter, which was rather attractive. His school life was uneventful, and his progress not quite satisfactory. The teachers did no tapping to find out what the students were good in and to draw the best out of them. The colonial educational system was so antiquated and defective that it could only turn out clerks and copyists, salesmen and shop assistants, for the benefit of the rulers and the foreign capitalists. The future Prime Minister and Adipadi showed no signs of his extraordinary talents and ability to achieve great things. His college life was no better: he did not shine at examinations, and games had no attraction for him. The only game he ever played with almost professional skill was draughts. He did not very much care whether he won or not; he just wanted to make brilliant moves, and when he did make one he was pleased with himself and the whole world. I was the only person he dreaded, for more often than not I would trounce him. In later years, he would tell his followers that to succeed in life as well as in politics a person must see several moves ahead and know when to give and when to take.

After graduation, he read a great deal and assimilated everything worth assimilating. With no plans for the future, he drifted from post to post till he was appointed Lecturer in English at Rangoon College, then affiliated to Calcutta University (we had no university of our own for nearly a century after the British annexation). Dr. Ba Maw found his post in the college con-

genial, as it afforded him an opportunity to develop his latent talents. He became an accomplished speaker and early developed the personal style which proved very useful in his future public career.

A few years after the termination of the First World War Dr. Ba Maw proceeded to England, primarily to be called to the bar. He studied at Cambridge, and after a few terms he left that university and attended the University of Bordeaux, where he studied French. He was awarded a doctorate with the highest honours and was also called to the English bar.

On his return to Burma he worked hard, and became a busy jurist. There were giants in those days, for the Burma bar was regarded as one of the strongest in India. Within a few short years Dr. Ba Maw had built up a lucrative practice, achieving his success by genuine intellect, and owing nothing to aggressiveness, ambition, or intrigue. His gift of speech was almost unrivalled; he created confidence and carried conviction. Burma has had many lawyers more learned, more subtle, and more resourceful, but few to equal and none to surpass him for clearness of expression, effective presentation, and quickness of perception. A friend of mine, after hearing a brilliant speech by the late U May Aung, a jurist and orator and later Judge and Home Member in the government of Burma, told me that he envied his brain more than that of any other man living. If I were disposed to envy other people's brains and wanted lucidity of thought and expression, I should envy Dr. Ba Maw's as the most attractive and effective.

Dr. Ba Maw appeared in many *causes célèbres*. He defended the rebel leader Saya San with courage, skill, and dignity, though he knew he had not the ghost of a chance of winning. I remember his discussing the case with me. I suggested that he should withdraw from it and advise his client to take no part in the proceedings, a course almost invariably adopted in India. The public would then say that the accused was tried and hanged without competent legal assistance. He refused to accept the suggestion and said that if the worst came to the worst, he would plead insanity on behalf of the accused. I then told him that the judges would very likely believe in the insanity of the counsel who urged such a plea. Later I discovered that his main object was to expose

publicly the misrule in the districts, the inhuman treatment of the people by the troops, the brutal measures adopted by the authorities, and the outrageous conduct of some of the police officers in displaying the decapitated heads of captured rebels in public places. Dr. Ba Maw did not intend to make electoral capital out of it, for his constituencies were never in Lower Burma where he defended the rebels. However, it was not long before he plunged into politics and, whether by coincidence or not, his entry marked the beginning of the storm which ended only with the attainment of our independence. Dr. Ba Maw rode that storm till the end of the war. When Japan was finally defeated he stood firmly by her side and shared her defeat and gave up his political career. That shows the kind of man he is.

Dr. Ba Maw's writings have not been collected, nor his speeches. Fortunately, however, the finest speech he ever made was in the Burma Legislature and is therefore preserved verbatim in the printed proceedings of that council. That speech, which dealt with the Burmese demand for complete independence from the British, has been reproduced in this book. It reveals the man and his great gifts strikingly. His inexorable logic, his marshalling of facts and arguments, his choice, impassioned words deservedly won the admiration of all who listened to him spellbound. The points he made were unanswerable, and no one from the government benches and the European Group attempted to answer them really. A smaller man than Dr. Ba Maw would have won immediate fame, but Dr. Ba Maw had won his years and years ago. Reading his speech in cold print nearly a quarter of a century later I even felt a peculiar sensation. No wonder the leader of the European Group rushed to him after the legislature had risen and said, "I say, Dr. Ba Maw, it was an awfully good speech, one of the best I ever heard. I wish I could speak like that."

During the war, the Japanese Prime Minister invited the heads of the Southeast Asian countries to a conference in Tokyo. Dr. Ba Maw of Burma, Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose of India, José Laurel of the Philippines, and several others attended. Dr. Ba Maw was chosen to address the conference on the day it was opened to distinguished guests invited to watch its proceedings. He spoke about the Indian freedom struggle and appealed for

the help of all East Asia. Netaji Bose was so moved that he wept. Similarly, Dr. Ba Maw was specially invited to make an appeal to the youth of Japan in the desperate days at the end of 1944 to join the Kamikaze squads. His speeches were repeated on the Tokyo radio for days.

At a press interview given on his return, Netaji Bose said that Dr. Ba Maw was the outstanding figure among the brilliant group of Southeast Asian leaders who met at the Tokyo conference. There was a mutual attraction between Netaji Bose and Dr. Ba Maw, and both openly expressed their boundless admiration for each other. They emerged out of the war among the greatest international figures that the world conflict had produced in Asia.

Dr. Ba Maw returned to Burma in 1946 after his incarceration in Sugamo Prison. Since then he has lived in complete retirement from active politics. Now in the evening of his life, he can lean back and think of what he has done and what he has left undone. I often wonder what he really regards as his greatest achievements: one of them must certainly be the freedom struggle he led which culminated in a declaration of independence by Burma on August 1, 1948; and also very probably the formulating of the Sinyetha or Proletarian Policy, by which in 1936 he sowed the first seeds of socialism in Burma; and again probably the sensational election victory he won with a whopping majority of votes for the *wunthanus* which put them into power. It is a most intriguing speculation.

One thing is certain: the Burmese travelled a long, turbulent way to new goals under Dr. Ba Maw's leadership during the stormiest years. For this he deserves our utmost praise and gratitude. Perhaps some will not agree with me, which is to be expected in a time of revolutionary changes complicated by partisanship and rivalries. But however much people may disagree in judging Dr. Ba Maw politically, there can be no question whatever about his outstanding personality and mental gifts, which set him apart from all others in Burma.

MAUNG MYINT

Rangoon, 1964

Preface

We are moving so fast these days that perhaps the events I shall relate here have by now become just an old and receding memory. Yet, if we look at them correctly, they are not old, for they are very much a part of a story that is still going on. In fact, nothing that has happened in Burma since the Second World War can be really understood without going back to what happened during that war and the years around it. Speaking quite factually, the seeds of the Burmese future were sown then which have exploded into the harvest the country is reaping at present, for better or for worse—and, it may even be said for a long time more. Furthermore, whether that wartime story has grown old or not, it still remains untold. The Burmese have not yet written their history of those years; at any rate nothing that could be regarded as such, in spite of the fact that they alone can write that history about themselves, for it is obvious that only they can know it in a complete way, from all sides and angles.

The truth about that period in Burma can never be known until the Burmese themselves tell it; nor can it be said to be really told as long as the people who were right in the events do not tell us what they know. Clearly, those who took a direct part in these events are in the best position—the only position—to give an account of them.

It is with such a conviction that I have written the present recollections of the period, mentioning here and there the thoughts that the happenings inevitably evoke. On account of my position then as the person who exercised total power in the state—mostly an illusion of power in the awful conditions of a desperately fought, worldwide conflict—my knowledge of the times must as a matter of course be more complete than that of others. It also makes my duty to reveal whatever I know all the greater.

Before I go further I wish to explain the way I see the war epoch

in Burma fundamentally. This view will run as an undercurrent through my entire narrative. For me the epoch is not a separate phenomenon existing by itself and unrelated to anything that occurred before it. I see it very definitely as the culmination of a struggle that goes back for generations, stretching through a good part of colonial rule in Burma, and ending only when Burma regained her independence. Several generations during those colonial years carried on that struggle in one form or another according to the means they had. It went on in the secrecy of their hearts and homes during the early years when their strength was small and scattered and their means were even smaller. There were times when it broke out spasmodically in local rebellions organised round their memories of a Burmese monarchy, which was the only way they knew then of finding an outlet for their racial drives. Eventually, the torch was passed on to the generation that witnessed the First World War and the crisis that followed in almost every country, bringing new hopes and opportunities to all.

The growing conflict then came into the open in Burma as it did in many other colonies; it became a widespread mass movement and struggle, the first of its kind in Burma and perhaps the most heroic, considering that it had to be waged by that generation without weapons, without friends or resources, without anything before it to learn from, almost without hope, and when the imperialist power still looked invincible and was employing every form of repression and even terror to quell its subject peoples. However, the struggle only widened and the new spirit it inflamed rose to such a pitch that by the time the Second World War broke out the country was ready to do anything. What happened during that war was the culmination of a long historical conflict.

All I have said about the course of the Burmese struggle has an inescapable conclusion: it is that this drawn-out fight for independence was at every stage basically anticolonial, that is, against Britain as the colonial power ruling over us; our objective was anticolonial, to get rid of that British colonial rule, and any other objective which may have grown out of the struggle as it zigzagged along was incidental. We were resisting colonialism, or imperial-

ism if that tougher word will make the meaning clearer, through all the years of its existence in Burma. We got into the last world war spectacularly to resist it with arms; we were in reality still resisting it till the war ended; we went on resisting it till the colonial power left Burma and we became independent; and since then we have declared our unity with the other newly independent nations of Asia and Africa in holding that colonialism in its various disguises is still the greatest menace threatening our two weaker continents. This viewpoint which I hold inflexibly will run through the whole of my narrative.

It is really an elementary view which every country that has been a colony continues to keep alive, a fact that is proved by the anticolonial outbursts still heard now and then in Asia and Africa. No bond unites these two continents so much as their common hostility towards colonialism.

It has been the same in Burma too, but the fact has been blurred in the accounts we usually hear of the Burmese struggle during the war. As they tell it, a fight carried on against colonialism and British colonial power is made to appear as one entirely against Japan, entirely between Asians because of Asian brutalities. For them the war we fought was not against a historical enemy in Asia, which was colonialism or imperialism, but against the enemy of the Western imperialist powers, which was fascism. Thus the whole outer perspective of the Burmese struggle in its last stage has been changed by these accounts. Inwardly and as things worked out in the end, nothing of course was changed or could be changed, for the forces of history erupting at the time were clear and immutable, and so the struggle at its core continued to be against colonialism as our people knew it for nearly a hundred years. However, the story of the struggle was changed and falsified in the telling.

I also wish to point out another perversion. In order of time our liberation from colonialism began in 1943 as a result of the earlier defeat and flight of the British from Burma and our declaration of independence in that year. A Burmese force had actively fought against the British and Chinese armies to win that liberation. Yet these crucial facts have been suppressed by our own postwar declaration that independence came to us only several years later

and as a gift from the colonial power. Thus we have actually denied one of our most important historical achievements during the war.

We have done the same with many other achievements of ours. To mention some of them, there was a freedom movement launched by the Burma Freedom Bloc which swept the country in defiance of wholesale jailings and repressions; the birth of the Burma Independence Army, the first of its kind to emerge anywhere out of the war, and the part it took so spectacularly in a full-scale military campaign across Burma; a whole people exploding with joy when the British colonial forces were forced out of Burma; the creation of the Burma Defence Army as a completely Burmese military force, the first of its kind in Southeast Asia during the war; the wartime Burmese Declaration of Independence, again the first of its kind, which was so unitedly made in 1943 when the days were darkest; the new sovereign state, war-created and war-stricken, but nevertheless a state which was set up with so much faith and courage; the new revolutionary goals so defiantly pursued; the planning for the future and the missions sent abroad, which at that time set an example to all Southeast Asia; the foundations for the new nation laid then and used by others later; and, above all, the marvellous spirit of the Burmese as a people which moved behind all that was accomplished during those desperate years when the country was torn between the Japanese militarists, whose heavy hand still lay on it, and the British, who were bombing it cruelly and getting ready to seize it again. By any criterion whatever, it was a tremendous period, during which the real beginnings of our independence were achieved. Yet one hardly hears of it nowadays. Even less is heard of the main political events and developments before the war.

We can see how such a situation came to arise. It is one of the ways in which good often comes out of evil and evil out of good. The anti-Japanese resistance, which resulted in Burma coming out of the war on the winning side also put the Burmese on the side of the British and other Western imperialist powers. One inescapable consequence of this sudden switch which found the Burmese fighting to bring the colonial power back to their country was that the entire story of their struggle had to be switched and changed too. It had now to be half the story instead of the whole. Everything

against the British had to be wiped out and the account begun as well as ended with the anti-Japanese uprising in the last days of the war and filled to the brim with the most virulent anti-Japanese passions and echoes.

For very practical reasons, the political organisations which emerged out of that resistance and the British victory could not have told any other kind of story. For similar practical reasons also, the organisations as well as other resistance elements were compelled to keep to that story in their subsequent struggle for power and fame. The anti-Japanese resistance completely dominated it. All contemporary Burmese history had somehow to be linked to that resistance or to those who had carried it out and their earlier activities, or else ignored altogether. And so the history of the war in Burma came to be fashioned accordingly. It was a very practical way of looking at the matter in conditions in which few bothered to look further. But those times with their needs and compulsions are past, and we should now be able to tell the whole truth. We must put Burma back into the actual stream of history as it has taken its course in Asia, and indeed in all the colonies everywhere, or else we shall find ourselves left out of that stream altogether.

To avoid any misunderstanding, I will explain further what I have said about British colonialism. For my story the colonial power is Britain and our anticolonial struggle is anti-British for the simple reason that that was the colonialism we had to fight in Burma, and I must set down the facts as they are. But today British colonialism or imperialism is a thing of the past, or mostly so. As far as the Burmese are concerned, it has become just an episode in their history which they once went through and have now left behind, having lost much during it as well as learnt much from it. For this very reason the Burmese must know and understand it correctly in order that its awful lessons should never be forgotten.

We are in a position now to take a complete view of colonialism or imperialism, to see the brutal truth that colonialism was historically right and progressive in certain regions under certain conditions, but by the working of the same historical laws it has now become in every instance an ultimate crime against humanity. So the British coming to Burma a hundred years or so ago was

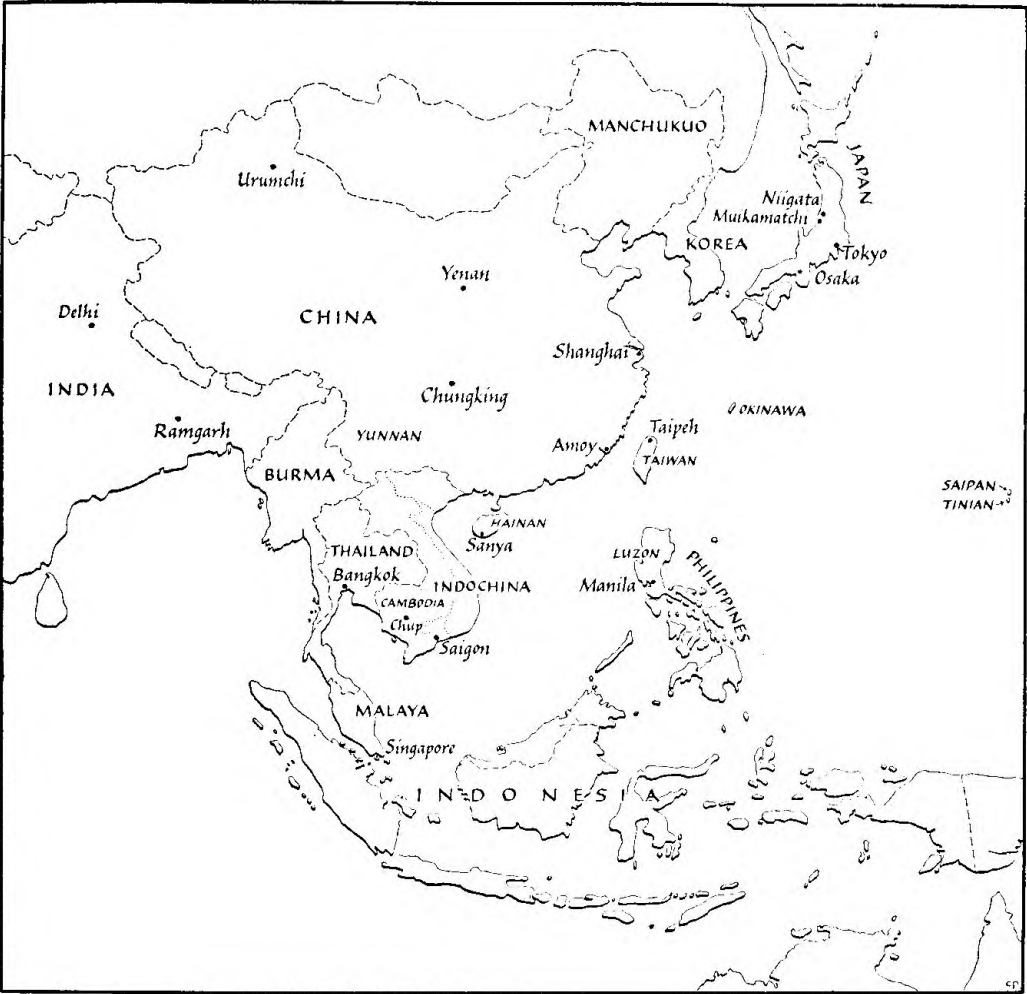
a historical necessity to pull us out of the ruts in which we had long lost our way, and their leaving also was a historical necessity; and the Burmese revolt against them also was such a necessity. Looking at it in that total perspective, nothing that happened in Burma during the war casts a reflection on the British as a people. In fact, few nations, if any, have displayed a truer sense of reality than the British in the most difficult postwar years, or have proved more their essential political vision.

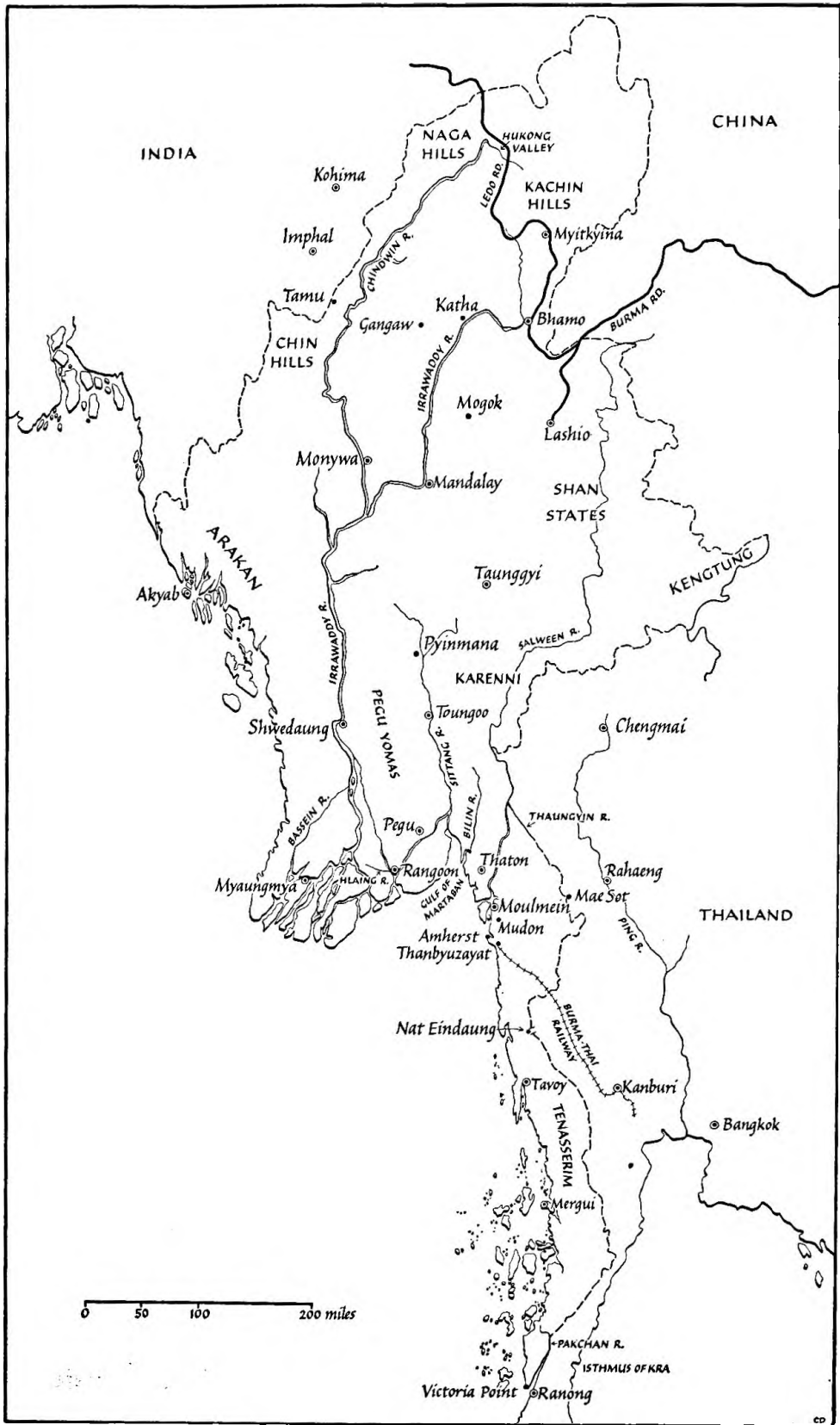
Finally, I repeat that our entire colonial story now belongs to the past. It is all behind us now, together with the passions it unleashed once, so we can today look back at its events dispassionately, historically, and with the single purpose of learning from them. That is what I intend to do here. It is inevitable that there should be as many ways of seeing the past as there are people and interests. The British will see it in their own way, and so will the Burmese. The British will see it from the outside, mostly from the viewpoint of the material values their presence in Burma had created and their catalytic effect, whereas the Burmese will get down deeper and point out the other side of those facts. They will stress their national heritage and its irreplaceable values which the British destroyed, the development of the Burmese as a nation which the British period arrested, and all the exploited wealth the British carried away. In consequence, the two nations will disagree over many things, and perhaps the truth will not be altogether on this side or that, but somewhere in the middle, or in a synthesis of what the Burmese see from within and what the British see from their outer viewpoint. Perhaps this will take us dialectically to a fuller truth. Meanwhile, both sides must be allowed to tell their own story freely and truthfully.

This narrative will therefore be as factual as possible, hiding nothing and adding nothing. It will be a very human story with both sides acting as people more or less do at such times. Speaking of the Burmese, we were behaving just as any other young and virile colonial people would in fighting for their rights. We did a lot of right as well as wrong things. We were wise at times and foolish at times, heroic at times and pretty unheroic at times; there were even times when we behaved like a bunch of donkeys. But we were also made great by the greatness of the hour. Most of the time we were doing something not because we knew how to do it

but because something within us and greater than us was driving us to do it. That is the kind of story you will be reading.

There is one thing more I wish to explain. I have written some parts of the narrative rather emotionally, and often polemically. This has been knowingly done. It was an emotional as well as polemical period, and that is a fact that must be brought out. It was also a period when the most commonplace ideas became new and burning truths for which a people fight passionately. This fact also has to come into the narrative. All the clichés used then too have to come into it somewhere. In this way I have tried to convey the full image of the times.









PART I

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Looking at it very broadly, the background to the wartime events in Burma was the same as in most parts of Asia, for Burma reflected the general Asian condition. For instance, as everywhere else, the prewar years were the sowing time of the new inflammatory ideas in Burma. The ferment of the period had also begun to find its way into the country. This was inevitable, with China deep in a revolution on one side of us and India on the other side smouldering with the beginnings of one. We also had our own reasons to think of a revolution of some kind which were as compelling as any in Asia. Meanwhile, the radical ideas kept coming in.

Almost every Asian country needed a thorough shake-up to pull it out of the old cart tracks in which it still jogged along. The mere fact that one half of the world was still jogging along like that, with signs of going on doing so endlessly, while the other half was leaping forward kept widening the gulf between them, and so increasing the contradictions as well as the resulting disequilibrium which threatened to pull the whole world apart.

Asia desperately needed a revolution that would give her the most in the least time. But the West, which held the power to regulate the pace of progress for most of the Asian countries, made whatever change they achieved so slow and piecemeal that in the end very little was changed in substance. Thus in Burma the British allowed years to go by with talk of petty reliefs and remedies when genuine reforms were needed, and then talked of reforms for another long span of years when something much more radical was needed. The result was that by the time the talks were over the situation had changed so much that most of the measures planned to be taken had gone outdated; and so it went on, the measures

nearly always trailing behind, until nothing less than a full-blown revolution became necessary to clear up all the work left undone and accumulating. It was at such a time that the vast upheavals in Russia, Germany, Italy, and Turkey and the rumblings in other parts of the West occurred, and their echoes were eagerly heard in Asia. This sweeping break with the past in pursuit of a new world vision carried a tremendous message to all the defeated and down-trodden everywhere. For the Asian leaders who were looking out from their several windows, its effect was immediate. It was something beyond all their hopes and dreams.

It would not be true, however, to say that anything happened apocalyptically in Asia under the spell of the Western revolutions, but they certainly caused a general stir among the mass of the people in many lands. It was inevitable that the spell should work faster among the politically conscious sections. The bolder spirits foresaw their own people liberated in the same way. Even more, the revolutions, so astonishingly successful in so many countries, proved to them that a good portion of the world wanted just what they did—that is, to wipe out the old predatory order. By all the portents it was a revolutionary age, which meant that the Asian revolution was a thing that could become real. It would occur as a part of the general clearing of the ground which had already begun, for there were now friends and forces to help it along. That really was all that many in Asia wanted to know.

√ Slowly the new ideas spread, taking different forms and periods of time in different countries according to the situation encountered, but all essentially revolutionary. Most of those who accepted them did not much care whether the ideas were black or red or yellow, whether they were from Russia or Germany or China or Japan. It was enough that they promised something new and were on their side, as against their colonial rulers, and held out a future that would be totally their own. Only a very few at that time went deeper than that. Such, in essence, was the effect of the new ideologies in Asia in the prewar years—slow, seminal, still confined for the most part to the leadership, but preparing the way for the future Asian mass revolutions.

I will now turn to the conditions in Burma. They were virtually the same as those I have just described; in fact, samer, as Orwell

might have said, for often they were worse. For instance, foreign exploitation was more grinding on every level, right down to the lowest. The vast British enterprises took everything on top, the Indian and Chinese businessmen nearly everything in the middle, and the Indian clerks and coolies a good deal of what remained at the bottom. The Burmese were undercut and elbowed out of most occupations that rightly belonged to them. There had been also a recent peasant rebellion that left the bulk of the peasants completely crushed; the world economic crisis of the early thirties had left most Burmese impoverished; and the two mock constitutions of the interwar years had left all Burmese disillusioned.

Continuing to speak of the economic conditions, paddy prices were dead, which meant for the Burmese that nearly everything was dead; unemployment became country-wide, especially among the urban and educated youth in whom the new ferment was already simmering. Rents, taxes, and interest rates were as ruthless as ever although incomes had crashed. Meanwhile, the colonial government just looked on, collecting its dues punctually as if nothing had happened, and also helping the foreign interests to do the same, in the name of a law whose concepts went back to the middle of the past century or even further back. That law was strained to the limit to shift the effects of the universal disaster onto the helpless Burmese peasant and others like him. Through that law roughly half of the agricultural lands in Lower Burma passed into the hands of the foreign moneylenders and absentee landlords, and the colonial government did not raise a finger to stop this mockery of all law, justice, and good conscience. It was almost as if there were no such thing as moral law or conscience.

In the administrative areas no government was stable or could be under the two constitutions I have mentioned. So no government could get down to the bottom of any problem or undertake anything that required time and concentration, and real power continued to remain in the hands of the colonial bureaucracy and its steel-frame services, as Lloyd George once proudly called them, steel-rigid and steel-cold, and the alien interests they protected. Such was the state of the country as the new revolutionary ideas kept seeping in.

Soon these ideas found their way into the political arena; and so the first seeds of socialism were planted in Burma. In 1936 the

Sinyetha, or Proletarian, Party announced a policy that contained the first of those seeds. At about the same time or a bit later other small socialist beginnings also made their appearance here and there, like the Left Book Club, which popularised Fabianism, a mild, British variety of socialism, but containing some of the genuine socialist ferment. There were also small Burmese youth groups and study circles like the Nagani or Red Dragon Book Shop which started vaguely to play with socialist ideas. Even a Marxist type of socialism was beginning to take root. A small Marxist group had already gathered round Thakin Than Tun and Thakin Soe, the two who were later to lead a full-scale communist insurrection in Burma. The group established contacts with the Communist Party in India shortly before the war.

So it happened that at a time when one country after another was in the grip of a revolution, Burma also was heading for something like one. The new doctrines were thrilling, especially for those seeking an escape from the old, and the trappings in which they were invariably decked thrilled even more, the private armies and coloured shirts and fist-raising and slogan-shoutings and, in the centre of it all, the shining charismatic leader who would save his people. All these had an enormous appeal for our awakening masses. Soon they were imitated. Hitler, Mussolini, Mustafa Kamal Pasha, Marx and Lenin and Stalin were names freely invoked to rouse almost every large political gathering. It was like that for years—basic, emotional, and more against something than for anything positively. Ideological niceties did not yet exist except perhaps among a very few. Fascism had not lost the war then, nor had the Western Allies won it, and all the talk about our postwar antifascists having always hated fascism is just not true. It is only a new policy seeking old roots in the past to gain a certain legitimacy. Most of the postwar antifascists were giving the fascist salute and shouting the fascist slogans in those days.

The fascist salute and the communist hammer and sickle were both revolutionary symbols, and so were taken over in some form or other by the more restless parties. *The Communist Manifesto* and *Mein Kampf* were both avidly read as revolutionary textbooks, and so were the Sinn Fein writings; the Black Dragon cult, or at any rate its darker phrases, were imported from Japan; Sun Yat-sen's books were translated and widely sold; the most popular

political song, around which a whole party was organised and which, upon that party achieving power after the war, has now become the Burmese national anthem, dwells defiantly in the manner of fascism upon "our land, our earth, our Burmese race." All the heady ideologies therefore mingled before the war to produce a brew that gave a violent swing to our politics as a whole.

The changes became more marked as the war approached. Mass demonstrations increased, speeches turned fiery and defiant, political armies grew larger, and the flames kept spreading. When at last the war came the new ideas did not take long to produce an organisation and a mass following and, within a year or so, a program and the cadres needed to carry it out. Whether they belonged to the left or to the right, whether nationalist or communist or the usual mixture of that mixed period, the radical men were agreed that the existing system and its creatures must go as they had done in the revolutionary countries.



I must now give a fuller account of the political background in Burma; that is, the parties and their evolution before the war. Without knowing something about them one could not really know how the Burmese evolved politically. We shall therefore have to go back a little into the past.

Politics, as understood today, began in Burma germinally, one might say, a little before the First World War when Young Men's Buddhist Associations (YMBA's) were formed in a few big towns after the pattern of the Christian YMCA's. Their name itself shows that religion was their chief concern, while other activities only came later under the stress of the quickly developing situation. Events kept pressing on these rudimentary bodies and forced their growth; they multiplied and gained strength and at last found themselves in the thick of the postwar issues. By then they had become a full-fledged national movement led by almost the entire body of monks in every town and village. In keeping with their new character, their name became the General Council of Buddhist Associations (GCBA's) while the members proudly called themselves *wunthanus*, or the racially faithful ones. The

monks also formed similar associations led by the most influential *sayadaws*, or presiding abbots, in the land, such as Be-me Sayadaw, Thet-pan Sayadaw, Ye-U Sayadaw, and so on. They worked in the closest association with the lay organisations and eventually controlled them.

The political faith of the rising movement was a simple mixture of religion and racialism, but by being simple and emotional at a stage when mass politics were really just beginning, the mixture proved to be an enormous force. Its rallying cry also was most simple, consisting of race, religion, language, and learning. Yet these four words had magic enough then to work the people into a racial frenzy out of which all that happened later in Burma more or less developed.

The new situation quickly produced its images. One of them was U Ottama, a Buddhist monk who more vividly than anyone else personified the unity of race and religion and the forces they had released. His was the first bold, radical voice in Burmese politics, and the masses flocked to hear it and passed on the words to others. This monk was definitely a great archetypal force, a storm in fact that shook the people at a time when they waited in their hearts for such a shaking.

Next, there were the products of the new education, the young men just out of the university who represented the new trends as they saw them. To this group belonged U Ba Pe, the veteran of Burmese politics, tough, sphinx-like, thoroughly wide-awake and pragmatic, the man who knew and weathered more political storms than anyone else in his day. Along with U Ba Pe were U Pu, U Thein Maung, Sir M.A. Maung Gyi, U M.M. Ohn Gaing, and many others who played an important part in the early stages of our progress.

U Thein Maung's contribution proved to have a deep historical significance. He led the famous antifootwear campaign soon after the First World War. Up till then Europeans visiting our pagodas and other sacred places would keep on their footwear in scorn of the Burmese sensibilities, which regarded such a practice as an act of the utmost desecration religiously and an intolerable insult politically. After the war the campaign assumed national proportions. The world conflict seemed to have taught the British

somewhat that the world was really changing, and they decided to change along with it in a few things. As a result, they yielded to the Burmese demand to prohibit the use of footwear in any form by anyone in any Buddhist place of worship. Historically, it was the first clear victory won by means of mass protest and action in Burma, and it gave a great impetus to the growing national awareness. The new political leadership carried this victory into the field of national education, which, in many ways, was the basis of the whole national movement. It helped immensely to create the new national schools which spread the new national spirit. It was a positive breakthrough. I will deal with it more fully a little further down.

The next generation of this interwar period found its image in Tun Shein, a young patriot with a magnetic personality. Soon after leaving the university Tun Shein plunged into the new movement and stirred the youth of the towns in particular with his simple but brilliantly timed and oriented message that the educated Burmese must restore the old Burmese values by being Burmese in every way in their personal lives, for that was where Burmeseness must begin. That, you will remember, was also the message of the wunthanus, and in fact the only kind of message that could find a way into the hearts of the Burmese in those early days. In the mouths of Tun Shein and Po Kya the message became a mystique.

I will now return to the new educational movement that was mentioned a while ago. An event of the most far-reaching importance occurred among the youth in December 1920—the students' boycott at Rangoon University. It was the first mass action to be more or less well organised in the country. Whatever it was, it changed the political atmosphere. The rising national spirit was seen in open action for the first time, and out of it a bold new system of national education emerged which set up its own schools and did everything else on its own, an incredibly tough job in those days; but it was done somehow, and the schools were kept going, and thousands of youths who were already seething with the new ideas thronged into them. The first anticolonial slogans in Burma came from these schools which denounced the whole system of colonial education as a slave system producing a slave

mentality. Soon these schools were proving to be what they claimed to be, and their students were flocking into the national movement.

Another result of immeasurable value came out of the students' boycott. The day it began in 1920 has been observed from then on as National Day. Looking back from the present distance, it could be regarded as the day when Burmese nationalism as we know it now came of age. It gave the new national spirit its first rallying point, its first day of recurring memory and renewal. To this day it is kept ardently, and nothing that has happened since has been able to obliterate it or will ever be able to do so. The British in their time tried to play it down, but that only widened the day's significance. As the education minister in the government in 1934, I made it an official holiday for all schools; and in 1938 when I was the premier I directed it to be declared a public holiday for all state institutions and services. National Day has remained so till now as one of the very few links with the past which have been allowed to remain.

Finally, there were the big GCBA figures like U Chit Hlaing, U Soe Thein, Tharrawaddy U Pu, and a great many others. They were the actual mass heroes of the time, flamboyant as mass heroes generally are, with many failings like the rest of us, but possessing the rare charismatic quality of burning with an inner fire and being able to kindle a similar fire within the masses. Together they succeeded in organising the monks and laymen in almost every Burmese village and so created the first truly mass political movement in Burma. In outlook, they were wunthanus to the bone.

√Then the inevitable cracks began to show. Personalities began to overshadow the sprawling, loosely tied organisation; then came quarrels and secret factions among the monks as well as the people; then open conflicts over this and that, but most of all over the leadership, and at last a complete break and fragmentation. Their basic faith, which was so effective in bringing them together, proved to be too basic and intangible to keep them together. The single GCBA broke up into a number of rival GCBA's, each calling itself by the name of its separate leader, whose word thereafter became its sole political faith and rule. However, the members of these GCBA's continued to call them-

selves wunthanus, and that commonly shared name remained as a tie which kept them together on most critical occasions.

The real historical break occurred between the moderate or constitutionalist wing led by the British-educated set on one side and the monk-led wunthanus on the other. It came to a climax over an issue resulting from a new constitution granted to Burma in the early twenties, namely, whether the Burmese should cooperate in making that constitution work by entering the legislature which was to be set up. The constitutionalists were for council-entry, as it was called then; they were prepared to accept whatever the British gave while agitating for more. They believed in orderly, step-by-step progress, in the policy of "a yard a day, where will Pagan run away," as the troops once marching on the old Burmese Pagan Kingdom used to say. The wunthanus scoffed at the very thought of such a dawdling, beggarly policy.

For the wunthanus it would have to be all, or substantially all, or nothing. They decided to take nothing, to boycott the new legislative council and carry on the struggle directly in the country. And so a new political pattern emerged in Burma, as in India, which in practice proved to be good as well as bad; good because it maintained political activity on two fronts, one in the legislature where present power resided and the other in the country outside where the mass of the people, the actual source of ultimate power, could be organised and prepared for action; and bad because it split the nation and created a triangular conflict between the British, the moderates, and the wunthanus, with the wunthanu segment outside the legislature, that is the masses, getting far the worse of it.

^The boycott of the legislature by the GCBA's, which had the largest mass backing, almost paralysed that body, or at least turned it into a mockery. But the GCBA's in their turn suffered cruelly. Anyone who has followed the Indian nationalist movement knows how terribly eventful and poignant the years following the first postwar constitution were in that country. The same thing happened in Burma; the council-boycott policy of the GCBA's set off a succession of mass actions, local civil disobedience campaigns, refusals to pay taxes in many districts, a boycott of foreign goods, especially clothing, outbreaks and defiance of the law in various forms. The government acted as usual: it viewed such actions as

breaches of law and order and nothing more, and proceeded to enforce the full letter of that law against the wunthanus, for it was they who carried the burden of this long, blind, unequal struggle in an unending night in order to sow the seeds for others to reap later.

✓ At last made desperate, politically by ceaseless provocations of one kind or another and economically by the collapse of the world markets in the early thirties, which worked havoc among them, leaving millions without land or cattle or stock, the peasant masses broke out in an insurrection which was the most shattering to occur under British rule. Again the government took the easy view that the law had been broken and so the lawbreakers must be punished. None in it thought of a moral law more binding than the man-made laws, none asked how much of even those coercive laws still remained valid and sufficient in the basically changed conditions of a far later and different day, and how much of the problem was juridical and how much political and how much economic, and what was the real solution for it all. Instead, the blindest reprisals followed. Saya San, a peasant leader with an utter dedication to his cause, had organised the uprising. Needless to say, the British hanged him together with hundreds of others. ✓ Saya San and his comrades belonged to the Soe Thein GCBA, and soon large numbers from the other GCBA's joined them. I myself might be said to have become one of them in a way, for I acted as the leading counsel for Saya San and most of the first rebel leaders when they were eventually captured and tried. I heard the whole, sickening truth about the plight of the peasants and what really made them break out. I tried to tell it to the government, but in vain; the government was adamant and, under the cloak of a judicial trial, went on enforcing the law against thousands of villagers who knew nothing of that law, but only knew how their few belongings had been seized and sold because they were unable to pay their taxes in time, and their homes and villages were wrecked, and many who were close and dear to them were bound and left under a fierce sun day after day without food or drink as a reprisal for something or other. The law punished the peasants who had rebelled, but actually rewarded its servants who had by their brutalities driven the peasants to rebellion.

The provocations were completely ignored even in weighing

the crime and its punishment. It was all really incredible and heart-breaking; but it happened, in the name of a law imposed by one race upon another for the preservation of the interests of the race which imposed it. I was, however, able to set things right a bit upon becoming in 1937 the premier under the new Burmese constitution, for one of my first official acts was to release all the rebels still lingering in prison. I wanted to do much more for them—for example, to give them something by way of compensation to start a new life and home, but the governor, using his constitutional powers, stepped in and stopped me.

Very shortly before the peasant uprising in the countryside an appalling race riot broke out in Rangoon and spread to several other towns. Its origin was economic, being over the exclusion of the Burmese from dock labour in Rangoon in favour of migrant coolies brought from South India to work for lower wages and longer hours. It ended racially, in a mass slaughter of Indian coolies and their families. Behind the tragedy was the British exploitation of cheap Indian labour at the expense of the Burmese labourer. These riots with their far-spreading roots were among the factors that drove the country to the breaking point of the peasant rebellion and the wounds it left behind.

Yet another riot broke out a little more than a year before the war which was even more violent and widespread because it contained a more explosive mixture of race, religion, and politics. It was between the Buddhists, who were Burmese, and the Moslems, who were mainly Indian. A few objectionable comments in a tract written by an utterly unimportant Moslem set off the first sparks, but it became a really serious conflagration in the excited and steamy political atmosphere of the time. The British police did nothing to put it out, and the general British community even exploited it in order to change the government to their own liking. They succeeded, and they got the government they wanted. It was only when the war came that they paid the price for it. ^{hid}

While speaking of the second race riot, which had so strong a power motive behind it, I might mention the students' strike and the oilfield workers' strike and march to Rangoon in 1938 which were staged more or less at the same time and with more or less the same motive. They were led by the youths and so were more

spectacular, but after the usual sound and fury they fizzled out as soon as the old government fell and a new government formed by the party that had instigated them came in. This gave away their actual motive. But one good thing came out of it for the youths. It was their first taste of action and it taught them a lot.

The countrywide peasant rebellion and the race riots were a very big turning point for the Burmese. They now realised more than ever before the brutal meaning of alien rule and exploitation, and the memory remained with them searingly. They proved this as soon as they had a chance to do so, which was in 1936 when a general election was held over the issue of the separation of Burma from India. The British wanted such separation. The moderate parties wanted it too. Seizing this opportunity to hit back at the British and their followers, the wunthanus came out of their long, sterile boycott and massively opposed separation. It at once became a straight fight between the British, supported by the moderate elements, and the entire strength of the GCBA's, with the mass of the people backing them. The result was that the Soe Thein GCBA, which led the anti-British opposition, won a phenomenal victory. It was a victory for me too, for by then I had joined this GCBA and led its parliamentary wing, which contested and won the election.

This victory marked yet another turning point in our fast-shifting struggle. From then on the wunthanus led by me took their place in the legislature and the government, and even dominated the two bodies in spite of the strong British presence in both of them. Separation was rejected, but the British forced it upon us; the proposed new constitution also was rejected, but the British forced this too upon us; and so ended all illusions ever entertained by the Burmese regarding British intentions in Burma.

Yet one more turning point occurred at this period. The new constitution was to start in 1937, and a general election was to precede it. So the parties began to get ready for it. The party I led in the legislature came out before the others with an explicit policy with which it would fight the election. We called it the *sinyetha*, or proletarian, policy and even changed our name to the Sinyetha, or Proletarian, Party in order to stress it. This was something altogether new in Burmese politics because it was the first

time that a party had declared its outlook and aims, and also because the policy revealed socialist leanings. As its name indicates, the policy used a broad socialist approach to find a solution for the overwhelming peasant population and their equally overwhelming problems.

It declared straightaway that independence was the first objective of the Burmese. Then the policy got down to the peasant, his village and lands and needs. Basically, it was only the first step into the future as seen in a total Burmese perspective, a beginning of a plan to rebuild Burma from the roots up by first rebuilding the Burmese village as far as practicable as a self-sustaining cooperative unit socially, economically, and administratively; and, most basic of all, because it went to the heart of all their problems, to give the agricultural lands back to the agriculturists and at the same time to enable them to keep those lands and work them gainfully both for themselves and for the community as a whole.

All this was sensational in the Burma of those days. As I had expected, there was a howl from the vested interests. It was new and challenging, too much so for that period in Burma, and the Sinyetha Party paid for it dearly in the general election by losing a large amount of votes. Yet the party came out with strength and resilience enough to be able to form a coalition government, the first under the new constitution. This government remained in power from 1937 to 1939. I headed it. After nearly two hectic years my coalition government fell, and was succeeded by another coalition, which was able to get on better with the British and other vested interests because its hands remained untied by any policy. The same year the war began; and so at last we arrive at our actual wartime story which will follow soon.



While the forces in the background I have just described were active below the surface, others were at work above which showed more clearly the signs of the approaching storm. They were the result of the constitutional reforms imposed upon India and Burma during that period. These dubious patchwork reforms had become by the time the war started mostly a show behind which

an open scramble for power and control went on interminably among a crowd of interest groups—communal, economic, administrative, and a lot more. It seemed that the new reforms were really meant to keep everyone busy and divided that way. They, however, had another kind of result as well: they destroyed all faith in British-made constitutions.

This constitutional side of our struggle began in earnest soon after the First World War when both Burma and India demanded self-government in accordance with the postwar promise of self-determination which had been so ringingly proclaimed by the victors. They did it more or less together, for Burma was then a part of India. But in the political immaturity and confusion of those early years, the issue turned into one for reforms, and more particularly for a larger share in the higher posts within the government. Even those demands the two countries left to be settled by negotiation, that is, by bargaining and compromise. It was a bad blunder they committed, and the British at once exploited it to fob them off with some specious changes that left the actual colonial framework of the administration fundamentally the same; it was only made a bit more palatable with a few top jobs for the people of the country.

All this taught the two countries a good lesson. As a result they rapidly matured; mass organisations and movements appeared, mass action soon followed, and the demand became one for the precise and immediate goal of home rule after the example of the Irish home-rule movement. The British, however, continued to sidestep and to parrot the old vague phrases. Meanwhile, the situation kept on changing drastically both within and outside the two countries, changing the nature of the problem as well as the solution for it, and still the British refused to match the extent of these changes; finally Mahatma Gandhi and the Indian Congress declared the Indian goal to be complete independence. Burma followed their example before long.

A few years prior to the Second World War another constitution was given to the two countries, now separated from each other. Again the past was repeated. After that, nothing could have saved the situation except the total ending of colonial rule in India and Burma, and that for the British in those prewar, pre-atomic days was simply out of the question.

Turning to Burma in particular, three years before the Second World War the Sinyetha Party declared in its sinyetha policy that complete independence was its first objective. The Dobama, or Thakin, Party, consisting mostly of adolescent youths, made a similar demand with more youthful words and gestures. Another party, the Myochits, being more pragmatic, would not speak unequivocally of independence, but generally acted in its spirit. The other parties were even more pragmatic and, therefore, more equivocal; they kept silent. However, by the time the war broke out independence had become such a universal emotion among the Burmese that the resolution demanding it in the national legislature won almost all the Burmese votes, and the independence struggle launched by the Burma Freedom Bloc swept the country.

A lot might be said in general about the constitutional issue which bedevilled our politics in Burma and India throughout those interwar years. They began to germinate even during the First World War, and when that war ended with the revolutionary flames spreading in the West, they appeared more starkly. Many hopes had been raised and many illusions created regarding the braver, newer, more democratic world that all the belligerents had declared they were fighting for. Those hopes and illusions had mounted vividly in Asia after President Wilson announced the doctrine of self-determination for all. That war had been fought to make the world safe for democracy; and democracy was in elemental terms the government of the people by the people for the people. And we in the Asian colonies were peoples with a very palpable history of our own; we also had fought in the war for democracy; and so, now that democracy had won, the democratic will of our people would surely prevail in our affairs. So we dreamed, very democratically. But it all turned out to be little more than a dream. Nothing of that kind happened in the end, and the colonies continued to be colonies, and only a little less so. From then on the constitutional issue dominated our entire politics.

In Burma it was the constitution of 1935 that created the atmosphere in which the Second World War began. I happen to be well acquainted with this constitution. As the leader of the largest

party in our legislature I took part in the talks held in London in 1933 while the measure was being put together; and in 1937 I accepted office as the first premier under it. I can still recall the atmosphere in which the talks were held—formal, frigid, unyielding and even hostile beneath the surface, and completely cynical, because everyone knew that the most important decisions were already made or would be made regardless of anything the Burmese had to say. As I said during the debate on the war resolution in our legislature in 1940, even such crucial questions in framing a constitution as self-determination and total autonomy were looked upon as forbidden topics that would disturb the pleasantly dead air round the talks. I returned more than ever convinced that the Burmese would never get anything real and just from Britain constitutionally.

The constitution proved to be even worse in actual working. The last word in every matter was left to a governor appointed by and responsible to the British Parliament alone. Ultimate power was given him under new names—the governor's special responsibilities, the governor's discretionary powers, the governor's reserved subjects, and things like that. In fact, there was no matter in which the governor could not intervene in exercise of some personal power or other. Even more, vital matters relating to the services which ran the actual administration were kept out of the control of the popularly elected government. The result was that this government was hamstrung between two controls, one being the governor's arbitrary powers above and the other the virtual independence of the key services below. Even the little amount of real power it possessed was shadowy, as its life as a government depended upon a legislature in which the minority communities led by the British group always held the deciding vote. And what the British bloc which represented the big British interests said and did in the legislature, the powerful British services which represented the working arm of these interests continued to say and do in the permanent day-to-day administration in the country.

I learnt all this bitterly during my premiership. For nearly two years I struggled to get a start for my *sinyetha* policy. To give the first taste of it to the people I abolished the poll tax, the most hated imposition in the country, which only the rural population

had to pay, as slaves and serfs once paid to their owners. The British accused me of making a huge hole in our public finances, and I replied that I would find other ways of filling that hole. They saw my point, and so the battle between us began. The work of every committee I set up to overhaul the administration was delayed or defeated in all sorts of mysterious ways, and behind the mystery were the British officials who controlled most of the materials that the committees needed. Everything was done by them to prevent these committees from going too deep or too far into any vital matter; and as I wanted them to go really deep and far, I was kept waiting indefinitely.

Then what I had always expected happened; I bumped against some of the biggest foreign interests in the country—oil and teak and rubber. I was determined to change the old outdated lease and tax structures and bring them into line with current values and practices, and the foreign interests were just as determined that neither mine nor any other government did anything to disturb their old privileges. Before I could do more, opposition against my government was whipped up everywhere, the inevitable censure motion came up in the legislature, the British bloc together with its large communal following voted solidly for it, and my government fell. The big interests, both foreign and domestic, got from the new government all I had denied them; the spectre of land nationalisation and agricultural debt reduction faded away, and oil and teak leases were renewed on the old, almost give-away terms, an important member of the British bloc was appointed as the representative for Burma on the powerful international rubber board, and all socialist trends, or what seemed so in government policy, disappeared completely. And so Burma was back again where she was in the past.

This was the kind of constitution and administration we had when the Second World War broke out. I have shown how in practice it had produced governments which did not govern, having little power or time to do so but mostly existing to keep up a show that hid the realities; and while the ministers and administrators, or a large number of them, were busy pursuing their own ends, the administration as a whole had drifted just as ever before with little changed, little really done. It became more and more a government by precedents and deals and just drifting along most

of the time. While this went on, the permanent colonial bureaucracy continued to run the country in its own way.

Getting further down, this constitution created more problems than it solved. It was again the old story of being too little and too late, of being essentially too static for a people in whom the new drives were growing. As a result, it became tied up in all sorts of contradictions. It tried to give with one hand and take back with the other, to yield in form and withhold in content, in order to preserve as much as possible the essential British powers and privileges. The outcome was a constitution that was self-defeating all the way. The colonial power was faced with the recurrent colonial dilemma of trying to give and yet not give, of taking with an air of giving, of moving forward and yet remaining in the basic things where it was; and, to solve this dilemma as best it could, it had to resort to its usual devices of dividing to rule and delaying to defeat, of inventing escape clauses and conditions which would make a good deal of whatever it had been forced to give empty when given. This is, of course, a dilemma facing all colonialism and not only the British. One can clearly see in the situation the seeds of its own destruction that any form of colonialism is doomed to carry within itself.

There is yet another fact that lay deep in this constitution as it does in everything colonial. The constitution was in reality made for the country and not for its people, for Burma and not for the Burmese. At the bottom of it was the feudal concept of property. Burma was regarded as a piece of property within a British-owned empire and not as the home of its native races, or as a living, evolving part of Asia and the world itself, of Asia materially, spiritually, historically, in every sense that matters for a people. In consequence, the property interests of the owning nation finally shaped every important part of it. This basic property concept, being not only feudal but also colonial and exploitative, gave little thought to the human facts and relationships, and so widened the gap further between the two peoples. As a result the tensions between them multiplied. Since that constitution was very cynically meant for the British, the Burmese with equal cynicism decided to use it against the British, to exploit it themselves so as to get what they could out of it while pressing for more; and this would go on until

they were ready to act directly and break free. The conviction grew among the Burmese that there was no other way left.

Such was the constitutional situation in Burma on the eve of the war. The inner rot found its way into everything. What was worse was that the colonial interests liked it that way, liked a weakened country and government, on the theory that a weak native government is the best kind of government for colonialism. So the rot spread and deepened, while the impact of the rising world tensions coming from outside gained steadily. Both the British and the Burmese were living in such a world, each thinking only of itself. The British were trying their best to save an empire as well as interests they knew deep within themselves to be historically doomed, and the Burmese, helped by the same historical forces, were trying to get out of the grip of that empire and those interests. Meanwhile the Burmese were split and distracted by a perpetual scramble for the spoils, as the British had anticipated when they planned that constitution, but, contrary to such anticipations, the Burmese remained inwardly united by a growing conviction that national independence would put an end to all these colonial evils. Thus, when the war came at last, the ground was ready for the overwhelming events that followed.

CHAPTER 2

The War Begins

I still have with me some of the diaries I kept in the early years of the war. They were recovered from a heap of odds and ends that remained forgotten in a disused shed which no one had thought worth the trouble to break open or burn down during the utter anarchy we passed through twice. These diaries are now in a poor state, with many pages riddled by termites, but fortunately they can still be read. Now these little books, already yellow and aging, remain in my life as a bit of the past and its memories that I shall never lose. They almost speak to me every night I sit down to write these pages.

The first entry in the diary concerning the war states simply that it had come at last. Next follow a few weak words about Munich: "Will it be Munich again?" it asks. There is nothing more for some days, which shows that nothing more had taken clear shape in my mind at the time. I noted at some length the fighting in Poland only some weeks later, when it was practically over. One entry says: "Poland is gone, and yet nothing happens. Now that Hitler has got what he wants, it won't be surprising if the whole show ends." Like many others working for a cause, I had thought of a world war for years, and had declared repeatedly my conviction that it would come and would bring us the opportunity to win our freedom back, and yet, when the expected actually occurred, I was as dazed by it as anyone else. The weak, rambling words in the diary show that my mind was rambling too for some time. It was a very revealing phenomenon.

I must, however, say that there were several reasons for my failure to rise at once to the turn events took so unexpectedly. It was a time when nothing seemed to be real or certain for long, and

anything could happen just as the war did in the end. Also, the success of the Axis powers had been so uninterrupted till then and the retreat of their opponents before them had become such a routine-like ending to every crisis that I, like so many others, had expected it to be repeated sooner or later in Poland too.

To understand that period in Burma, we must never forget the tremendous spell that Hitler and the Axis countries cast over the East generally. It was almost hypnotic. The Axis leaders were believed to be irresistible. They would create a new world order, as they declared they would and were actually doing; and the East as a whole was longing for some kind of really new order. Hitler had had his way in international affairs so completely by simply raising his voice and his fist, as it were, that we expected it to happen again after he had taken Poland. We saw no difference in principle, and much less in policy, between the sacrifice of Poland and that of half a dozen other small countries that had already taken place. Both fitted completely into the policy of appeasing the strong at the expense of the weak.

Our doubts were increased by the fact that Hitler had often declared he had no wish to see the British empire dismembered, and even regarded its continuance in India and the other colonies in Asia as necessary for his Nordic concepts, and the recent fate of one small country after another, Czechoslovakia, Austria, Ethiopia, Manchuria, had convinced most of us that Britain's principal thought was to save herself and her empire, and to turn the German threat away from her and her allies towards the Soviet Union. That was one reason why I was for some time unable to make up my mind about the way I should regard the new conflict. I even expected it to gutter out as abruptly as it had begun.

International deals had become such a common method of settling disputes among the great powers in that prewar era that there was no knowing at all how any incident would end. So in the first weeks the war looked unreal, except in a limited way in Poland, until Hitler's armies demonstrated over half of Europe that it was most certainly not going to remain unreal. Only then did I, together with countless others, I am sure, begin to think in earnest about the fast-growing world situation and all the things at stake in it for us.

There was another reason for my vacillation. I found myself in a

serious dilemma. I had always regarded imperialism or colonialism as being really a form of race enslavement, and so I instinctively saw the war in that light. For me it was a plain collision between two racial concepts and policies, one asserting the superiority of a single race over all the rest, while the other was more implicit and civilised, but the same in spirit, for it assumed the white man's right to rule over "the lesser breeds without the law." For us in Asia and Africa there was as little difference between the two policies as there was between the devil and the deep sea.

It was, indeed, a bleak situation with nothing in it clear-cut or easy, and my mind kept tossing between the two alternatives, hating both and hating even more my wretched luck in having to make a choice, for it was clear to me before long that the Burmese could not keep out, but must align themselves with one side or the other. Japan had not yet come in to take the Nordic edge off the Axis war aims, and Churchill was to declare soon that the Atlantic Charter was wholly a white man's charter, and there were also many other things said and done then which brought out the racial angles in the war most starkly.

At last I decided to take a practical view of the whole matter and act on the principle of first things first. For us in Burma, British imperialism was real and palpable while other threats were only shadows seen across a great distance. As the Burmese would put it, our first task was to get rid of the ogre riding on our necks before we turned to fight any other ogre, however ogre-ish he might be; indeed, even if necessary to use the other ogre to drive away the one on our necks at the moment. I concluded that the Burmese must think of only one task, that of liberating themselves from British colonial rule, if possible amicably, but if not, then anyhow. Nothing must come in the way of this fact. Even more, I was convinced that the Burmese as a people would see any threat of foreign conquest or rule only in the form in which they had experienced it in their own lives, that is, as British colonialism, so that the hatred of colonialism in this British form alone could be the driving force behind their coming struggle. I reached these conclusions by working things out coldly as I would a business proposition. From then on my mind became clear and fixed.

Speaking of those early indecisions, there was also a personal

reason for them about which I must say something in order to show the kind of period we lived in then. It seemed that I had all the time thought of the next world conflict in the way I wanted it to happen, and not as it was actually going to happen with everything in it dead real and in turn demanding from me the utmost sense of reality. As a result, when the war did arrive it found me, and in fact all the Burmese, unprepared to face its realities for some time. We were not realistic enough; we were as a people too young and green yet, too semantic, too lost in words and abstractions to be ready to think of action of the necessary kind when the time arrived. I am not forgetting that even in the best of circumstances such things take time, more so in a colony.

I am really dwelling on our mental unpreparedness. This unrealism is one of the many consequences of our colonial conditioning, which, in the name of democracy, had taught us as our chief political occupation the making of interminable speeches and the passing of resolutions which proposed and demanded and protested and did everything possible with words; in fact, taught us everything except the basic rule of action that the only way to get a thing done is to know what is to be done, to find a means of doing it, and then to do it. We had never thought of action, of doing anything, in that sense. To be fair, we cannot put the entire blame for it upon the British. Our unrealism goes much further back than the British days; it is as old as the race itself, perhaps as old as the East in general. Indeed, one might even ask if it was not the cause of our colonial subjugation instead of being its result. Anyway, its roots are precolonial.

So it became apparent that I, together with the whole of our generation in Burma, had been only emotionally engaged in a struggle for freedom up till then, and that we were unprepared for a situation which would require us to think and act differently from the past. Upon looking back now, I am convinced too that most of our prewar political action was really a form of inaction, or an escape from action, which we tried to disguise with a lot of resounding words. Or, putting it in more political terms, although our objective of freedom at any cost was in reality a revolutionary one, so that our action too had to be the same, we thought of that action only within the framework of a colonial constitution which

was designed to prevent anything revolutionary from occurring. We had allowed our minds to be caught in this basic contradiction.

At last I made up my mind about the course I was to take, or rather its starting point, for it was impossible to think of going beyond the start at that stage. There were still so many things to be decided before taking another step, like what was to be done next, and with whom, and how, and when, and so on, endlessly. Those questions took me on a long search for the facts necessary to answer them and also for people and parties that shared my views on the war and the opportunities it offered us.

Soon I found myself drawing all sorts of people into a discussion of the general situation, trying from long political habit to discover their thoughts and feelings, and how far they represented the general mind. The result was often discouraging. But perhaps it is not fair to say this, because none of us were very encouraging in that period except that some were less so than others. The out-and-out nationalists, for instance, were trying to come together, but were not succeeding very well. At the other end, there were those who looked as if they wanted to remain just where they were till events took them safely along. Those others were interested in the war events only as such, just as they would be interested in a fire burning down some other person's house many miles safely away from them. That was about all the interest they showed. It did not look too hopeful in the early days when many people at the top were still living in a colonial make-believe world and had not yet discovered their true feelings or were concealing them. In that confusion, few thought beyond the day's events.

I will give some examples of the way the Burmese were reacting to the war. The first is an extreme one, but it represents a cross-section that existed chiefly in the state services where such sentiments were part of the rule of conduct.

Going back to my diary, an exasperated little entry says, "Had a talk with—. He's a fool." I remember the talk well. First of all, I must explain that the man I mentioned was not in the least a fool, but an eminent lawyer and much respected by all. It must have been that I was morbidly guilt-conscious and extremist at the time, and this man's views were not extremist enough for me; and, as it often happens in political discussions especially during a

crisis, both of us must have ended by being convinced that the other was either a fool or a liar and traitor.

I had asked this very intelligent man what he thought about the war that was going on so lamely.

He had a ready reply. "Why, didn't you see it in the papers lately? Hitler has run out of petrol. He hasn't enough of it to last more than a few weeks. That's why his armies are not moving much. It's going to be a short war."

"And you really believe that?" I asked him rather sharply.

"It must be true," he persisted. "There is the British blockade strangling Hitler." That explained it somewhat. That man was living back in the days of the First World War when a British blockade did more or less strangle the enemy at about the end of the war. For those like him history goes on unevolving and simply repeating the past. Such static notions can be explained; but what is inexplicable is that any sensible man should believe a story that implied that Germany had gone to war against half the world with just a few barrels of petrol, and that the British blockade had stalled her stupendous fighting power even before it could start to fight.

The story itself was so fatuous that I am sure the British official information service had no hand in circulating it. It was the sort of stuff that some war commentators regarded as their business to bring out from time to time for a certain type of people who had to be won over that way. But it went round in Burma to the extent of my very sane friend repeating it. Whether he did so without giving much thought to what he said did not matter. His mind was capable of doing it, and that mattered a good deal. It symbolised a certain state of mind that a long colonial moulding creates, a colonised mind resulting from the complete anomaly of one kind of world trying to impose its own shape on another. The new product reflects the anomaly; and one way it does so is by a weakening of its native pride and spirit. This has happened in every long occupation of one country by another.

The man I have mentioned was of course an extreme instance of colonial conditioning, but there were others, especially in the upper social layers, who were not much better. For many in that tight little service and professional set the war was just another war which the British would take care of. They showed a general

lack of any individual views that went beyond the mere spectacle of the events taking place. Instead, they were content to repeat what the British said; they let the British do their thinking. The British did it happily and with great flair. As often as possible they led all war talk into a speculation whether it would be over before Christmas or some such short date, thus implying that a British victory was certain and the only question was whether it would be won soon or late, either this year or the next or the next. The propaganda in it was insidious and quite effective in its own set. One heard the question everywhere that set gathered together.

I heard it once at a big legal dinner. Soon after the party began, the talk drifted to the war, to Hitler and the Allied fighting strength, and the usual things were said and the usual words used. Then came the inevitable question from a British judge, who put it to the man sitting next to me.

"Do you think it will be over before Christmas?" The reply this time was better than I had expected.

"You will have to fight very hard to win so soon," the Burmese lawyer said. "Germany, you know, is very formidable." The judge, a man of exceptional sanity and balance who was used to seeing both sides of a matter, remained silent and then passed on to something else. I also had a long talk with him on that occasion, but both of us carefully avoided the subject of the war. We respected each other too much to risk embarrassing each other.

Another British official, an earnest young man in the Indian civil service whom I had known when I was prime minister, was not so careful, or probably he felt that it was more important to be earnest than to be careful.

"What do you think of the war?" he asked, trying to speak casually.

I guessed his gambit. "About what in particular?" I asked back. My tone must have warned him of what was coming.

"Well," he replied after a moment, "what I mean is, how long will it take?"

"I suppose till one side wins unmistakably. And that will depend on who fights better and longer and with more guns." The young man, still green in such things, looked surprised at my reply. At any rate he made me see that he was surprised, while I did my best to play the game by showing that I was surprised at his surprise.

"But there can't be any doubt that we shall win," he went on to say. I had waited for this opportunity. The weakness I had seen all round me on so many occasions made me want to tell the British, any one of them, something different, something coming from the real heart of the people which I knew far better than those members of the privileged, parasitical set who generally answered the British question. It was only months later that I had a chance to do so publicly when I spoke on the war resolution in the legislature in February 1940. The feelings I am expressing now are all in that speech, which can still be found in the recorded proceedings of our prewar legislature. I spoke for the Freedom Bloc, which had started to rally the country round it. Such feelings as I have expressed there were already churning within the Bloc at the time I spoke to this British official.

"You mean the British will win," I corrected him. Then I went on. "I don't know who will win. That is far too big a question for any of us. But no matter who wins or loses, I want to see the Burmese win their own victory. That is the first thing I am interested in." After that we changed the subject.

The talk was a casual one, but its consequences turned out to be serious for me. My words must have travelled quickly in that herd-like British colonial set, which always kept tightly together, for after that none of the British, as far as I remember, ever mentioned the war to me, and some months later they found a reason to throw me into jail indefinitely. That was how the British fought for a free world in the colonies.

In the political sector, the atmosphere was partly better and partly worse. For one thing, the Burmese political parties in general and their wide fringes were in closer touch with the people than the privileged set were, and consequently they approached the war more in the Burmese way; they were more independent of the British in their thinking. There was hardly anything yet beyond that, but that in itself was much, as events showed later. It was this strong racial undercurrent running within the Burmese as a people that made the long struggle which followed possible. The mass racial faith more than anything else kept us going.

I have said that the political atmosphere was in certain ways worse than that existing elsewhere. It was particularly so within

the legislature and the government where the national issues came to be considered not according to national interests, but according to the needs of the perpetual brawls over office. One of those needs was the support of the European Group and its satellites, without which none could stay in office for long. I shall have more to say about this as I go on.

One of my diaries mentions a talk which I think is illuminating. It took place with an old friend, an oldtime politician who belonged to a parliamentary group then sharing office with others. The man spoke very honestly. The fact that I noted down the substance of our talk in my diary shows the importance I attached to what we said to each other.

We were alone, and both of us felt that we could speak freely. We soon came to the subject of the war and, looking at my diary, I must have in effect spoken somewhat like this: "This fight among the Burmese parties to win office is important in a way, but don't you think the price the winning side has to pay is too crushing? It has to give half the jobs to just plain self-seekers who will cut anyone's throat as they did mine if it pays them to do so. And the European Group is there to drive you with a whip all the time. Isn't there some way for those who are genuinely nationalist to get together during this war so that we could do something more worthwhile: to win our independence, for example? An idea has come to me lately. If your government feels that I am a threat to its security in office, I am prepared to resign from the legislature. But there must be an understanding. Your government must on its part support our fight for independence."

That, more or less, was the gist of what I said to him. I recall it vividly because it was the first occasion when I spoke of an idea I had begun to nurse of late, which was to quit the legislature and throw myself completely into the fight that I already saw looming.

My friend did not reply at once. The question I had posed was not an easy one, and it must have taken him by surprise.

"Well," he replied at last, hesitantly—I recall that he spoke with a certain hesitation right through: "To be frank, I agree with most of what you have said. I know it is a national crisis, or it's going to be one, and we should not forget our national interests, our independence, as you say. But let us be practical. All the parties

have other interests that are stronger in many ways; and there will always be those who are prepared to do anything, sell or steal anything, to get what they want. It is not enough for some of us to think of independence as long as there are a large number of others in power now who don't, at any rate not to the extent necessary, and you know that the number is large enough to frustrate what you have in mind. It would be worse than it is now if the best people risked their place in the government while the worst fellows hung on. That way we would be losing both power and independence."

"But in a struggle like ours," I pressed, "you must risk one or the other of these two."

My friend seemed to be unconvinced. In this matter he showed all the symptoms of a split mind that was functioning in two separate parts, the inner and genuine mind and the other, its outer pragmatism. Such a type of mind was a common product of the colonial era when people learnt to think in two ways and to speak in two voices. There was their real voice, with which they spoke among themselves, and their public voice, which they used in places like the legislature where the Burmese parties seeking office needed support wherever they could get it. These subterfuges had long become a part of colonial politics. The whole British colonial practice was to speak with two voices, or even with more when more divergent interests and claims had to be quieted down.

That talk went to the very heart of the problem that kept most of the Burmese parties in the legislature paralysed in a real crisis. Our freedom movement escaped this fate only by breaking away from that arena after its independence motion was lost there as a result of British machinations. But this part of the story will come later. For the present I repeat that the talk, the substance of which I have tried to give with the help of my diary notes, is most revealing of the difficulties that lay in our way even then. For me, it is also important because it marks a turning point. The first task we had to face took clear shape in my mind at about that time, and so did the step I felt increasingly I must take sooner or later.

Outside the parliamentary circle, political activities went on more uninhibitedly. They reflected the popular feeling very much

more. These activities were almost entirely carried on by the extreme nationalist parties, which had less interest at that moment in office or any of the gains it brought, whatever the reasons may have been. Being freer, therefore, to act than most of the parliamentary men, these nationalists, in spite of their first confusion and a lot of other drawbacks, were able to start something, to get somewhere, as will be seen when I relate how our wartime venture began.

Getting down to a broader level, there were the masses consisting, in the towns, of the small-income people, the petty traders and workers of all sorts. Even a casual talk with them quickly brought out some facts that time had not changed or seemed able to change. To mention one, British influence after a hundred years or so of total rule was revealed as only an outer and more or less precarious crust lying on the surface, while all the way below the Burmese still lived in their own centuries, as unchangingly Burmese as they were under their kings; and the further you went down among the masses the more that was found to be true. I mention the fact particularly because it proved to be the main source of our strength as the struggle went on.

Most of my political work had been done among this section of people in the towns and the peasants in the districts. They were the *sinyetha*, or proletariat, of my *Sinyetha* Party, the stratum most hit by the colonial policy of turning the subject peoples as much as possible into the "clerks and coolies" needed by a colonial, exploitative economy. In consequence, I was able to understand their minds fairly well. They were not well informed or able to express their feelings as they would have liked to, but those feelings were sharply there. As a segment they had been among the most exploited and neglected under foreign rule, and in course of time a hostility to the foreigner had grown within them. They saw him by a simple process of transference as the cause of all their poverty in their own rich and spacious homeland. All sorts of racial memories and traumas also gave an added edge to the hostility. A great majority among them wanted to see every foreigner driven out, which meant, in the perspective of the war, that they wanted at once to drive out the British and be completely Burmese and free. That desire which I discovered in the masses led me more than anything else during those days to believe in the

dream that was already beginning to lead me. It convinced me that these people together had the emotional strength and purpose necessary to carry a national struggle through. They would provide the driving power if only we would win them over, and then organise and lead them correctly.

They spoke of the war as I had expected, most scathingly. According to my diary notes, which of course have recorded the effect upon my mind of their words rather than the actual words they used, those people saw the belligerent nations quite simply as a set of robbers trying to rob each other. They did not want to have anything to do with such a war. It was not really theirs; it was being fought thousands of miles away, and however much it spread it would end there; one side would win and the other lose and be completely stripped and crushed; several changes in the map would follow when the victors divided the spoils among themselves, and after that the world, a little differently balanced now, would go on just as it had done before till the next war started it all over again. That was the feeling I found widely prevalent among the country people I met and talked with at that time. A little further probing revealed that they also believed that good would somehow come out of the conflict for the Burmese. The captor powers of whole colonial peoples were cutting each other's throats, they said, and that was a hopeful sign for the captives. They believed also that fate was working for them.

So that was yet another aspect of the state of things in Burma in the early months of the war. There was in those months a certain amount of inner turmoil and confusion in some sectors, indifference here and there, even resistance of a sort among a few, but a single racial thought eventually swept all those away. It was out of such a mixed slumbering soil that the last stage of the Burmese struggle for independence was to emerge.



It did not take long for the war to become more real for the Burmese. One event after another showed that, without their consent, a colonial people can be involved in a total war and their whole life turned upside down at the single will of the colonial

power. A power conflict with which we had nothing to do soon claimed us and all our resources. In exercise of a right legalistically deduced from what I have already called the ownership concept of colonialism, Burma as a British-owned colony was considered to have gone to war against Britain's enemies as soon as Britain did so. This at once permitted the most unlimited war measures to be taken, and the power to take them rested entirely within the scope of the governor's special rights under the colonial constitution. So the Burmese, without knowing anything at all, let alone consenting to anything, found themselves fighting for the victory of a colonial system that would mean the continuance of their own defeat and subjugation.

Very soon the country was actually put into a state of war. All the Burmese resources were listed to be seized as the British willed. Old defence laws and regulations were revived to clamp down wartime controls on the people, the armed forces were enlarged, new defence works were started with an uncontrolled budget, and war propaganda in every known form kept pouring out ceaselessly. As this went on we also heard how the other countries, both belligerent and neutral, were meeting the situation.

The people naturally noticed the activities going on all around whose purpose was to drag them into the British war. They soon realised that they must take up some kind of attitude towards the things happening in their name. Whatever they might do or say, it was also going to be their war, fought in their name and at their expense too, and even, if Britain willed it so, with their lives.

Thus outside events and pressures led the Burmese to think more as a people about the world conflict, and as a result a new situation began gradually to crystallise. Attitudes became more sharply defined among our people, especially among the political parties, and these in due course produced the movements which appeared later. There were naturally many events which caused the transformation, some of them occurring in the country and some abroad. I will describe those which, I believe, had the greatest influence on the Burmese during these formative months. I will describe five of them as the most far-reaching in their effect on the course that we eventually took. They were the British action in bringing Burma into the war without the knowledge or

consent of the Burmese; the British war aims, particularly the declaration that Britain was fighting to free Poland and similarly enslaved white nations; the attitude of the Indian National Congress towards the war; the new Asian policy of the Japanese; the German military triumphs early in 1940, followed by those of Japan in 1941 and 1942. The effect of these events was decisive in Burma.

✓ As soon as Britain declared war, the governor in Burma looked for a way to bring the Burmese into it. According to an official of the Defence Department of that period who had personal knowledge of the matter, the governor requested U Pu, the prime minister then, to obtain a formal declaration of war from the Burma legislature. U Pu balked on the ground that such a resolution, if directly put, would split his own multihued party and weaken his position dangerously. The legislature would never accept it without raising the most disruptive political issues, U Pu explained, and the attempt would only add to his difficulties, which were already great enough. Instead, he left it to the British governor to use his constitutional powers to put Burma in a state of war, or, as another way out, to treat Burma as being already at war with Germany, since the British empire was at war and Burma was a part of it. It would give the British what they wanted without U Pu and his ministry risking their office. Only the people would be sacrificed.

Thus the Burmese found themselves fighting a world war without even knowing why they were doing it or what the gain would be for themselves. It demonstrated the terrifying reality of the power that Britain exercised over the destiny of a colonial people, no matter what the new constitutions declared. A way was always provided in these semantic constitutions themselves to get round any declaration. This was something that became clearer with every crisis.

By then also the antiwar cries from India were beginning to reach us. Those cries first incited the people, and the governor's action did the rest; and so the antiwar movement began in Burma. It was actively spread by the nationalist parties, both Burmese and Indian, and opposed only by those who lived and prospered under the shadow of the British. From then onwards, the people as a whole increasingly looked upon the war as the British governor's

since he had declared it, and so left it to him to wage it. It would be their war only on their terms, which they soon proclaimed to be complete self-government. Thus the war in Burma got tangled with the most stormy issue of the time and became the starting point of the final Burmese struggle.

✓ Together with the anomaly of a people who found that they had declared a war without even knowing they had done so was the further anomaly of the aims for which they were said to be fighting it. Britain as usual announced those aims in the loftiest phrases. As far as the colonies understood them, they amounted to this, that Britain was embarking upon a crusade to liberate all enslaved peoples except those enslaved by her and her allies. We were told very earnestly that all who cherished the moral as well as political values must defend them in the war. It was therefore our war, and although the Burmese had no right to be free, all white peoples had that right, and the Burmese must fight and, if necessary, die and give up all they possessed in defence of the white man's right—that is to say, fight to free, not themselves, but the far-away Poles of whom they had hardly ever heard and who might have been living on the moon for all they knew or cared. That was what the British war aims implied for her colonies.

The whole British approach, as far as we were concerned, was so fantastic that it actually became amusing. It had a serious side to it though, which we did not miss. We concluded that the British were making a basic distinction between us and the Poles, or rather between the white and the other races. The Burmese were Asians and were conquered by the British, whereas the Poles were European and conquered by the Germans; and so what was right for the British was wrong for the Germans; in other words, that right and wrong depended upon who did it and to whom. The same British code with a little change here and there was used against the Japanese also when their turn came. They always kept in mind in those days the dictum of their greatest empire-builder, Disraeli, that race is the key to all history. But perhaps a more historical view would be that the British were forced to contend so, as they found themselves caught more and more in the dialectics of their own imperialism and the conflicts it kept on breeding. Taking any view, however, it was now the turn of the

imperialists to pay the price of imperialism, both morally and materially.

The wording of the war aims was as all had expected it to be, broad and abstract and capable of being all things to all men, as Churchill demonstrated later. For Burma there was a more specific announcement. With a great gesture of giving, the governor repeated precisely what had been said for years, that Burma would progressively realise self-government within the British orbit. "Full self-government which is the essence of Dominion Status is the goal for Burma," was all he could say in August 1940; and also that, after victory, "His Majesty's Government will be willing to discuss the problems to be solved in Burma." Every important word in it was semantic, with Britain promising only to discuss Burmese problems after victory and no more. There would be a goal, of course, somewhere and sometime, but none could say where and when.

It was the ritual colonial formula that the Burmese had rejected long ago as something that could mean anything: any pace of progress, within any length of time, towards any kind of self-government as a shadow in the distance, upon any whim or fantasy of the power giving it whose word would be final. Not a material word was changed. The tone even hardened as time passed. As late as June 1941, in an hour when Western Europe had been overrun by the German armies and Britain was beleaguered and Britain's Eastern empire was actually preparing to fight alone if she fell, the new governor declared that Burma's constitutional advance would depend upon the amount of her war effort and cooperation with Britain.

Yet more followed in the same tones. The famous Atlantic Charter appeared in August 1941. Its third article declared that "they respect the right of all people to choose the form of government under which they will live, and they wish to see sovereign rights and self-government returned to those who have been forcibly deprived." To all for whom words, honestly used, must mean what they say, the words of the Atlantic Charter were clear. The Burmese believed that they meant what they said. Churchill, however, did not. Within a month or so of the Atlantic pledge he again announced that it did not apply to the British,

colonies. It was therefore a white man's charter meant to see that all white nations were free and sovereign. There was no clear promise of anything for the colonies, although they were called upon to throw themselves into the war as much as those who were promised everything.

Nor did it end there. More statements were made which said the same evasive things, the same yes and no as someone quipped at the time, until in September the British Secretary of State for Burma said the final no in a ponderous official statement:

It is to this high position of Dominion Status—a position to which we would not lightly admit outside people without full consideration of the character of their government or the responsibility which it might involve—that we wish to help Burma to attain as fully and completely as may be possible under certain contingencies immediately after the victorious conclusion of the war.

The statement, which very carefully tried to say nothing new or positive, was made in reply to a direct question asked by U Saw, the Burmese premier, during his visit to London at the end of 1941 as to whether the Burmese, in fighting in the war, would be doing so for their own right to govern themselves. The British refused to say more. Churchill even refused to discuss anything relating to Burma's future. Thus within a few fateful months of the Japanese invasion the British killed all Burmese hopes in language the Burmese were long used to hearing. Our war effort was to be complete and unconditional while any gain we might derive from it would depend upon what "may be possible under certain contingencies" which the British alone would decide after a victory which would make their decision unassailable. Nothing else was defined any clearer.

While this dialogue proceeded officially the usual colonial men of all shades and callings joined in the cry that the Burmese were unfit to be free, repeating as they always had the things their fathers and grandfathers had said before them about the blessings of British colonialism and the need of the subject races for the white man's hand to lead them always. Not even a world in flames could teach these people anything new. Burmese claims were attacked and even ridiculed, and not a single British voice was

heard to speak fairly for us. When the Poles and other dispossessed white nations declared that liberation was their war aim they were passionately supported, and that aim was set down in a great charter; but when a colonial people merely raised the question of their future they were accused of bargaining, of, according to the *London Times*, being "inclined to use the contributions of Burma to the war effort as a lever for extracting from the British government further and more far-reaching promises."

Within a few months of these imperial words and postures the Japanese smashed their way into Burma, the British were fleeing to India, and the Burmese joined the Japanese in driving them out. Thus the Burmese proved their fitness as well as their right to rule themselves in the only way a colonial power understood and accepted in those pre-atomic, bloc-free days.


In explaining the Burmese action to his people, Churchill said that the British had "failed to win the hearts of the Burmese." This statement, set against the background of all I have already related, reveals more than anything else the colonial mentality which finally destroyed colonialism. It would be too banal to ask whether you win people's hearts by seizing their land, or, to put it in a way that occurred instantly to us in Burma, whether Churchill was similarly surprised that Hitler did not win Polish hearts by spurning Polish claims and seizing Poland; or, going back to the comment in the *Times*, whether that great newspaper ever considered that the independence of Poland or any other white nation subjugated by the Nazis was to be regained by "extracting promises" from their conquerors. It takes you again to the root of the racial issue, to the distinction made between the white and the other races, to the Churchillian theory that while liberty is a right for the white nations it is not so for others, especially for the British colonial subjects; and when that stage is reached all talk of racial peace and harmony becomes fatuous. This happened in Burma when Churchill made his statement. Its cynicism infuriated the Burmese more than anything else. Churchill was surprised, but the Burmese were staggered, that, after all that had been recently said and done to them he should think the British could have won Burmese hearts, or that, more broadly, they or anyone else could reap without sowing or sow without reaping.

The mounting controversy over Britain's war aims as declared

to the world and her imperial policy as declared to the colonies revealed more than anything else the actual situation in Burma as the war worsened. It had the greatest influence on the future course of events; even more, it opened the way wide to the other influences which soon combined to give the final direction to the Burmese struggle. Consequently, it is of the utmost importance for us to understand the shock, both mental and emotional, that the controversy gave the Burmese, and the results that followed.

To convey all this I must also explain the Burmese side of the argument, what the Burmese said in reply to the British. One gets the whole atmosphere and impact in the statements made at the actual time. Fortunately, there is an official record of some of them. They were speeches delivered in our legislature when the war resolution was debated in February 1940. I might mention that no other official record of the Burmese argument exists. I spoke in that debate as the leader of the parliamentary opposition as well as the Freedom Bloc. But first of all, I must explain the Freedom Bloc very briefly here (I shall describe it at far greater length later): it was the wartime united front set up by three nationalist organisations, the Sinyetha Party, the Dobama or Thakin Party, and the Students' Organisation, which decided to work together because their common aim was to use the opportunity the war had created to win Burmese independence. It will appear in the course of the narrative how this Bloc, backed by the masses, organised and led the Burmese struggle until very nearly the last days of the war.

As I spoke in the legislature for the Freedom Bloc, I was able to explain the complete Burmese nationalist view regarding the British war aims and their contradictions. The very overtones of my speech will give an idea of the atmosphere brewing then. The speech was bitter and violent, but so was the atmosphere, and so was everything at that time, for feelings were mounting swiftly. I will quote at some length from that speech because it is the only complete statement on record of the Burmese case for independence made during the war, and also to show how feelings were running then:


 Sir, we live in a most bewildering world, a world that is just now a most crazy pattern of black and white. There are white

promises and black performances; there are words without deeds, words that are soon gone with the wind. The conflict of word and deed, promise and performance, meets us everywhere. War aims belong to this disjointed and crazy world and their meaning will be found only in that context.

We look all round us and find that every belligerent country is declaring its war aims in the most resounding moral phrases. Japan, fighting in China, solemnly declares that she is doing so in order to establish a new order in the East, to consolidate and redeem Asia and her countries and races from white aggression. Japan affirms that her aims are high and just and based upon an Asiatic ideology. In the West, Germany has declared that she is merely out to destroy world domination by a single imperialism, and that she too wants to preserve the rights of small nations. Great Britain also under very great pressure from the rest of the world, from America, from the neutral countries, from India, has declared her war aims, which we already know.

Now our difficulty is as to what we are to believe. All these war aims cannot be true. Some of them must necessarily be false and a mere mask. Our present task is to separate the true from the false by supplying the test of actual action. That is our immediate task. We are not questioning British sincerity or good faith in the present resolution and amendment. We say that since every belligerent country has declared the most lofty, the most impeccable, war aims, we want Britain to prove the reality of her profession by implementing them in her own empire, in Burma so that we may know them to be sincere, to be principles and not a policy. Looking into history we find that Britain has exalted all her wars to the moral plane of a crusade. Even the opium wars in China found fine moral phrases and flaming formulas to prove that Britain was defending some high, even if imprecise, principle, somebody else's right, some standard of international morality with her usual disinterestedness. In every British war, past or present, God and the Church of England bishops are always on the British side. But after those wars were fought and won and accounts were settled, as they were always settled with great realism, what happened? Where were the moral issues then?

What happened to the standards of international morality? What could have happened to them except to disappear (utterly)? This is the teaching of history, that there was not a single time when Britain implemented, in pursuance of a principle and not a policy, her war declaration.

I do not wish to go back to such long-dead and therefore academic things as the old wars. Let us as an illustration only go back to the First World War. What were Britain's war aims then? With the same moral fervour she declared that in fighting Germany she was defending the smaller nationalities; she was making the world safe for democracy; she was fighting for self-determination in every country; and she had absolutely no territorial ambitions. Asquith, Lloyd George, Bonar Law, and several other representative British statesmen declared solemnly before the world that Britain, in fighting the World War, had no territorial ambitions. But what was the result? What happened when the battle and the shouting were done and the victors obtained their victory? The British Empire added to itself roughly a million and a half square miles of new territory as a result of the war. What happened to the doctrine of self-determination? When I, with my usual recklessness, mentioned self-determination before the Joint Select Committee at the time that the Committee was hammering out Burma's constitution, the British representatives were amused. . . .

What happened to the principle of self-determination? President Wilson, we know, was duped by means of that word. He crossed the Atlantic to Europe in pursuit of that word. What did he get when he got there? The ending of all his life-long idealism, particularly the idealism of war and peace aims. And we, what have we got from all that idealism? We have got the Burma Constitution of 1935. . . . Will any European member seriously maintain that this constitution of ours is self-determination?

And what has happened to Britain's declaration regarding the rights of the smaller nations? Where is Albania now, and Abyssinia, and Manchukuo, Czechoslovakia, and Austria? All these small states and nationalities were wiped away in Munich. Then and then only the British world saw the vast

portentous writing on the wall that foretold her own doom. Then only Britain realised that Hitler was preparing to challenge her domination of the world. It was a new world dynamism challenging the old. Then only the moral conscience of Britain woke up and she realised that there were still small nations to be protected from big nations, that she had a conscience and a duty to protect these small nations, or at least those that came within Hitler's plan for rival world dominion. What she refused to do for Abyssinia, for Czechoslovakia and Manchukuo, she suddenly realised she must do for Poland.

While speaking of this I wish to refer to a statement made in America by a British ex-Cabinet Minister, Mr. Duff Cooper. . . . This interview that Mr. Duff Cooper gave in America is meant for the American people and as an appeal to neutral opinion. Mr. Duff Cooper told the American people: "The immediate issue is Poland but, as a matter of fact, the survival of the British Empire has always been the real, the true, issue, even though many of the British people and their leaders have not recognised it as such."

Here is one outspoken British statesman who has declared in America to a hundred million people, to the most powerful neutral country in the world, that the British war aims may have begun with Poland but the preservation of the British Empire and British imperialism is their real meaning. Let us not forget the last war and what Britain said then, her war aims and phrases then. What are the results of those phrases? The Treaty of Versailles and its sinister creature, the new minority question in Europe, which has grown into a new instrument of international policy. New minority-ridden states were created along the frontiers of the vanquished countries to keep them insecure, to keep Germany insecure, and Russia, and also others, and upon the insecurity of the vanquished the victors wanted to build their own security and perpetual world domination. But Nemesis has now spoken. What they considered to be security has proved to be insecurity. They overreached themselves when they created that new question in Eastern Europe.

The minority question that Britain created for the undoing

of her enemies has, in the hands of those enemies, proved to be a boomerang. We all know that had it not been for the minority question in Czechoslovakia, in Poland, in Yugoslavia, and in Rumania, things would not have been what they are now. That was how the last war and its aims ended. . . . Now it is the same war aims again, the same old phrases, moral, high-sounding, disinterested; that Britain is fighting for somebody else's right, for the world's moral standards. . . . This is British policy.

West of Suez freedom is an unqualified war aim, but east of Suez it is not so. Their words to us are: "You must prove to our satisfaction that you are fit to be free. It is true that we are a party in the case, but even so we propose to be the judge as well. You must prove to our satisfaction that you deserve freedom." They are words that a master would use to a slave. My conclusion is that, things being what they are, till promise is followed by performance, till word results in action, till things are entirely different from what they were in the past, war aims are a useless coinage. Until we are otherwise convinced by deeds and not by words, we refuse to believe that this is an ideological war, that there is any idealism in it or moral purpose. It is just one imperialism fighting another for the spoils which are the small nations. . . .

This is what Duff Cooper declared to the American people: "I am impressed by the outstanding success of German propaganda in this country. This new line is that even if Germany has made mistakes, she is no worse than England; that in our dealings with the colonies we have been undemocratic."

That was Mr. Duff Cooper's impression when he visited America of the prevailing public opinion in the most powerful neutral country in the world at present. American opinion definitely holds the view that Germany may be bad but Britain is no better [*a voice*: "Worse"], that Germany may be undemocratic but Britain in her colonies, in her empire, is equally undemocratic [*applause*]. So my conclusion in regard to Britain's war aims is that a war is still a war in spite of those aims and professions. The present war, like any other war, is entirely a war of either conquest or domination, a war for markets, for territories, for the most starkly material ends. It is naked politics.

That was exactly how the wartime nationalist movement in Burma reacted to the British declaration. Absolutely nothing was said in the legislature to refute my accusations either by those members of the government and their dubious following, who opposed my motion for complete independence, or by the European Group, who were the hidden hand behind the government, or by any other member who spoke in the debate. The charges went unanswered. This fact, instead of the voting, is the best indication of the actual feelings of the Burmese during that period. The Freedom Bloc carried the attack into the country, the charges were repeated everywhere, the masses who heard supported them passionately, and there also they were never refuted. The British were silent; the government, drifting as always for lack of a common conviction or policy, was silent too—it only went on increasing the repressions while the nationalist words and actions went on winning over the masses.

Burma was not the only colony that reacted violently to Britain's two-faced policy of having one standard for the white nations and another for her colonies. The policy shook her whole colonial world in Asia. As usual, India was quickest in openly challenging it and, again as usual, Indian action was watched and largely followed in Burma.

It had always been like that; Burma had followed India politically from as far back as the First World War, which may be said to mark the beginning of our new political consciousness. The great wave of the future, as it was hopefully called, which that war set free reached us through India. That country's example largely guided us through the interwar years. Some of the current words and techniques of the communist and socialist wings of the Indian Congress began to be employed by our more restless youths in the years before the Second World War, and such links further increased the Indian impact. A few of these youths even attended the general conferences of the Indian Congress several times, the last being the one held at Ramgarh in May 1940. The older parties however, being more aware of the general Burmese race-sensitiveness, kept away from such direct participation in Indian political activities, but watched them from a distance and, as I have said, were guided by them in many ways. Consequently, with the outbreak of the war it was only natural that Burma should again

watch what India did before she took the next step. Thus the storm that broke over the British war aims and other announcements in India increased the storm already looming in Burma.

The Burmese learnt much from the way the Congress leaders in India met the new situation. Those leaders immediately countered the British abstractions with a concrete demand which in substance was that India's right to settle her own policy should be recognised. It put the colonial case in a nutshell, driving straight to the point. It was also simple enough for the masses to understand and repeat, and big and hypnotic enough to impel them to act with equal bigness. The phrase caught at once in Burma. The parties echoed it when they spoke of the war; it set the tone for much that was later said in the legislature; in the country it was repeated widely.

At the same time the antiwar movement started in India as the action behind the words of the political demand. The demand touched off something deep in the racial submind and converted it into a mass force ready to break out into mass action. All this was a great lesson for those of us in Burma who were eager to learn and act. We used the antiwar cries in a somewhat similar way. Our political demand was simple and repetitive; it told the masses always in the same words what to demand; and when thoroughly aroused, they were told what to do to get what they had demanded and been denied. This technique served us extremely well.

But the Burmese certainly never felt that they should always follow India. Quite often they did not. So when Gandhiji, speaking at the critical conference of the Indian Congress held at Ramgarh in May 1940, counselled a halt during which the people should concentrate on the charka or home spinning movement, the Burmese were not impressed. "We are not prepared," Gandhiji said at Ramgarh. "I do not want you to have a defeat. My defeat and your defeat will be India's defeat. . . . I know the struggle for freedom must be launched. The next step must be taken, but it must be taken when we are fully prepared. We must fight to win." He went on to explain that the preparation for the fight must be through the practice of charka spinnings.

Aung San, Than Tun, and a few other Burmese youths who heard him at Ramgarh concluded that Gandhiji was against start-

ing the freedom struggle at once. That was the impression in Burma too, and Gandhiji's words were coldly received by the Burmese nationalists. The following month, in June 1940, India decided at Wardha to start a civil disobedience campaign. By then the Freedom Bloc in Burma too had decided upon its own course; and when two years later Gandhiji launched his great "Quit India" campaign to force the British to leave India, the Burmese were already fighting openly against the British. With Japanese help, Burma had got ahead of India; her struggle had gone beyond the stage of demand and agitation and therefore beyond calling upon the British to quit. The British had already been compelled to quit.

✓ In a way it could be said that Indian influence in Burma was historical whereas Japanese influence was psychological. The Japanese influence worked within a broad sublayer of the racial mind throughout Asia. In actual fact, it goes back to the beginning of the century when Japan defeated Russia in the first victory won for a very long time by an Asian people over a Western power. The impact of that victory on the Asian subconscious never really died away; instead, it was further deepened by Japan's subsequent rise into a world power capable of holding her own against the West militarily as well as industrially. It was a historical breakthrough which gave all subjugated races new dreams.

I can even now recall the Russo-Japanese war and the emotion with which we heard about the Japanese victories. I was then just a little boy at school, but the feeling was so widespread that even the little ones caught it. For instance, in the war games that became popular then we fought each other to be on the Japanese side. That would have been inconceivable before the Japanese victories. Britain, who was backing Japan in the war, circulated marvellous stories and, even better still for us at school, pictures depicting Japanese heroism and other fighting qualities, and so the Burmese heard for the first time since they came under the British of the greatness of an Asian people. It really gave us a new pride. Historically, that victory could be called the beginning, or perhaps the beginning of the beginning, of an awakening in Asia.

We must not, however, exaggerate anything. Like all historical processes, this new awakening as I have called it was slow and

faltering when it began over fifty years ago; and in Burma just as elsewhere, it was mostly emotional, more than anything else a deep inner satisfaction at seeing a great white power beaten and humiliated by someone in Asia. The Burmese also began, still very inchoately, to believe that what the Japanese had succeeded in achieving today they themselves would be able to achieve in time. Whether they would do it by plunging into the machine age some day as Japan had done, or by using their old magical spells and incantations and seeking the aid of the spirits, who they believed were guarding their race and religion and every object in their land, was still very far away from their minds. In fact, the magic was still far more real to them than the machine. They had not yet stepped out of the past enough to be prepared to think of the present and the future except in terms of that past. A secret joy and hope was the whole extent of the new feeling Japan gave the Burmese more than fifty years ago, but that, as I have said, was the beginning of an awakening.

The Japanese aura in the East took a great leap forward when she emerged with the victors out of the First World War and shared their conquests. The ethical aspect of her gains mattered little, since none of the victor powers were acting too ethically then. The war was over, and the moral talk was over too, and the world was much the same as before; and Japan took her share of the spoils exactly as the other victors did.

Again, India was the first to recognise the Japanese destiny in Asia; that is, the decisive part Japan would play in destroying the Western domination of the continent. Indian leaders began to look towards Japan openly. Rabindranath Tagore, the Nobel prize-winning poet, Rash Behari Bose, the political rebel, and a stream of others visited the country and found the heart of Asia beating there too. All returned with a wider Asian feeling, with their faith increased in the reality of the Asian bond, and especially the historical necessity for it. It started a new relationship between Japan and our part of Asia.

Soon students from India and Burma went in large numbers to study in the Japanese institutions. In the 1930s Burma-Japan cultural associations were formed in the two countries. Visits were exchanged and political leaders from Burma went to Japan and

formed important ties there, like U Saw and Dr. Thein Maung, a far-seeing politician and journalist of those days. With the outbreak of the Second World War the ties became more numerous and meaningful. Thein Maung's declaration in Japan that the West had failed us and we must now look to the East stirred many in India and Burma. It was followed by a strong campaign on the same lines in the Burmese press led by Thein Maung's paper *New Burma*. It was at about this time that Japan's famous slogan of "Asia for the Asians" rang across the East.

By then our liberation movement had reached a new stage. The Axis victories had changed the entire picture for us. The British empire in Asia was visibly shaken and tottering. India was in a very ugly mood, and Bose was in Germany actually seeking military assistance. Even before Bose took this step we in Burma had realised that we must somehow find a friendly power abroad who would help us; and for all the reasons I have mentioned and even more, such a friend, strong and willing and Asian, could only be Japan; and so our secret contacts with her had already begun in earnest as early as the end of 1939. How we did it and how much we succeeded will be a part of this story. One thing I will say at once is that, without the active and secret support we received from the Japanese, the military part of the work we did would never have achieved the scope and decisiveness it eventually did; and without that part the whole history of Burma, both during the war and after and even today, would have been different.

Finally, among the influences that decided our course were the prodigious Axis victories in the West as well as in the East. They totally changed the perspectives. Everything became possible now, with the colonial powers crushed or nearly so. I was convinced that, however the war might eventually end, British power in Asia would never be the same again, and our liberation was nearer and surer than ever. I was also convinced by what I saw happening everywhere, the weak and the suppliant altogether at the mercy of the strong, that in a power conflict like the kind raging then liberation, like patriotism, is not enough; it must be earned, be achieved by a people by fighting for it themselves, for the fight alone can give a people the faith and the strength to defend what they have won after they have won it and give them also the unity

that comes from a common effort and sacrifice. We were learning these lessons empirically, which is the only way a people can really learn them.

I have said that the Indian influence on our movement at that stage was political and that of the Japanese was psychological. The influence of the sweeping military events could be said to have made us realistic at a time when the whole world more or less had become so. They made us stop dreaming and get to doing something. We decided upon an open campaign to demand our independence as the price of Burmese participation in the war, decided to defy the law and take the consequences in the course of the campaign, decided finally to prepare in secret for an armed combat as soon as we were ready to start it.

CHAPTER 3

The Freedom Bloc

All colonial politics, upon maturing, become a form of mass revolt or resistance of the colonial people against colonial rule. Then the resistance splits into two parts, each moving on a separate plane, one on the surface and the other below. According to the stage reached by it, the part which functions below becomes agitation, then conspiracy as times get worse, and eventually it explodes into violence and even an armed uprising. All these patterns might be seen increasingly in Burma as the war approached. There were our parliamentary politics which grew around the constitution with, as their focus, the legislature and the activities linked with it. That was the outer face of our politics. It worked within the constitution and the law, for electoral votes in the country, for seats and party strength within the legislature, for the immediate objectives of office and power.

Outside the legislature there was mass politics, which functioned separately, partly above and partly below the surface. Behind it was the theory that the most effective form of colonial politics is mass politics, which never leave the people out of a crisis, but always bring them in and use their sheer weight and strength to the utmost.

By its very nature, mass politics is more sensitive and reflects the mass mind far more accurately; and, most important of all, it is the only kind of politics that can speak directly for the masses and move with them at a time when mass action becomes essential. The war was exactly such a time in Burma. As a total war, almost all its weight would fall on the people, and thus they became the biggest political power, overshadowing the normal derivative power forms such as the legislature, the government, and the rest

of the machinery running the country. In consequence, the coming struggle in the country was foreseen from the start as a struggle for the masses. It was in such a situation that the first signs of a wartime national movement or resistance appeared in Burma.

The new power of the people created, as something they could not escape, a new historical role for the organisations which were closest to them. It fell upon these organisations to carry out the tasks which required the participation of the masses, for they could win it best. The wartime national struggle began as a struggle for the masses, and so the parties whose mass relations were closest found themselves leading it.

Four parties or organisations had such a mass base in Burma: the Sinyetha, or Proletarian, Party, the Dobama, or Thakin, Party, the All-Burma Students' Organisation, and the Myochit Party. The Myochit Party, whose leader was U Saw, the premier of Burma for a year or so during the early part of the war, was in the coalition government supporting the British war effort, at any rate outwardly, and that fact alone made it impossible for the party to engage in any activity against the government or the war. Another result of its government involvement was that the party's stand on all the basic questions of the day became equivocal and even shifty. I have mentioned that it refused to make a clear stand on the issue of independence. There were also other reasons why the Myochit Party could not get together with the other three organisations. For instance, its narrow capitalist leadership and its obsessive pursuit of office had always kept it at bitter odds with the three others. This party therefore remained out of the movement which emerged, till finally, when its leader, U Saw, overreaching himself, landed in a British detention camp in Uganda at the end of 1941, it broke up altogether.

(As the Burmese premier, U Saw had visited Britain and entered into secret talks with the Japanese, but the British caught him in the act. U Saw ended tragically. A year or so after his return to Burma he again overreached himself by taking part in the mass assassination of seven ministers in the postwar government, for which he was hanged. He was in several ways a force in prewar Burmese politics and he possessed many virile qualities, which unfortunately were corrupted by a demon-like personal ambition uncurbed by either a clear political faith or a conscience.)

Three organisations therefore remained to bring the masses into the freedom movement that was already looming. They were also the only ones that had at all times openly demanded independence for Burma. There were other similarities between them springing more or less from the same roots. They had gone to the same school as it were, many among them having read the same British Left Book Club publications and Marxist writings and various shades of revolutionary literature ranging from Irish Sinn Fein books to those of Sun Yat-sen in China. Furthermore, all the three parties reflected the restlessness of the times. So it was only natural that they should draw together in the kind of crisis the war brought. I might mention that they had their differences too, which could be broadly described as tactical in nature, for most at that period were over ways and means and such matters of tactics rather than over ends; but for that very reason they caused deeper internal fissions that in time split them violently apart. This happens in nearly every revolution or mass struggle when the struggle goes on too long and the strains mount, or when it is over and the first sense of common peril and purpose weakens and gives way to other purposes. But all this will come later.

✓ To begin with, there was the Sinyetha Party, which I led. It had evolved out of the oldest and largest of the GCBA's. I might mention again that I as the leader of this party had formed a coalition government under the new constitution which remained in power from 1937 to 1939. This had resulted in a clash between the Sinyetha Party and the other extreme elements, which came to a head in the early part of 1939 when the Dobama Party and the students' unions helped the British-dominated opposition in the legislature to cause the fall of my government by organising a number of students' and workers' strikes. When eventually the war broke out memories of that conflict still smouldered within the Sinyetha Party and the other two bodies. In fact, these memories never completely died away, a fact which came to have a considerable bearing on the course events took in Burma.

✓ The next was the Dobama Asiayone, more widely known as the Thakin Party. Owing to the part it has played in our history during the war as well as later I shall have much to say about it. The party began as a protest against the frustrations of the times. Polit-

ically, it followed, up to a point, the example of the Sinn Fein Party in Ireland. Thus in imitation of Sinn Feinism they used the name Dobama (We Burmese) for themselves and everything connected with them, their rallying song and their slogans and their salute. They also called themselves *thakins* (masters) in defiance of the colonialists who called themselves by that name when dealing with the Burmese; they read, when they did so, such Sinn Fein publications as Dam Bren's *I Fight for Freedom*, Sun Yat-sen's writings, Fabian books, and an assortment of contemporary political tracts; they sang everywhere they went a rousing racial song, the Dobama song, which has now become the Burmese national anthem; they wove around that song and its simple nostalgic phrases a pure form of racialism; they used the current political techniques, demonstrations and slogans and salutes, to capture the masses; they caught, by lashing out at the British and almost everyone and everything with Feinian ferocity, the mood of those among the youth and workers who had begun to be seized by the fever of the times in which they lived; and so they forged ahead.

But their actual following, being mainly from the social fringes, was very nebulous till the spectacular success they achieved by joining the Japanese armies in driving the British out of Burma in 1942. Another spectacular success followed, when in 1945 a large number of them joined the British, this time in driving the Japanese armies out. These well-timed and vastly profitable switches turned them into a national force which, as the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL), dominated the country both as a government and a political party for well over a decade.

I should explain that the AFPFL was the new postwar political association which sprang out of the anti-Japanese resistance in Burma near the war's end. It was predominantly a Thakin-led creation which, having gone over to the British at a timely moment, was able to reap the full fruits of the British victory. All the other parties were swept out of its way, and thus it leapt into power when the British decided to leave the country. The Thakin force ebbed away as rapidly as it had risen when its successes ceased with the military take-over of the country in 1962. Its men had ridden to power and domination largely on the tide of their

wartime luck, and when that luck ran out their lucky days also did the same.

The appeal of the Thakins was in the beginning purely racial, and there were only the Dobama song and slogan and salute to keep the group together. As time passed, however, the mounting inner disturbances and drives of the youth who joined them helped to forge a party out of that very mixed material. Nevertheless, its structure, both in organisation and in doctrine, remained chaotic. Actually, it persisted for quite a time like that, just a vast elemental surge, so to say, around a song, a slogan, and a variety of mass frustrations. Beyond the race cult it tolerated every sort of political doctrine. This open door turned out to be good as well as bad for the party, for while it drew towards itself those who could fit in nowhere else, many who came continued to find the same difficulty fitting into the party, and soon fell out among themselves and split into factions which in course of time proved to be the most implacable enemies to each other. Meanwhile monarchists, nationalists, Fabian socialists and communists of a sort, and just plain opportunists and firebrands mingled in it and sang the same song and shouted the same slogans. But no matter how much they disagreed in other ways, they were united in one thing: they were all fiercely Burmese. Their Burmeseness always came through in the end. This, historically, was their lasting contribution to the Burmese national struggle.

The Dobama Party was a phenomenon of the times. This was another fact which gave it a certain historical role. The party made its first appearance about the middle of the interwar period, when the world was passing through some of the stormiest days ever known, and an entire new generation caught their full blast. The storms struck Burma too, and we had our own share of troubles, like the peasant uprising and the economic disasters which overtook the Burmese, as I have described earlier. Our politics soon reflected the changed conditions; they became as stormy as the times and more sharply defined. It was in such conditions that a new substratum in the population broke through into politics as the Party of Thakins, or the Dobama Party. They were among the people most hit by the storms raging at the time. Most of them might actually be called the orphans of the storm, economically insecure or unemployed, socially rootless, composed of a few of the

best mingled with a vast crowd of the worst who, generally speaking, had little talent or background or claim to a place in the existing society.

But for these very reasons the Thakins represented more than most others the conditions of the times and the masses struggling with them and the problems that arose out of them. Thus their very deficiencies were transformed into a new kind of vitality and strength. What they lacked the masses also lacked, so they became the face and voice of the masses. One might almost say that they were the frustrated mass man produced by the mass age, and when they spoke for themselves they found themselves speaking also for the masses and their frustrations. In this sense, therefore, the Dobama Party was historical; it moved with history because it was a product of the times and their thickening shadows.

I must mention yet another weakness of the Dobama Party which became a source of strength to it for a period and greatly changed our politics as well. Most of the active Thakins were young, with very little to do and no family or dependents hanging onto them. This gave them a very valuable kind of freedom. The young or jobless among them used it to the full by devoting to political work across the country all the time and energy their lack of employment left free. Thus Burmese politics became for the Thakins a full-time occupation, which had immense value for our eventual struggle. For example, it enabled some of them to plunge into adventures which others with more ties and duties to hold them back were not free to undertake, such as the secret departure to Japan of the thirty comrades to be trained on the remotest chance of several events happening successfully in the future. But while such gains were great, there were also consequences which turned out to be disastrous later, when the struggle had ended and the Thakins gained power and responsibility and yet continued as a whole to show that the negative kind of politics they practised before were the only kind of trade and tactics they really knew.

I have explained how, at a certain historical stage, owing to the conditions and tasks it created, what was a weakness was turned into strength in the Dobama Party. But in course of time another stage followed, and conditions and tasks changed; then, by a similar dialectical process, what had become a strength again turned into a weakness. This happened when the period of mass

agitation and incitement was over, when the time arrived for the masses to be led instead of leading, and leadership of another kind was needed, demanding the positive qualities of mind and will and character. The Thakins as a whole were not conditioned to give such leadership. Too many of them proved themselves to be agitators, insurgents, often just law-breakers, and not revolutionists; they lacked the stuff that revolutionists are made of. A great many of them who were in the AFPFL soon confused the revolutionary goal with the revolutionary gains, especially when those gains were for themselves or their factional following. They believed the revolution was doing well just because they and their following were doing very well out of it. Finally, they concluded that the revolution had ended when they themselves had gained power and office and every good thing they had been denied in the past. They had not struggled for anything wider or more revolutionary. In fact, their antisocial qualities, which were their peculiar virtue in breaking up the old society, proved to be their drawback in the subsequent work of building a new one. They had begun as a destructive force and remained too much such a force to be able to construct anything to take the place of what they had helped to destroy. So they created a vast emptiness, and when they had nothing else to destroy, they turned and destroyed themselves and many things besides in the country.

The result of all this has been tragic for Burma. The national revolution, which alone could have pulled her out of the past and given her the future she had fought for so ardently, remained for years neglected and lost in an open scramble for the most personal gains. Now it appears that others have pushed them aside to finish the job they proved incapable of doing. And so it will go on as long as the revolution which it is the destiny of our present generation to complete remains incomplete. These facts regarding the Thakin movement explain much that has happened in Burma since the last war.

I will now say something about the Students' Organisation. This body was led by the Rangoon University Students' Union group. A number of students who had left the university and entered politics had joined the Dobama Party, and before long they largely led it as well. On account of this more or less common

leadership the two organisations worked closely together. They had another thing in common: youth, with all the strength as well as weakness that youth implies. Youth dominated both the organisations, and consequently both believed in destroying the world they did not dominate and building another which, being built by them, would be a perfect world. They wanted nothing less than a perfect world as they understood it.

I discovered that for myself in a rather embarrassing way when, as the head of the government in 1939, I had to refuse a great many of the students' demands. Those demands never seemed to end; they were really the outer face of something that lay very deep within the young generation at the time. Arguing with them as one who was too busy trying to cope with the old imperfect world we lived in to be able to think for the moment of any other, I went through a strange, hallucinatory experience. I felt as if I were arguing with myself as I was when I was twenty or so. As I had expected, those demands were wildly impracticable, and therefore wrong. But there was something deeply right in the spirit that lay behind them. That spirit was active in the whole country then. I also felt it was right that the young should believe in a perfect world, just as it is right for children to believe in fairy tales. In the very imperfect world in which the old have to live such faith helps us enormously to hold onto at least a remnant of the hope and vision which keep life moving forward. Looking back at those last prewar years and their troubles, we now know enough to see them in another light. As I know personally, the political maturity many student leaders gained in those years was of immense value in organising our wartime struggle and in carrying it through.

Such were the three political bodies which were marked out by circumstances to play the first role in the Burmese struggle during the Second World War. They organised the Freedom Bloc which began the struggle.



The Freedom Bloc was an alliance of the three mass organisations I have already described, and in addition several groups that

had broken away from the other parties soon joined it. It came into existence rather nebulously in October 1939. As those who were trying to get the three parties to unite continued to meet and discuss their common problems, the alliance became more tangible and acted together now and then; and gradually, out of such tentative beginnings, a common plan of action slowly took shape and grew into a movement, with all of us deeply in it for better or for worse.

In October 1939 the different political parties were still trying to understand the situation the war had created. Nothing happened during those days to indicate the course events would take. Some parties issued statements and some passed resolutions, but these did not reveal what was actually going on within them. The parties were merely trying to gain time. Meanwhile, they watched each other's moves and especially the events in India.

Those within the government in particular kept completely silent. The only policy they held in common being to stay in office as long as they could, these parties could not say anything that would endanger their security as a government. The war and independence were definitely issues which could make the government fall. They could set the country on fire, which they did eventually. In consequence, every move to bring up these issues in any form, no matter where, was regarded by the government parties as an opposition plot to throw them out of office and take their place. Burmese independence became for them not so much a threat to British rule in Burma as to the positions they held and enjoyed under that rule; and so they resisted any clear-cut demand for it as desperately as the British did. As we shall see later, the government used all its wartime powers to stifle the demand. Beyond that it gave no indication that it had any views in these critical matters except to support British policy indirectly. When at last a resolution introduced by the Freedom Bloc in the legislature in February 1940 forced the government parties to say something on the question of our independence, it became a mass of contradictions as they went on saying it. They even split over the voting on it. All that the principal ministers said was loudly applauded by the British group.

So it was left to the opposition parties to do for the people what their own government would not; and of these parties the three I

have mentioned were most capable of doing it. But in the first days those three also were confused, divided, and still unable to decide what they should do.

The Sinyetha Party, which led the opposition to the government, kept closely in touch with the situation as the tensions rose. As its leader I issued a statement in its name very soon after the governor's announcement of the British policy for Burma in the new conditions created by the war. The party rejected outright that policy and asked for an immediate recognition of Burma's right to settle her own future after the war. It refused to participate in the war on any other terms.

"Freedom and independence cannot be one thing in the West and another in the East," the Sinyetha Party declared. "If it is what the British have proclaimed it to be, freedom must be the same for all peoples, an absolute human right and value; and if the war is being really fought for this kind of freedom, it must be fought for all peoples robbed of it, for Burma as well as Poland, or for neither Poland nor Burma. The Burmese will not fight for others to be free while they themselves will remain enslaved. They will not fight for a contradiction, nor for half a thing, for a world which is half free and half slave, which is one thing for the white races and another for the rest."

Continuing, the statement recalled the notorious Nazi declaration that German culture needed slaves. "This we believe to be the real German war aim," it goes on to say. "But British culture also, being equally race-minded and predatory in Asia and Africa, has the same kind of basic need for slaves; it needs colonies, which is the same thing as needing slaves." The statement flayed the whole British colonial system. It was still too early yet to talk of any line of action. For that we had to wait till the Freedom Bloc emerged.

The Thakins also were moving in the same direction as the Sinyetha Party, but owing to certain inherent obstacles in their way they had to be more cautious. Their greatest obstacle was the result of their mottled composition, since a crisis brought up to the surface all the disparities existing among them; another was the fact that the government watched them more closely. So in place of a statement on its attitude towards the war, the Central Executive Committee of the Thakin Party passed a stopgap resolu-

tion that in effect called upon all to refrain from subversive activities—that is, to lie low in actual operation, and keep within the law until any further decision was reached by it. Everything else was significantly left out. Thus by keeping the real questions open the party succeeded in keeping its several factions together.

The small communist-inclined group within the Thakin Party, however, came out with a statement bristling with attacks all around, but one could see that it too was completely disoriented by the turn events had taken since the German-Soviet pact which preceded the war. The group was employing its usual jargon while waiting to understand the situation better. The fact is, all of us were groping in the dark before the Freedom Bloc showed us the way.

Among the other political parties, only the Myochits issued a statement relating to the war. This party was within the coalition in power at the time, and so anything it wished to say had to be said in a roundabout way. But the implication was clear: it also wanted independence after victory in the war. "There is only one test of the sincerity of their war aims," one of its statements said, "and that is whether the British government is prepared to recognise the right of self-determination of Burma and other countries of the empire." The Myochits however spoke of this right being exercised constitutionally "through a constituent assembly convened on the basis of adult suffrage," as the Indian Congress was more or less to do at its Ramgarh session in May 1940. When, about two years later, U Saw, the Myochit leader, was sent by the British to a detention camp in Uganda for the duration of the war, the bid of the Myochit Party to steal a march over the Freedom Bloc in the struggle for independence ended, and with that the party also ceased all activity.

For a month or so after these party statements on the war had appeared I sounded out the various political groups as to what we might be able to do unitedly for Burmese independence. I had heard that the Thakins and the student leaders were having their own internal troubles, and so I decided to leave them out for the time being; in fact, I thought it best to be slow in approaching them so that I could be sure of their unity as well as their true intentions. None of us had any notion yet of what should or could be done, let alone how to do it. As for me, I worked on the simple,

practical rule that if one kept on doing something one would at last hit upon what is right or nearly so; anyway, there was no other rule to follow then, so I had no choice.

But another lesson, equally simple and necessary, warned me against acting too soon or too adventurously, because that would ruin our entire opportunity at a time when it was greatest. So we in the Sinyetha Party spent those weeks in studying the situation generally, taking care at the same time to keep well within the law. While that went on, three persons whom I trusted implicitly worked with me in absolute secrecy: Dr. Thein Maung, Bandoola U Sein, and U Hla Min. It was this little group that planned the first steps the Sinyetha Party took, which proved, largely by good luck, to be the right ones.

All we had to start with were certain assumptions and hopes. We had no material resources of any kind whatever, and we knew that the work ahead of us needed all the resources we could lay our hands on. That gave us our first thought to look for help elsewhere; and at this point some purely personal relationships of two of us in the group played an important part.

It happened that my family doctor for years was a Japanese, Dr. Suzuki, and he had the closest relations with the Japanese consulate in Rangoon and also with several Japanese secret agents who were active in Burma in those days. The monsoon weather that September gave me a touch of lumbago or something, and Suzuki, who was treating me for it, visited me regularly without attracting unusual attention. Similarly, Dr. Thein Maung's close friendship with the Japanese was too well-known to arouse any undue suspicion connected with the war. These facts proved to be crucial for us.

For various reasons which I have explained earlier, our thoughts were already turning towards Japan. Thein Maung and I used our personal contacts to take the first tentative steps in our party to follow up those thoughts concretely. Everything at that stage seemed to be happening almost by chance or coincidence; quite casually, I sounded out Suzuki; he in turn sounded out the Japanese consul; it led to a few meetings between the consul and myself, at which Thein Maung was sometimes present; at other times Hla Min kept in touch with the consul. Several other Japanese, principally naval officers, visited me now and then, said

little, observed a lot, asked a number of apparently set questions. I also gathered from their words that they were in touch with a certain section of the Thakins.

It struck me vaguely, somewhere at the far edge of my mind, that Japan might perhaps be already thinking of getting into the conflict, and that Burma would somehow be involved in it if that happened. I felt I had found something to start with. It was then that I decided to follow up these Japanese contacts a little more earnestly. Results were slow at first; then suddenly a door opened. Under instructions from Tokyo the consul suggested to me that Thein Maung, whom both sides trusted, should pay a visit to Japan. It convinced me further that Japan was in earnest. Thein Maung went in November 1939. He brought back a firm assurance that financial help would be given us in the campaign for independence that we proposed to start.

There was no talk of anything beyond a political movement, nothing about an armed struggle, for instance, at that stage. Even the fighting in the West looked as if it would not go on for long, and any thought of arms and violence never occurred to us in those months. We were thinking entirely of political action. In fact, the Japanese insisted that we should think of nothing for which the situation, as well as ourselves, was not fully ready. But they agreed with us that we should keep up the pressure on Britain with a mass movement for independence. On their part, they said vaguely, they would add to the pressure in their own way and time. After Thein Maung's return our relations with the Japanese consulate in Rangoon became close, regular, and deeply secret. By then the Freedom Bloc had been organised, and was stripping for the political fight.

The Thakins and the students also were having their troubles during this period. However, theirs were greater than ours because of the factions and clash of personalities and ideologies that plagued them, especially in a crisis. The Central Executive Committee of the Thakin Party restored harmony for the time being by passing the stopgap resolution I have mentioned, which would in effect give the different factions time and opportunity to decide upon their own line of action as the situation developed and to follow it freely later. That was how the resolution was interpreted by most of them. These internal dissensions, however, proved in

the supreme test of the war to be ripples on the surface. Under that test the dissensions were submerged, at least for the time being, in a tide of nationalist feeling. True to their origins, the Thakin leadership decided that the immediate task for all Burmese was to free Burma from the British. Thus the way was prepared for a nationalist alliance and the Freedom Bloc.

Some time in September, while I was attempting to unite several nationalist groups around the Sinyetha Party, the Thakin Party announced that it was prepared to work with anyone for the national cause. This move, however, was dubiously received by our side, for many among us had learnt to be cautious in dealing with the Thakins; we felt we could never be sure how much those people meant what they said, or how long they would mean it and work together with others or even among themselves, or what demands they would eventually make. At this juncture the student leaders stepped in. I met one or two of them quite by chance at a small party given at the Japanese consulate in the same month. We did not say much to each other, but it was apparent that they as well as I sensed that there was something going on in secret in both our camps, and that the Japanese came in somewhere. I think this fact played a large part in much that followed.

A few days later, some students, Ba Hein and two others, visited me. They came prepared; they at once proposed that the Sinyetha Party, the Dobama Asiayone, and the Students' Organisation should work as a wartime alliance. "For what?" I asked at once.

"For Burmese freedom."

"Good." That made our talk much easier.

I asked for time to give my reply because I would have to consult my party as well as other colleagues; they would decide. The boys smiled; they seemed to guess my thoughts at the moment.

"Those Thakins who really count are united and want such an alliance," Ba Hein quickly assured me. "The students want the nationalists to struggle together for independence. We are trying to unite them for such a struggle."

"That's good," I replied. "We are agreed about the way to gain that independence." The boys were confident that everything would be all right once we started to work together. I felt they were right; the work could be the discipline that would unite us all; it had happened in most revolutions. This was more or less

how our first talk which led to the Freedom Bloc went, according to my diary notes.

Shortly after, Aung San visited me. The police were chasing him with a warrant of arrest then; so some companions he brought with him kept watch outside while we talked in a back room. I was able to talk more freely with Aung San, whom I already knew fairly well. Besides, he was then the general secretary of one section of the Thakin Party so he was able to speak for that section also. We began with a long and general talk. Then, when I judged that it was time to do so, I came to the point. What I said, in substance, was this: "Let us understand each other before we do anything. My side is ready to work with you or anyone else for that matter to see Burma free, and, as it appears to us, the struggle will have to start by opposing the British in this war. We shall need help, and that will have to come from whoever gives it to us. The struggle might take any form, and we shall have to be prepared for whatever happens; and once we get together we must for our very self-survival keep together till the struggle ends. Will the Thakins see it that way?"

In political matters Aung San was a bundle of obsessions that would flare out most unexpectedly, but on account of their very intensity those rages could not last very long; a nervous exhaustion would follow quickly and send him into almost a stupor or a sulk. That was his strength as well as his weakness in a crisis. It was also this that made it so confusing to deal with him at times, unless of course you had come to know him and waited for him to exhaust himself, and then he was often easy to handle, as the Japanese discovered before their defeat became certain. At the moment I am speaking of now, he was obsessed with the fact that the British had insulted him by fixing a reward of five rupees for his capture, which was something less, he said bitterly, than the price of a fair-sized chicken. When I mentioned the British, he swore that he would fight them till the end. We must be realistic, he went on; we must fight those who were keeping us enslaved; the rest would come later; and so on with a lot of fiery political phrases which showed the inflamed state of his mind then. He always convinced me of his absolute sincerity. It was his abrupt moods and angles which often made it difficult for one to be certain of his real attitudes or how long they would last. The fact was, he was so moody!

at times that even a small thing could become big for him by long and solitary brooding; it would then harden into an obsession which changed him surprisingly while it lasted.

After that visit we met regularly. Others also came, particularly U Nu, who brought Than Tun, the Communist leader, whom I had not met before. (U Nu became the first prime minister of Burma after postwar independence.) Other prominent Thakins and student leaders joined from time to time in our regular talks. The warm presence of those young men so deeply concerned with our common national cause gave me a growing feeling of hope and confidence. I decided that it would be possible to work with them, in fact, that I must work with them, and not think too much about the past when we had once misunderstood each other so badly, or about the future when similar misunderstandings might recur, not only between them and me but also among themselves. Those youths more than others represented their generation in Burma for reasons I have explained, and so they could not be left out. We needed each other in the struggle we now foresaw.

I took a few precautions though. In current terms, the alliance was to be functional rather than organic, an action group built up step by step as we went on acting together. Our actual work and the sense of comradeship resulting from it were to unite us, and not rules and resolutions and such formalities, from which we would keep free. The work, of course, was to be a struggle against the British to liberate Burma. For the rest the three parties would remain as they were, separate and independent. That would be the first stage; a closer form of unity might be considered later. Such an understanding, I believed, would get rid of a good deal of the causes of friction which a long struggle was bound to breed among people who were so polarised in their political conditioning as well as in many other ways.

And so our wartime nationalist alliance began. As I have just explained, it was kept structurally free as much as possible from the usual ties and rules so that we should feel all the more that we must stand together in our own interest, while at the same time any of us could always break away and go our own way without disrupting those left behind and their work. I was the president and Aung San was the secretary; there were no other officeholders. Even our two offices were nominal, created mainly to show that

the alliance existed, and perhaps to symbolise its unity. We did not even have a headquarters. A few would walk into my house with an idea, which would be examined thoroughly till we agreed upon the next step to be taken according to the situation at the time, and its needs, and our means; we would then inform our respective organisations, and they would follow it. Then we would meet again, examine the results, and plan the next step according to the new situation. It was this method which saved our work when, as a result of the wartime repressions, it became more conspiratorial and, in the last stages, fully so. It also forged a new sort of relationship among us, something deep and mystical, like a revolutionary comradeship.

We chose the name of the alliance in the same way, empirically. We realised at once the importance of finding a name that would capture the Burmese masses. It had to be simple, nostalgic, if possible with a touch of race or religion, and inflammatory without being too openly so, in order to keep clear of the new defence regulations. I have related how we came to call it the Freedom Bloc in English. As for the choice of the Burmese name, *Htwet Yat Gaing*, which literally means "The Association of the Way Out," it had the touch I have mentioned. I will explain how it happened.

Just at that time an old Burmese legend mysteriously revived across the country. It relates the story of three school friends who entered into a pact to remain loyal to one another through life. In after years, one of them became a hermit and attained the supreme goal of emancipation; another, U Waing by name, became a king and founded a great kingdom. The third among them, however, proved to be the greatest; he achieved the mystic's dream of complete power and transcendence.

One day the mystic, whose name was Bo Bo Aung, visited the king in his palace in Amarapura. The king resented the existence of anyone in his kingdom who could even remotely be a threat to his life and throne; he believed that Bo Bo Aung's mystical powers were palpably such a threat, and so he decided to do away with him. Knowing the king's thoughts, Bo Bo Aung walked boldly into his presence, wrote a single *O*, which is the Burmese letter called *wa*, on a wall, and defied the king to rub it out before he dared to think that he would succeed in killing him. As soon as the

king had rubbed out that *O* two appeared in its place, and the two when rubbed out became four, and four became eight, and so it went on doubling with every attempt till all the walls were covered with the writing. Convinced now that Bo Bo Aung had attained complete mystical powers, the king repented, renounced his throne and family, and became a lone recluse.

The story had an astonishing effect; it aroused a great longing for the past, its belief in magic, in mysterious powers and agencies constantly shaping our lives, in the messianic dream of a being who, having himself attained deliverance, will one day deliver the Burmese from their bondage. A popular song about Bo Bo Aung which appeared at the same time caught on everywhere. It declared that Bo Bo Aung still lived, that he would save the Burmese; through his mighty arts and spells Burmese glory would multiply as unconquerably as Bo Bo Aung's *wa's* did once.

✓ The Bo Bo Aung mystique was wonderful material for us and, by its appearance at that moment, convinced large numbers even among the unbelieving that Bo Bo Aung or some mystical power he symbolised was preparing to help the Burmese. I decided that the alliance must get Bo Bo Aung and his innumerable following on its side, and so I proposed that we call the alliance *Htwet Yat Gaing*. U Nu, who is very much inclined to believe in the occult, supported me. The rest left it to me, and so the name was adopted, with results which were almost as magical as Bo Bo Aung's magic itself. The strength of the alliance increased like his *wa's*, especially in the monasteries and rural areas where the ancient legends still live on as potently as ever. The Sinyetha Party, with its strong monastic element, sang Bo Bo Aung's song at its mass meetings. It also dug up old oracular sayings which were believed to contain deeply veiled meanings and predictions, always taking care of course that these sayings could be made to mean that British rule would end and the Burmese would be free again. They stirred up the most powerful folk memories and yearnings.

THE MOVEMENT

From then on the Freedom Bloc became a mass movement. My calculations proved to be true; a common, concrete effort kept the alliance closely together; and, as the effort and the perils increased, the parties as a whole realised that they really needed each other.

Even the most important among the few Communists, like Thakin Than Tun and Thakin Soe, laid aside for the moment their big international dreams and became realistic and nationalist in the crisis the whole nation then faced, or at least at that stage of it. The equally few with British leanings remained silent.

As for Aung San, he kept his word to me by issuing a strong statement some time in October 1939 to rally all around the Freedom Bloc. In the statement he stressed that the immediate task for the Burmese was to win their independence and that any other form of action which overlooked the historical stages and tried to go too fast was adventurism. There could be no socialism before independence, he said in the strongest words. He showed me the statement before releasing it. It was mainly aimed at the Communists. Even then one could notice the first signs of tension between Aung San and the Communists, and also between the old Thakins and the student leaders who had joined them.

U Nu and Than Tun worked tirelessly within their party for the success of the alliance. As far as I know, it was they with some others close to them who did most for our unity in those days. U Nu would pick out the best among the Thakins, like Than Tun and Bo Let Ya and Ba Hein, and bring them to me or my wife for undertakings that involved the utmost danger and secrecy; and invariably we found that, as he said, they were the best for the sort of work to be done then.

∨ In the first months, the activities of the alliance consisted very largely of mass meetings and demonstrations in Rangoon, which were needed to build up our mass strength. One meeting followed another, and the crowds continued to swell. Those who spoke kept the theme very simple and racial; the British say they are fighting for Poland and other subjugated white nations; the Burmese are being made to fight without their consent to free those white nations, but will not be free themselves; we must fight for ourselves also; we must get what the white nations get; otherwise we must struggle for it with all the means we have; Bo Bo Aung will help us; Bo Bo Aung will also get others to help us. Such words went straight to the Burmese heart; or rather, they echoed something that was already beginning to speak there.

∨ Another fact which helped us was the total absence of opposition to us. The British found that they had no friends who would

really stand up for them in the country. The Burmese ministers in the government and their parties said nothing and did nothing in connection with the demand for independence. In fact, that was the only policy they could agree upon among themselves, because it was the only one that would enable them to remain in office. They were not the kind of men who would risk what they already had for something that might come later. None among them possessed that kind of faith and dedication; or else, they wanted to hold on to what they had while others gave up everything to fight for more for all, and they would take that too when it was achieved. Such were the tortuous ways of colonial politics, moving on two separate planes, with the gap between them widening in the crisis. It was to expose this fact that the Freedom Bloc repeatedly asked the ministers to resign and join the movement for independence if they believed in it. The congress ministers in India had resigned. But our ministers said and did nothing. And so the Freedom Bloc had a clear field everywhere.

After our success in Rangoon we naturally thought next of Mandalay in Upper Burma and the towns along the way. The Sinyetha Party was strong in those areas where its monks, veterans of many past GCBA struggles, had great influence. A flood of letters I received had already informed me that the old *wunthanu* or nationalist spirit was returning in those places, and we were very strongly urged to visit them as soon as possible. I discovered when I went that the spirit was very much there, but to escape past mistakes and failures it needed to be better organised, better led at the top and strengthened at the base. We found this to be true all along the way. At every stop people flocked in thousands from the neighbouring villages to listen to us; they had started to stir to that extent.

✓ On reaching Mandalay, the welcome we received was tumultuous. The receptions and meetings and speech-makings which followed never seemed to end. One thing I still remember vividly is that at almost every meeting we held, Thakin Soe, the most fiery among the Communists, always sang with his great, high-pitched voice the Dobama nationalist song, flinging out as far and loud as he could into the night the race-proud words: "This is our earth, this is our land, our Burmese land." You could almost feel his Burmese blood surging through those words as he went on repeat-

ing them again and again. After him U Nu spoke the clearest nationalist words, and I followed with some of the most emotional speeches of my life. By the time we left it, Mandalay was ours; and by the time we got back to Rangoon, the Freedom Bloc had become a full-scale national movement and force.



It was now the early part of 1940. The spirit we had aroused everywhere we went had seized not only the people, but also all of us working within the Freedom Bloc. We were solidly united now, and ready to go through the fight together, come what might. Shortly after we had started with this new resolve I had a talk with Aung San which gave me the first indication of coming events. One evening, he came to see me and we were alone.

"We are thinking of starting an armed struggle during the war," he said. I did not show any surprise, being used for years to hearing this sort of adolescent talk from the younger political set, especially when they were at a loss for anything else to say; it always sounded so big and brave. Besides, I remembered that in his war statement issued only a few months back he had denounced all fire-breathing talk as bluster, demagoguery, and adventurism. But, of course, much had happened since then. In an amused way I asked him if it was the Thakin Party that was speaking. He replied it was not the party, but a secret group within it. To convince me that they were in earnest, he mentioned several persons who were actually working with us in the alliance. I waited for him to continue. At the same time, to show that I was interested, I asked him when the idea came to them.

"Just before we asked you to join us in the present alliance," he replied. "We came to you chiefly because we wanted you to be with us in the fight." A lot of flattering things about me followed which I did not take very seriously, although I knew that Aung San was not in the habit of saying anything simply to please someone. He also said some unpleasant things about the Sinyetha Party leadership generally. As he saw it, I was surrounded by a lot of petty parasitical fellows who were riding on my back.

"We want to rescue you from them and work with you loyally,"

he declared. His words sounded so sincere that I could not resent the attack on my party; and, after all, I too had frequently shown that I was not very impressed by the general run of Thakins. I might mention that quite often Aung San would himself denounce the Thakins virulently. "About this armed struggle, have you any plans for it ready?" I asked him.

"No," he replied. "Our first idea is to get foreign contacts. We want to send some comrades abroad to work for that. We believe you and Dr. Thein Maung are in touch with the Japanese. As for our strength to put the plan through, you have it in Upper Burma while we can look after Lower Burma. You have the monks too and the old *wunthanus* while we have the students and the youths in general. This war is bound to give us our chance. We weighed all these facts before we decided to tell you what we want to do."

"Do Thakin Nu and Thakin Than Tun know about it?"

"Yes," he said. These two persons were closest to me among the Thakins at that time.

It was then I realised that Aung San was serious. They really were thinking along those lines. The fact that, owing to the warrant chasing him, Aung San would not be able to come out into the open must, I concluded, have something to do with it. All sorts of thoughts and memories rushed into my mind. I saw again the rebellion of 1930, which had ended so tragically for the Burmese because it was so ill-planned, ill-timed, ill-matched in every way, so much like a gambler's doing. As I have already mentioned, I had appeared as the defence lawyer for almost all the rebel leaders in the trials that followed. I had also seen the charred villages from which all the men had been taken away, their few possessions seized or scattered, and the women and children left weeping their hearts out.

It was an unforgettable lesson. It drove me into the GCBA, which had started the rebellion. Convinced that there would be a next time and eager to see that it would be different then, I began to read every revolutionary work I could get hold of, so that I read again Marx, Lenin, Trotsky, Hitler, the revolutionary histories and novels and other writings in a grim new light; like many others of my generation in Asia, I found myself led by the lure of a revolution as an Asian imperative to the new political doctrines. There was perhaps this difference, that in my case the lesson of a

peasant rising that had failed miserably made me more empirical and cautious. All my reading and observation had taught me to see the first need for a revolutionary theory, a revolutionary class and leadership, and a revolutionary situation before a revolution can succeed.

I could not also forget the fact that a revolution has another side to it, the revolutionary terror and the counterrevolution; in other words, a revolution devouring her own children, and finally herself and the country. Weaving into these thoughts was the advice that Thein Maung had brought back from Japan. In the first months of 1940 when the world war hardly looked like one I agreed with the Japanese that any use of force in those conditions was out of the question; in fact, with British power fully poised as it was then, it would have been utter madness.

✓ Seated by ourselves in the dim evening light in a back room, I explained all that was in my mind to Aung San quite frankly, confident that he would understand. It was also my first opportunity to speak with him really seriously. I agreed very much with him in principle, I said, that Burma must have her own revolution which, if necessary, must be violent, and the present generation would have to undertake it. In fact, it was this firm belief that had drawn me into politics through the GCBA, which had led our last rebellion, had made me go Marxist to the extent of declaring the Sinyetha policy, and had now brought me to work with them in the Freedom Bloc, believing that a good part of the revolutionary class or base needed in Burma was to be found among our youth. But, I added, a revolution in practice was another matter which would have to be very carefully weighed and worked out.

✓ Here I came to the point I wanted to make. The essential thing, I insisted, was the revolutionary situation, the right time and conditions as well as the means. We must wait for it before resorting to force during the war or else we should be back again in 1930. It would then be the worst kind of adventurism, I continued, using the word he had used in his recent statement. So we must go on winning over and organising the masses first. When and how the struggle would be transformed from a political into an armed conflict would depend upon the correlation of forces at the time, as Trotsky had explained. Meanwhile, I said in conclusion, I agreed that we should prepare for every eventuality by seeking to

friends and allies abroad. This last statement seemed to convince Aung San that I was not trying to stop them from doing anything, but to make them do it in the right way and at the right time.

Aung San had listened attentively to my rather rambling words. He gave me a feeling that he had his own inner conflicts on this question which were similar to mine, and my talk about revolutionary theory and practice appeared to reassure him a good deal. Seeing this, I gave him before he left my copy of Trotsky's *Russian Revolution*, after marking the place where a revolution is distinguished from other forms of violent action.

"So," I told him after reading out the passage, "if it is confined to a small group of us it will only be a conspiracy. If the masses are left to do it by themselves, it will be an insurrection, which is bound to go wild as it did in 1930. We and the masses must come together organically, as they say, to put through a real revolution." Aung San left hugging that book.

My mind was restless the whole of that night. For the first time since the outbreak of the war I saw the future a little less mistily. It looked as if our movement was about to hit a trail leading somewhere. Even the thought of it was exhilarating. But what lay ahead was so new and adventurous and depending for its success on so many unpredictable factors that I felt weak and dizzy thinking of all those factors. For instance, those of us who were talking so heroically about a revolution were doing so only from books and catchphrases and without any practical idea of the things to be done in it; only a very few of us had ever even possessed a gun or fired one. Furthermore, the British would never give the Burmese military training on a large scale, with the country seething as it was.

✓ Then, just when my mind was completely tired out, a thought flashed through it. I remembered Japan. I suddenly became convinced that the war would go on and, before it ended, Japan would be in it. In that event, it would be very much in her interest to start an uprising in Burma and the other British colonies in the East. Our revolution could be accomplished that way. I at once decided to work for such an understanding with the Japanese. It gave me an immense feeling that I had found some kind of way out. There was also a feeling of fatalism which made me say to myself, "What must be, must be; and this revolution of ours must be." I wrote those words down in my diary. I read them again

when I packed up my books and papers on the day before I left Rangoon in April 1945. As I write now, that diary is before me. Events have deepened the meaning of the words, although at the time they were written they were almost banal. They now seem to speak of the irony of fate even more than of fate itself.

✓ Getting back to the work of our movement at the beginning of 1940, it continued to be as before except for some new activities which the situation called for. We had done a lot of mass agitation over a wide area, and it was now time to consolidate our gains, to tighten up our work as well as our workers, and to think of the next step. A new factor had appeared since my talk with Aung San. So, while the mass rallies and speeches went on, our real work began to be done in secrecy, behind closed doors, and among a very small group. Even there we talked in very general terms, but the meaning was clear to all of us. By degrees our work was turning into a conspiracy, as a step towards a revolution which still looked big and dreamy and distant, but was getting to be less so as the months passed and the pressures, both within us and outside, drove us forward. Looking back now, it seems that events shaped our first actions very much more than we shaped them.

The approach of the February session of the legislature also kept us busy then. It would be our first open battle with the government and its parties on the questions of war cooperation and independence. We decided to extract the greatest possible gain out of the occasion by putting the Burmese case as categorically as we could and forcing the government to come out with a clear statement of its attitude, and so exposing it thoroughly. The result would be crucial. It would enable us to judge what our future relations with the government and the legislature were going to be. Our policy would to a large extent be guided by those relations, so that the session would mark a big new turn in our movement. We expected the movement to explode into a struggle after the session.



✓ The February session of the legislature began on the 23rd. Two motions dealing with the war and independence had been sent in,

one by me for the Freedom Bloc and the other by Ba Thi for the moderate section of the nationalists. On my suggestion, the Freedom Bloc also put in an amendment to Ba Thi's motion which repeated the substance of my motion. There was a reason for this. When the motions and the amendment came up before the house, the government refused to give more than one day, that is, actually two or three sitting hours, for all of them, which meant that my motion, being the second one, would not be reached. The government was stooping to every trick to defeat the motion for independence and to limit to a few hours a national debate on which the whole course of the war in Burma would hang. Not to be cheated in this way, we agreed to have the entire debate on Ba Thi's motion and our amendment to it while I withdrew mine. Thus we outmanoeuvred the government by tagging our amendment to the motion to be debated.

✓ Ba Thi's motion regretted "that the British government have made Burma a participant in the war between Great Britain and Germany without the consent of the people of Burma." It also asked "that Burma should be recognised as an independent nation entitled to frame her own constitution." However, the request was whittled down by several clauses which contradicted the very concept of independence. Seeing these pitfalls, the amendment of the Freedom Bloc left out the qualifications and put the whole matter categorically.

✓ The motions came up in the lower house of the legislature on the day the session opened. We had followed the tense and passionate debates that had taken place on the war in India, South Africa, and some other countries. In most of them the governments there had themselves accepted their plain responsibility to act for the people by sponsoring the war motion, and the legislatures were given as many days as were necessary for the debate that followed. Thus the governments kept closely in touch with the people in a crisis. But it was not so in Burma. Our ministry faced the people's representatives in cold and even hostile silence. They announced nothing, explained nothing, made no statement whatever on any of the events and actions which were already beginning to rock the country, the Burmese participation in the war, the measures being taken without Burmese consent, the new defence rules and regulations which were curtailing the people's

liberties, the growing demand for independence. The ministry did not even dare to put up a motion of any kind itself.

✓ Although it did nothing it should have done, it did nearly everything to obstruct what others were doing. As far back as the preceding November the Freedom Bloc had requested a special session of the legislature to consider the situation created by the war, but the government had denied it. I have mentioned how even in the February session, which it was forced to hold in order to pass the annual budget, it refused to give more than a few hours for the debate on our motions on the ground that there were more important matters to consider than a world conflagration which was beginning to approach us from outside and a mass upheaval which was already threatening to set the country on fire from within. It was in such an atmosphere of complete frustration and unreality that the debate on the motion took place.

The ministry had no common policy in any of the matters that were being debated; its members were so divided among themselves that a free vote had to be given to them and their separate groups within the coalition. Consequently, the Freedom Bloc led the entire debate. With the exception of two ministers who were known always to act for the European Group, all the Burmese speakers spoke in clear nationalist voices. They recalled their Burmese past, bemoaned their plight under British rule, and demanded that Burma be restored to the Burmese. However, even that was too equivocal for the Freedom Bloc; it explicitly demanded complete independence. Throughout the debate the Burmese members were united in denouncing Britain's double policy of fighting to free Poland and yet keeping her colonial subjects enslaved. When U Tun Aung, who moved the Freedom Bloc's amendment to the motion, read out a passage from H. G. Wells' "In Search of Hot Water" the whole house listened tensely to it. This was what Wells wrote:

The British government in its inimitable way has been evoking bitter antagonism to British rule in the Burmese mind. The British ruling class do not realise they do it, they do not understand how they do it, but they do it. The same sort of self-complacent arrogance which built up a barrier of evil memories between the Irish and the English after 1918 is now producing an open sore upon a vital world route. In

Burma as in India the British raj never explains. In effect it has nothing to explain. It is there a brainless incubus.

U Pu, another member of the Freedom Bloc, who followed U Tun Aung, was even more blunt:

It has always been and will ever be the determined will of the Burmese nation to get back by all possible means, constitutional or otherwise, their lost birthright of liberty, freedom and complete independence. [*"Hear, hear."*] . . . Some years ago, Sir, I had a discussion on Burma politics with an American driller at Yenangyaung. I quite remember him saying to me, "But I can tell you when you will get your independence and that will be when your country ceases to produce a single drop of earth-oil and when there is not a single teak in your forests and when your paddy fields have become barren. . . . These British have come out . . . to Burma just to make money.

So the debate proceeded, with one speaker after another driving in the same points, except that some did it less and some more, some supported Ba Thi's motion and some the Freedom Bloc's amendment. Even the Indian members rallied to support the motion; in fact, the whole house did so except the European and Anglo-Burmese members and a few Burmese ministers. None of us were surprised at the action of those ministers.

I spoke in the middle of the debate. I did so as the leader of the opposition and the Freedom Bloc. The government as well as the legislature expected me to declare authoritatively the attitude of the Bloc towards the war and the issues it had brought into the open. The governor had sent his secretary to listen to me. I therefore used the occasion to make a full statement. I have already quoted earlier the part of the speech that dealt with the war. Now I will give the passages dealing with the Burmese case for independence. They will be rather long, contentious, somewhat high-pitched in tone, but they are necessary for two reasons: firstly because, as I have pointed out before, this speech is the only officially recorded statement which now exists of the views of the Freedom Bloc; secondly, because statements made at the actual time give the most truthful picture of the time:

✓ My resolution is meant to show how futile the present British war aims are. But that is not my only purpose. Another purpose I have is to convert these aims into realities, to turn the war into a crusade, a world crusade if necessary, to mobilise world opinion on the side of the new world order which shall be everlastingly built not upon force or fraud but upon universal and equal human rights, rights which belong to me in Burma just as much as to any man in England or France or Poland. That is what I want to do and to see happen and for this reason I attach much importance to the amendment to the present resolution.

✓ Cynics have said to me, "What is the use of words? They have no effect. Have we not spoken enough words? We talk and talk while the British occupy Rangoon, while the British occupy Mandalay. And we are still talking." That is only a half-truth. I say that we have a new weapon now for our liberation and that is the weapon of world opinion. The liberation of all nations and peoples is now a world cause and as such it is a world struggle, and therefore our struggle; more than that, our shield and buckler. For this reason I say that my resolution is no mere formula, no mere legal writing as one speaker has tried to put it, but it is Burma's contribution to the world struggle and her entry into it. At the bar of the world the new tremendous issue will come up very much sooner than many of us seem to realise. No longer shall any imperialist power pursue its imperialism unchecked and undestroyed. There has been created all over the world . . . a world opinion which is very definitely developing into an idealism based upon the freedom of all nations, great or small, weak or strong. . . .

In the last war, Britain declared that she wanted to make the world safe for democracy. Let us declare now with the rest of the world that we want to make the world safe for all men to live in. I am adapting the words of Lord Halifax, the British Foreign Minister. Lord Halifax declared that he wanted to maintain, to protect, the rights of all peoples to live their own lives. This should be our new ideology. This is our true war aim, to make the world safe for all peoples to live in and not only for people who can form stable ministries that will give

British interests the kind of law and order they want. [*Laughter.*] The utter irrelevancy of an argument like that which came from the European Leader is evident. . . . There are unstable ministries and communal and political riots all the world over; in France for example. Can anyone imagine Lord Halifax and Mr. Chamberlain declaring to the hearing of America and the neutral countries that Britain is prepared to fight for the liberty of Poland only if and when Poland proves that she can construct a stable ministry? [*Applause.*] . . .

Now I come to Burma's case. I must at once deal with things said against Burma's case for independence. Obviously, I must also deal with the statement made recently to the legislature by His Excellency the Governor. He told the legislature not to attach too great an importance to the term "democracy." Also recently, Lord Zetland said to a newspaper that India was making a fetish of the term "independence."

The Governor has told us that more important than democracy is hard thinking and hard working. I only ask him this: "Would the British dare say such a thing to Poland? Would Britain dare go to Poland and say, "Don't think too much about independence. [*Laughter.*] Independence is a term with little meaning. You must deserve independence. You must come under our tutelage. Instead of talking about independence work hard, think hard." [*Laughter.*] If Hitler had said the same thing to Poland, if Hitler had told Poland, "Don't talk about independence; work hard, think hard; get the substance of independence instead of the form," what would my friends in the European group say? Would they not call Hitler worse names than they are calling him now? In Poland, in Czechoslovakia, in Finland, in Austria, the British use one term—"independence." There it is the cry of "My country, right or wrong; independence, right or wrong."

But in the East, within the orbit of her own imperialism, within her own power politics, independence, Britain declares, is a fetish, democracy is meaningless. "Work hard, think hard." [*Laughter.*] . . . Now what are we to believe? Here is one law of morality for the East and another law of morality for the West; one political theory for countries that

fall within the orbit of Nazi policy and another for countries that fall within the British orbit. And yet we are asked in all solemnity to trust the British word; we are told that if we only have faith and patience we shall get what is promised us. That is the sort of thing that has created the worst possible impression of British policy.

The Governor has advised us—we thank him—to “work hard,” to “think hard,” in connection with democracy. As a return for that advice I tender him this advice: “Think in a big way, plan in a big way. As one of the custodians of an empire it is essential to think in a big way, to think and speak and act with vision and understanding of people other than one’s own.” In this connection I wish to quote the classic phrase of one of their own political thinkers, Burke. Burke has truly said that “Great Empires and small minds go ill together.” This profound political truth I wish to present to His Excellency the Governor. [*Loud applause.*]

✓ Again, what else are we being told? We, it seems, must prove ourselves to be fit for independence. These are words signifying tutelage, words that a master uses to his slave. As I have said, would Britain tolerate Hitler or Mussolini or Stalin using such words to countries which they are now occupying? In our case we are told that we must qualify ourselves for independence according to British standards; we must pass an examination in independence before we get it. In a dispute between two parties one party sets itself up as the judge with authority to bind and to loose. I wish to endorse with all earnestness the words spoken by my hon’ble friend, the member for Magwe, that the meaning of such words is that Britain will never admit our competence for self-rule so long as there is anything in Burma to make it profitable for them to stay on here. [*Loud applause from Opposition Benches.*]

Finally, what do these arguments mean? . . . They mean just this, that we must first of all acquire all the virtues of independence before we can be independent. My answer to that must be obvious. If you wish to see us fit, as you understand that word, for independence, grant us independence. If you are sincere in wishing to improve our education, our public health, our politics, everything else that is ours, grant

us independence. You cannot ask us, a people in bondage for nearly a hundred years, to show you all the virtues of independence before we are independent. Britain never did that in her own case. In other words, this sort of argument is a reversal of the historical process. You tell us almost in so many words, "Learn how to swim before you jump into the water." [*Laughter.*] I say, "Put us into the water first. That was how you and all the rest learnt how to swim."

Go back to the history of every country. How did they acquire independence? Did they qualify themselves for independence first and then seek independence? Think of your own country; think of France, of America. Independence in these countries started not with qualifying examinations but with wars and revolutions, did it not—with the will to independence? And yet Britain is now, in the midst of her flaming war professions, applying one criterion to us and another criterion to themselves. . . .

Pursuing this matter I declare that, if it comes to the question of showing reasons for independence and also reasons for withholding independence, for every reason Britain can adduce against Burma's independence, I will adduce ten reasons against Britain's independence. I will prove to you conclusively that Britain does not deserve to be independent. [*"Hear, hear."*]

I, therefore, say that the whole question and its settlement rests at present in the hands of Britain. She now has a great and singular opportunity to change the whole history of the world, almost literally to redeem the world from a terrible doom. She can save the world and in doing so she can save herself and all she stands for if she will give reality and fulfillment to her war aims. Everything rests with her. She may lose a material empire, but in place of that empire she will have far greater and more enduring power and domination in a world of free peoples, living side by side in freedom and equality, which is the only stable basis for the new world order. . . .

Britain can save herself and achieve a glory and a destiny greater than anything that history can show if she makes use of the present opportunity, if she discards her old traditions,

her outworn creed based on race, territory, markets, oilwells, and teak forests, if she discards those old predatory conceptions of empire, the old traditions and policy, and follows the new ideology. She will get back a hundredfold. In place of unwilling, embittered peoples tied to the chariot wheels of her empire she will then have free peoples working in absolute harmony with her, on terms of absolute equality and for the common benefit of a redeemed and reconciled world.

I almost feel that there was something oracular in my words spoken in 1940, for a great many nations have been liberated exactly in the way that I, in what perhaps was a visionary moment, foretold. It may, perhaps, have been just a lucky coincidence. But it happens at times that one's vision is clarified by genuine faith and passion.

I recall in connection with this debate a small incident which I must mention; it gave me such a wistful insight into the best part of the British character. After the house had risen that evening the Hon'ble Somerset Butler, who was really Irish and the twin brother of an Irish earl, rushed up to me in the corridor and said, "I say, Dr. Ba Maw, it was an awfully good speech, one of the best I have ever heard. I wish I could speak like that." He had said the same thing more or less during the debate, but I had not taken him seriously then. But now I knew he was serious. I was dumbfounded for several reasons. First of all, his words were so sincere and unexpected, so sporting as the British would say, that they left me dazed.

✓ But, unhappily, there was another side to it that I could not help noticing. I had poured out the hopes and emotions of a whole nationwide movement into that speech, and, although I had dramatised it a bit here and there to drive home my meaning more forcefully, I had tried to reveal all I knew of what was brewing in the country at the time just as I knew it. At the least the speech, so brutal in its candour, was a sign that something was deeply wrong somewhere. And yet it was able to impress the leader of the European Group in the legislature only as an awfully good speech and no more. Its gravity did not seem to have struck him particularly. I listened to him with mixed feelings, grateful to him for the fine spirit he had shown by saying the nice things he said about the speech, but rather disturbed by the fact that he had missed its

whole point, its deep plea and warning. His very praise of it as a fine speech implied that he did not consider it to be anything much more than that.

That night I wrote down these words in my diary: "It's a dead end. We must now look for other ways. London bridge is falling down, falling down, falling down." The state of my mind then could be gathered from the fact that I am unable to explain why I wrote down that piece of nursery jingle. It may be that my mind was so exhausted then that it sought relief in something simple and soothing, something rhythmic that makes no sense at all. I am told that exhausted minds generally do that; or it may even be that the mind, seized by a sense of insecurity, withdraws to the shelter and comfort of its earliest beginnings, which in the present case were the school kindergarten and its memories. Whatever the reason may have been, that curious entry reveals the load that was on my mind at the time I wrote it. I felt that I had really reached a dead end.

✓ U Pu, the premier, spoke at the close of the debate. As we had expected, he repeated what the British had always said. He kept drumming on a vague thing called "responsible government" and very carefully avoided mentioning freedom, independence, all the fundamental values for which the nations were at war. He even tried to change the whole direction of the motion and the amendment by asserting that "there is no difference of opinion, whether the members belong to the Opposition or whether they belong to the Government; we are all out to have as full a measure of responsible government as possible." Still more astounding was his statement that "the objective which was held out to us by the British parliament and the objective which we have in view is one and the same." So the objective was not independence, but responsible government, whatever it might mean; even that would be only to the extent possible.

✓ Continuing, U Pu informed the house how he intended to achieve this goal of his: by "actual action," he declared, raising his voice. While all waited expectantly for his next words he added, "that is to say, proving ourselves that we are fit for the full measure of responsible government." Here the record of the proceedings states, "Applause by the European Group," very significantly leaving out all the other members of the house. U Pu

also told us to whom we were to prove our fitness to enjoy what belonged to us as a people, and how we were to do it. It would be done by "proving to the British government that we are capable of shouldering our responsibility"; this again was to be done by rejecting "views contrary to mine that in a crisis like this we must not cooperate with the paramount power." Thus the Burmese premier stated as his own the whole British case while the European members applauded and almost all the rest waited frigidly for the speech to end.

One more ordeal was left for the Burmese members. U Pu had spoken for the Europeans, but the next minister to get up, Sir Paw Tun, spoke as a European. So openly did he do it that even the European Group looked embarrassed. Losing his patience, one Burmese member shot in a remark to the effect that this minister always got his instructions from the European Group and, according to the record, there was laughter. The record also shows that right through his speech only the European Group applauded him, and when he ended there was "applause from the government benches," which was always given ritually to a member of the government; the rest were all scornfully silent.

The voting was heavily in favour of Ba Thi's motion, which, as I have shown, was opposed only by the European Group, the Anglo-Burmese member, and a few ministers. As for the amendment of the Freedom Bloc, almost all the non-Burmese members together with the entire ministry and their secretaries banded together to vote it down. Consequently, it was defeated.

That day proved to be a fateful one. It marked a turning point for the Freedom Bloc and all it stood for, as we shall see.



The defeat of its amendment in the legislature brought the Freedom Bloc closer to realities. We had a good idea now of the opposition we should encounter. So we met and examined the situation again. Looking towards India, we saw a constitutional crisis building up there as a result of the antiwar campaign and the passions it stirred and the repressions that followed. Soon we came to certain conclusions. First of all, the British would never yield to

our demand constitutionally; next, British policy was bound to be the same in Burma as in India and we could expect the same kind of tactics to break our movement and the leaders would all be in jail or go underground before long; lastly, the Burmese being what they are, the movement would sooner or later flare out into an open conflagration. Violence would follow by itself in the wake of the repressions, and hence our task would change its character; it would not then be to incite violence where there was none, but to organise and direct it to the correct goals when it was provoked by the British and came of itself, for we now foresaw it coming that way.

I explained this changed aspect to our inner group, saying that it might make our task a little different and perhaps easier. It would not of course be easier on any account for the more conspicuous leaders, since they would find themselves either in prison or in hiding for years perhaps, but the movement would, if nothing happened to wreck it, produce its own impetus as well as its reasons for going on. What we, its leaders, were unable to do, its own inner laws were likely to do for it up to a certain stage.

We were facing a problem that arises in the course of all political action involving the masses. A mass movement begins, it grows and gets stronger; all that happens more or less automatically if there is a popular and emotional cause and people know how to utilise it. Then there comes the next stage, and the question is what action is to follow when the movement has not the means to carry out the consequences. That is the critical period, when the struggle, not knowing what to do next, threatens either to burn itself out or to go wild and do whatever comes into its head at the moment. That is also the time when everything begins to depend on factors over which we have little or no control, upon luck or fate, as the ordinary man would call it, or upon unforeseen contingencies, as the more realistic would say, or upon the laws of the development of society and the quality of leadership and strategy they have produced, for those inclined to view it in that deeper way. Whatever it may be, the fact remains that it is a time when men generally lose control of events and the imponderables take over.

The Freedom Bloc found itself in such a situation during those weeks. I felt that we had to have a more lucid plan of action and

purpose if the movement was to be kept together in our hands. So far we really had been following a day-to-day policy, one of rousing the masses without any clear notion as to what we were to do with them when they were aroused. In wartime conditions this was dangerously like playing with fire. We all agreed that a positive scheme was necessary, something that could be continued by others when we were no longer there and could be fitted into any future situation. I then gave them an outline of a plan based upon the principle of diversification and multiple attack, which has been followed by almost all revolutionary movements.

There would be four separate fronts, one in the legislature, which would really be a cover for the other fronts; one among the people, which would keep up the mass agitation and defy the repressions, thus creating an aura of martyrdom round the struggle and its leaders; a third maintained by active revolutionary workers who would go underground and build up resistance forces there; and the fourth front to consist of picked men sent abroad for contacts and training. In order to keep the plan realistic and flexible there were to be three objectives to choose from, according to the situation, instead of one which leaves no choice: an armed revolution if the situation was ripe for it; terrorism as in Ireland and Russia before 1917; and incessant political pressure and appeal to world opinion. We all agreed that such a plan would be as long-range and dynamic as we could make it then. Every freedom fighter would be able to find a place in it, and the final choice of objectives would be flexible enough to meet any situation.

At this juncture some of those imponderables intervened and changed everything. Suddenly, it seemed the earth shook; the great German drive began in April 1940; one country after another fell before it; the British armies were fearfully mauled and driven to the sea in Dunkirk; and by June Britain found herself beleaguered and fighting alone. The situation became so desperate that she announced a plan for her colonial forces to go on defending their own territories, such as India, Burma, and Malaya, should she also be conquered and occupied. The British empire was clearly reeling. For the Burmese it meant that their opportunity had come at last. All doubts and dawdling ended at once for many of us, and without any further argument it became clear that Burma was heading for an internal armed conflict which the

'Freedom Bloc would be leading. The imponderables had decided a question that we could not.

And yet, to tell the truth, we were not unmoved by the British disasters. Although we continued to pursue our plans as before, I noticed that even within the inner group in the Freedom Bloc our personal feelings became more mixed and ambivalent as those disasters increased. Most of us felt a genuine sorrow for the British people. Defeat and suffering draw all peoples together, and something inside us felt emotionally drawn to those people who were now sharing in a way our own long defeat. In her hour of trial I, for instance, realised how much Britain had shaped our destiny not only to our loss but also to our lasting gain. Paradoxically, we were preparing to fight against Britain in defence of values that Britain herself had taught us to a large extent, the values of liberty, democracy, progress, fair play, and many more like that, even though the British had confined them largely to themselves.

We were also fighting with weapons that Britain had done so much to place in our hands. Also the Nordic spectre towering over all the other races of the earth grew more real to me; again I remembered the Nazi saying that Germany needed slaves. They were spine-chilling thoughts. They made me do a singular thing. I wrote a personal letter to Sir Archibald Cochrane, the governor, to inform him that in the grave new crisis I was prepared to discuss the situation in Burma with him in order to find a way out of our deadlock. I could not have said more to indicate that there could be a way out. That letter remained unanswered.

Some time at the beginning of the year I met Sir Stafford Cripps, who was passing through Burma on the way to China. He was the type of man who made any political talk fruitful even though it might end in disagreement, for he showed that he understood the other man's viewpoint even when he was arguing against it. That quality in him was enough to remove most barriers between us during our discussions. Before I could say anything he told me that it was hard to understand the colonial mentality in the East. He had just come from a luncheon at the Pegu Club, a closed European haunt, where they stared at him when he told them that he would be visiting me. One of them complained to him that I had refused all invitations to the club when I was premier.

"But I understand your action," Sir Stafford said, without waiting for me to explain. "I should have done the same as long as the racial bars were there." After that we found no difficulty in speaking to each other as we really felt.

Cripps wanted to see Burma free, but remaining within the commonwealth, "in her own interest as much as in that of the commonwealth itself," he explained, and gave quite candidly the reasons for his belief. "But what do you think the Burmese will do if they don't get all they want?" he asked me as he was about to leave.

"The Burmese will act in the Burmese way," I replied, trying to evade the question.

"What is the Burmese way?" he persisted, his interest aroused.

"That's a Burmese secret," I said.

Really my previous remark had been an off-hand one which meant little, and when Cripps followed it up I had to keep on dodging him. I wanted him to laugh and forget about it, but he did not. Instead, I think he saw something dark and deep in it, for he looked lost in his own thoughts, and finally said that with a conservative government that refused to take a long view he had very much of a foreboding that what I had said was going to happen rather nastily in more than one part of the empire.

I remember this talk well because, apart from the impression that Cripps created on me, my statement that the Burmese would act in the Burmese way got into the newspapers and caused a stir. It seemed to appeal to the Burmese delight in cryptic sayings which could mean several things or nothing. "It's like a duck egg," one paper exultantly declared. "You cannot find either the beginning or the end of its meaning, but you know the meaning is there."

By June the German armies had overrun half of Europe, and Italy had joined in for the kill. I was therefore certain that Japan, the third Axis power, would soon be in it too; or the least she would do would be to weaken as much as possible the Western powers in Asia by actively stirring up their colonies. Her policy of Asia for the Asians could have no other meaning. All these facts increased my conviction that an armed revolution in Burma was inevitable and that Japan would eagerly help us when it occurred.

She had more reasons than ever before to do so, because the Burma Road, which was the main supply line of the Chinese in their war against her, was draining her strength seriously; she had to disrupt that supply somehow. More and more Japanese came to see me, and their talk too became more open. For the first time I told them that we saw a violent struggle ahead of us for which we should need their help. After listening one day to all I had to say, the consul informed me that the authorities in Japan had lately shown a special interest in Burmese affairs. That statement struck me as most significant.

It was at about this time that Aung San discussed with me his plan to go abroad. The Thakins were, he said, in general agreement with all I had said about a four-pronged front and a three-fold objective; and now a revolutionary situation had emerged in Burma and many other countries, and we must prepare for it. He wanted to go abroad to a country which could and would help us in our revolution. It would have to be one which was hostile to the British. He could only think of Japan, as Bose thought of Germany. He knew that Thein Maung and I had friends in Japan; he therefore wanted us to help him to carry out his plan. I will describe these talks more fully when I relate the complete story of the Thirty Comrades and how they went to Japan in 1940 and 1941.

With the precipitate turn the war was taking in the West, events in Burma also took a new direction, which was, of course, as we all had expected. Attitudes at once toughened both in the government and the Freedom Bloc. We increased our activities while the government countered by arresting the leaders, but leaving the others alone in order to keep the people out of the struggle as much as possible. We, of course, were determined that the people should be in it; in fact, it was their struggle. The arrests jumped in the months of May, June, and July after the party conferences convened by the Sinyethas and the Thakins. The Communist leaders, Thakin Than Tun, Thakin Soe, and a few others were picked up first. Next U Nu's turn came, as the result of a violent antiwar speech given in the heart of Rangoon, and also for his prominence at the Thakin conference held in May.

Then came the turn of the Sinyetha Party. Thein Maung was arrested in July, and five others followed in the same month. The

government was leaving me till the end, although my speeches in those months and even before were the most militant of all. It was clear that the government wanted to avoid doing anything that would look too extreme or sensational, and my arrest at that juncture would certainly have caused a bit of a sensation. But I knew that my turn would come sooner or later. To make the most of the freedom still left me I resigned from the legislature in July and plunged whole-heartedly into the struggle. More than anything else I wanted to hold a conference of the Sinyetha Party in order to bring it completely into the conflict and to arrange for the continuation of my work during my absence. The government's hesitant policy enabled me to do it. It was only after the conference that I was arrested, in August 1940.



✓ Before describing my own party conference I must say something about the Thakins' conference, which was held in May 1940, a month before mine. It was held in Tharrawaddy District in Lower Burma, whereas the Sinyetha conference was held in Mandalay in Upper Burma. Thus the two conferences roughly covered the entire country. The Thakins assembled in full force and spoke out boldly. U Nu moved the main motion, which declared that the Thakin Party would "intensify its activities for Burma's freedom even to the extent of taking direct action." Than Tun seconded the motion, the most violent speeches followed, and the motion was carried with wild acclamation. Within a few days several Thakin leaders, including U Nu and Than Tun, were arrested.

✓ The Sinyetha conference took place a month later at Mandalay. I learnt from intelligence reports which fell into my hands after the British had evacuated Burma in 1942 that the government had watched this conference most closely, especially after having seen the Thakin outburst at Tharrawaddy. Word had gone out beforehand throughout Upper Burma that it would be a freedom conference, and I believe this led the government to look upon it as a test of the popular feeling behind the whole freedom movement.

The British intelligence reports stated that the conference lasted three days and was attended on its final day by over 15,000 people, but actually the number was larger, for, owing to the sessions being long and the *pandal* packed, sections of the assembly kept changing with early-comers leaving and late-comers taking their places. Anyway, it was described as the largest political gathering in Burma for many years. Over a thousand monks came from every district in Upper and Central Burma, and an even greater number of youths who belonged to the Dama Tat, or the "Army of Knives," a youth organisation belonging to the party. The reports stressed the fact that many monks and leaders associated with the peasant rebellion of 1930 were present at the conference.

✓ The open-air mass meetings which followed at night after the day's business was over were in a way the most significant part of the events. Being open to the whole town, the crowds were largest then and packed the broad fields round the conference *pandal*; the speeches were the most challenging, and the public response also was the greatest. You could almost feel on those nights how the heart¹ of the people was beating.

✓ Speaking on the first night I gave a full account of the Freedom Bloc, its beginnings, its work and progress, its goal of freedom for the Burmese. I knew that this would be one of my last opportunities to speak to such an enormous gathering, so I was determined to pour out all that was in my mind at the time. The intelligence men kept busily writing down whatever I said, and I kept saying more and more while the gathering, particularly the monks, asked for more and more. A compulsion stronger than ourselves seemed to be driving us like a fate into the vortex of the world storm. I spoke for the first time of a resort to force.

"Cowards and fools," I said, according to the intelligence reports, "call us fools for talking of force when we have nothing in our hands, no guns, not even sharp knives or needles. Don't believe them; they will give you every reason for doing nothing, for just talking about freedom and doing nothing to gain it. I tell you that there will be plenty of weapons in this war. Weapons are not only those you make for yourselves; they are also those which come into your hands without your making them. Have no fear. Look at your hands. They are empty now. But they won't be

empty always." Then after a pause to obtain the greatest effect, I said, "Bo Bo Aung will give us all we need."

The intelligence men felt cheated, but the people who heard the mystical name suddenly uttered knew the meaning and roared in excitement. After that speech there was no holding back those who spoke after me night after night. It was as if you watched a people's struggle taking form and shape under your very eyes. It is said that when historically static nations start to move forward they do so in sudden leaps and convulsions. The Burmese at that moment were almost visibly tucking up their loin cloths, as we say in Burmese, to take such a leap forward.

To show how wide the leap was I will mention an incident which, though trivial and perhaps even amusing, proved to be far from trivial in its effect on the masses. It will also give us a glimpse into the state of the mass mind at the time, and the sunken, subconscious world of fact and myth in which it largely dwelt. In effect, the struggle for independence was for the Burmese a revolutionary leap out of that twilight world into the present day.

The incident occurred on the first night of the conference. I had mentioned in my speech that Burmese strength would multiply like Bo Bo Aung's *O's* to free us. After I had spoken, a popular actor had sung Bo Bo Aung's song and the large crowd listened enthralled. The next morning some of the early worshippers at Maha-myat-muni Pagoda, the most famous shrine in Mandalay, perhaps still dreamy with the words and song they had heard at the meeting the previous night, saw in the wind-blown light of the candle flames faint circles glowing on the soft and uneven gold of the great Buddha image. What some saw at first all began to see in time, and the number of circles also began to grow. The story went quickly round that Bo Bo Aung's *O's* had appeared at the most sacred pagoda in the town. Our conference was at once called Bo Bo Aung's Conference.

People in their new mood recalled other cryptic signs and sayings that were believed to foretell the defeat of the British and their departure from Burma. One such saying was made to sound so ingeniously oracular that it deserves to be recorded. It goes like this: "Upon the fishery the *hintha* bird will descend; the *hintha* will be shot by the hunter; the hunter will be struck down by the

umbrella rod; the umbrella rod will be shattered by the lightning."

With a little ingenious unravelling the fishery becomes the Ava dynasty in Burma, the Burmese name for Ava literally meaning "the mouth of the fishery"; the hintha is the traditional bird of the Talaings or Mons; the hunter is the last Burmese dynasty, whose founder Alaungpaya came from the Village of the Hunter in Upper Burma; the umbrella rod astrologically interpreted signifies Britain; and the lightning can similarly be made to signify Japan and her lightning-like conquests. After this the meaning of the folk rhyme becomes clear and prophetic. The old Burmese dynasty in Ava would be destroyed by the Talaings; the Talaings by Alaungpaya, the Burmese conqueror; Alaungpaya's dynasty by the British; and the British by Japan, striking like lightning from the southeast.

✓ All except the last part of the prophesy had already proved to be true. It was of little importance to the masses whether the interpretation put upon the prophecies came before or after the event or whether it was a little fanciful; to the masses they stood fulfilled. And so the final prophesy about British power being shattered by lightning was widely believed long before the Japanese armies struck with lightning speed in 1942. For all its fantasy, there was something awesome in the way the popular belief fitted into the facts.

✓ As the conference went on I began to realise that a new situation had arisen which created new problems. Mass emotions were already churning; they would now have to be controlled and directed properly. Already they were threatening to get out of hand, and that, if it happened too soon, could be a serious setback for our cause and struggle. For instance, the conference had violently defied the government and the law and wholesale repression could now follow. I had to think out a way to prevent such a disaster or, if that was not possible, to profit somehow by it. It was then that an idea which had been drifting within my mind for some time struck me like a flash as a practical step that must now be taken for several reasons. My party was heading for trouble with the government, and I would have to come between the two by taking personal responsibility for all its acts and statements

before it was ready for a showdown. Furthermore, with the revolutionary spirit rising visibly, it was the right moment to give it a revolutionary direction, as had been done in most revolutions of the day. There were the example of Russia, Germany, Italy, and several other revolutionary countries.

I therefore decided to change the power structure of my party into a dictatorship. The conference had convinced me that a revolutionary situation was definitely shaping so that the party would have to get ready to meet it in the revolutionary way; that is, by a concentration of power and leadership during the struggle. Every revolution I know has had to resort to such a form of authoritarian leadership during a transitional period. As Sun Yat-sen pointed out when he devised the tutelage system for revolutionary China, the more backward countries have to travel a greater distance to catch up with others, and consequently have more revolutionary tasks to accomplish within a shorter span of time. They need to travel faster and learn sooner. All this means that such countries have more reason to use the quicker and completer forms of power while the revolutionary tasks are being carried out.

Again, a revolution is as grave and imperative a national crisis as a war, and if, in order to win a war and all that is at stake in it, a democratic people can surrender their peacetime freedoms to a democratically chosen authority with total power without really surrendering their democracy, there is no reason why a similar kind of surrender should not be made during a revolution to overcome a similar national crisis. It was with these and other realistic thoughts in my mind that I introduced the principle of total leadership during a transitional revolutionary period into Burmese politics, and later into the wartime Burmese administration. I might mention that Subhas Chandra Bose, with whom I discussed this principle during many talks at the time he was organising his independent state of India, completely agreed with my view and acted in the same way as I did. The course of events today in Asia and Africa and even elsewhere is proving that we were right.

On the last day of the conference the Sinyetha Party accepted the proposal to set up a dictatorship within it for the period of the war, and I was elected the *anashin*, or dictator. Accepting the task, I issued seven orders which would at once have these two results:

first, the party would be transformed into a revolutionary organisation that would be ready to carry out with speed the most secret plans; second, all the legal responsibility for the party's actions would be placed on the leader alone and so protect as much as possible the party workers. A writer describing the event has said that the orders, together with my arrest and trial for issuing them, created a sensation in the country. Anyway, the effect was sweeping. As we shall see, one thing quickly followed another after that—my trial and imprisonment, then Aung San's secret departure for Japan, then the mass arrests of the leaders of the Sinyetha Party, and finally the transformation of the Freedom Bloc into an underground organisation.

The seven orders will show better than anything I could say at present how fundamentally the freedom movement was changing. Their substance, in brief, was this: to refuse to participate in the war in any way as long as freedom was refused to the Burmese; to take a vow at the nearest monastery or pagoda to follow in the steps of comrades who fell; to enlist in the action groups to be formed; to carry out the leader's orders unquestioningly; to recognise the new constitution for a free state of Burma that would be written by a constituent assembly set up for the purpose; to contribute liberally to the freedom fund; in the event of the dictator's arrest, to keep up the struggle under the direction of a council of three appointed by him or their successors till independence was won.

Before issuing the orders I made this statement, according to the same government intelligence reports:

The orders have not been issued by either the Sinyetha Party or the Mingalun Monks' Association, which controls the party. I accept sole and personal responsibility for them. If any action is taken in connection with these orders I alone will face it, because as the party dictator I alone am responsible.

The statement is important because it reveals one of the reasons in my mind for accepting my election as dictator. It was to place the whole responsibility for all our actions on a single person and so shield the party and the struggle it was carrying on. Later it will also become apparent that a similar reason was present in my

mind during the years when I acted as the Burmese dictator throughout the extremely difficult relations between the Burmese and the Japanese military command; also when Burma declared her independence and her entry into the war against Britain. The responsibility for the latter actions became solely mine.

Delegates who had come to the conference from all parts of the country took away stacks of printed copies of these orders to be distributed everywhere. In a number of secret meetings which followed I told the district leaders that my arrest was certain, in which event a token defiance of the law must be launched by carefully picked volunteers reading out the seven orders at public meetings; it would be the right time for this kind of limited mass action. Lastly, I told them to lie low before I was arrested, because I wanted to remain free as long as possible in order to make a final tour of the districts in Lower and Central Burma.

On my return to Rangoon I gave a last speech at the Students' Union of the University, and a day or two later I left on a tour of several districts around Rangoon where I met the local leaders of my party and repeated to them the instructions I had given in Mandalay. I saw copies of my seven orders being distributed everywhere, with the police hot on their tracks. When I got back to Rangoon I met for the last time those leaders of the Freedom Bloc who still remained at liberty. Most of us were now convinced that an open conflict was imminent and that the Freedom Bloc must see it through. For us it had become a fate; or, as we saw it politically, a destiny.



On August 6, 1940, I was arrested in Rangoon and taken away to Mandalay, and the next morning I was produced before a criminal court to be tried under the Defence of Burma Rules. The news had spread by then, and a large crowd had gathered in the court compound. It was a short appearance; bail was applied for and granted, and a date fixed for the hearing. Upon release I made the utmost use of the free days I still had to select, instruct, and strengthen the faith of those who would carry on after my departure and keep up the fight until I joined them again, for I as-

I assured them that I would come back or someone else would take my place; one leader falls, one leader rises, I told them, repeating a Burmese saying.

Mandalay was getting very tense and restless by then. With my thoughts fixed on the wider situation, especially that in the West, which at that moment was changing violently, I did my best to prevent anything precipitate from happening. Aung San was on the point of leaving secretly for Japan, and the Japanese, who had closely followed the events, kept on warning me against hasty and unorganised action. It was with their knowledge that I and many other leaders of the Freedom Bloc had decided to seek arrest and imprisonment; such action, we calculated, would keep the struggle within the political bounds as long as some of the leaders were in prison and the rest had gone either underground or abroad. My greatest fear then was that something might explode too soon and blow up all our work before the masses were ready for the next step. Gandhiji's words spoken at Ramgarh haunted me: "We must be prepared before we act; we must fight to win."

My trial in itself was a ritual sort of affair, brief and formal and without any touch of drama in it. All the drama was taking place outside the courtroom among the huge, seething crowd that filled the grounds around it and in the town, where people everywhere had begun to speak with greater racial feeling and defiance.

The trial proceeded without any incident. U Tun Maung, the magistrate, and I had been close friends since our schooldays together. I was informed that he had heard my speeches at the night meetings of the conference and warmly agreed with much I had spoken. In court I could see the inner conflict he was passing through; he was so embarrassed by the irony of the situation that he avoided looking at me. Knowing this, I tried to catch his eye once by noisily shifting in my chair. He looked at me, and as soon as he did I winked hard at him and smiled. The court prosecutor saw it and smiled too. U Tun Maung also began to smile. After that, all of us felt much more at ease.

I was charged with having issued seven orders to my party which were "prejudicial to the efficient prosecution of the war," and so on in contravention of the Defence of Burma Rules. The complaint was made by one Raines, who was the British superintendent of police in Mandalay. He presented the case with complete

fairness and poise. Beyond filing those orders in support of the complaint he had nothing to say against me. He took no personal responsibility in the matter, saying that he had "received instructions from the higher authorities" to lodge the complaint and he had done so. In the course of his testimony he agreed with all the declarations to the effect that freedom is a universal human right which were being made at the time by Eden, Morrison, Stafford Cripps, Nehru, Jinnah, and the Working Committee of the Indian Congress.

"Personally," he told the court, "I can see no objection had Dr. Ba Maw said, 'Give us freedom and we shall help, but before that we cannot.'"

Although I kept aloof from it all, I could not help being fascinated by the skill and experience with which my brother, Dr. Ba Han, who appeared for me, conducted the cross-examination of the witnesses, the way he confronted the complainant with the clear declarations I have just mentioned, and the complainant's ready agreement with all of them. It went like clockwork, every question and answer going home. This small bright spot in the picture shows how the war had started to erode even the old colonial complexes.

The British police officer deposed before the court with unusual candour that in his view the war was fought for the freedom of all the nations, great or small. He was also not prepared, he said, to deny that the British refusal to grant freedom to the Burmese was an act gravely prejudicial to the successful conduct of the war, or that the prosecutions going on then of those claiming freedom for their own people would be similarly prejudicial. It was really a moment of truth. During that period I do not remember hearing any other British colonialist speak in that lucid and fair-minded way, least of all in the legislature or the press, where such a gesture of understanding could have meant a lot.

The other witnesses who were all police reporters and informers were a bit more nervous and evasive, but on the whole they too were as fair as they could be within their much narrower liberty. "A free man would be able to fight better for freedom than a slave," one of them said quite firmly. "I admired Dr. Ba Maw for his courage to say those words," declared another, himself displaying the courage he admired. Those were poignant moments for me

during the trial, the sight of the large, faithful crowd waiting outside in the burning Mandalay heat, the British police officer refusing to compromise his personal faith and integrity, the police hangers-on for once trying to speak out as they really felt as Burmese, the magistrate struggling between two loyalties, and even the armed escort saluting me—a man standing trial for a grave offence—in a most demonstrative way before the watching eyes of all.

I offered no defence. Instead, I filed this statement in writing:

So far as I am concerned I have no statement to make. I issued the orders under complaint and their meaning is clear. Apart, however, from my own case I want to make a general statement on the present use that is being made of the Defence of Burma Act solely for the safeguarding of British imperial policy and its interests. The Act declares to be an offence any act which it deems prejudicial to the efficient prosecution of the war. I want to state for all fair-minded and freedom-loving people to know that Burma's struggle for her own independence cannot conceivably prejudice the prosecution of a war which Britain professes to be in defence of the rights of all countries, whether great or small. On the contrary, it is Britain's own policy and acts which are proving very clearly to be prejudicial; her refusal to recognise Burma's right to be free in accordance with repeated British war professions, her present action in repressing as much as possible the freedom struggle of her own subject peoples. Therefore it is Britain herself who is guilty of an act vitally prejudicial to her war efforts, and she alone stands condemned before the world for it.

Orders were passed on August 28, 1940; I was found guilty and sentenced to a year's rigorous imprisonment. With his eyes wet and his voice growing unsteady as he went on, the magistrate read out the order and left the bench hurriedly. The crowd outside, greatly increased that morning, looked tense and threatening, and a large group of women had massed themselves across the car paths leading away from the courthouse. I had learnt some days previously of their plan to block the paths even at the risk of being run over in order to prevent the police cars from taking me away to

the jail. With the simple thought of preventing any futile incident I had opposed it. I was also told that the magistrate who had been secretly consulted by some of the women had advised them similarly, telling them that such short-sighted action would do far more harm than good. But the women were adamant.

The police, however, who had learnt of the plan outwitted them in a rather neat way. They just looked on as the women gathered on the car routes, but close around their cars, which were parked away from the paths, a group of their own men stood filling a space wide enough for the cars to get through. As soon as I had been placed in one of the cars and the crowd, violently excited, surged into every path leading out, the police gave a signal to their men, who then moved away from the cars and so opened a way for them across the field bordering the paths. With their horns and gears and everything that could screech screeching, they charged across the outer field, where a similar ruse was employed, till they were well away on the main road, while the crowd, taken completely by surprise, were left where they were, raging and shouting futilely. Small groups of armed men who had been stationed at all the road crossings watched us speed along. Some Gurkha troops stood with fixed bayonets at the entrance of the fort within which the jail was situated. At a signal from the escort car in front we were allowed to pass. Shortly after, we reached the jail; the gate was opened, then closed behind us, and I was turned over to the chief jailor. Thus the long crowded drama ended, and I became a prisoner serving a sentence which could go on indefinitely.

After the gates were closed and bolted and locked with a great clanging sound, I was able to collect my thoughts a little and look around. Soon I felt, like a sharp physical sensation, the change that had taken place. All the packed, swirling weeks and events that had just ended seemed now far away; suddenly all had gone empty and dead and silent. The silence around me as I sat in that grim little room was what struck me most during those first moments; it was different from any silence I had known before. It brought an inexplicable feeling of peace and release. Then gradually, what was till then just a confused blur floating across my consciousness took shape here and there and I became aware of the heavily

barred windows, and the inner gates continually locked and unlocked, and jailors and warders barking out ceaseless orders, and gray-clad prisoners carrying them out impassively. These and similar things that I noticed one by one, as though in a trance, began to come together to form the first pattern in my mind of the new, caged existence I would be made to lead for a long time.

Meanwhile, my name and a few other facts concerning me were entered in the jail books, and my boxes and bedding were searched. Finally, I was taken to the political section of the jail, where the whole upper floor of a fine large building had been kept ready for me. I was told that it had once been occupied by Subhas Chandra Bose. News travels very fast among prisoners, and I found a large number of them watching me in silence as I was led past them. Their hushed presence at that moment was a token of their respect and understanding which deeply moved me. Even more moving was the fact that they continued to show me the same respect, especially by taking care that no foul language was used in my hearing all the time I was in that jail.

As soon as I entered the political compound the prisoners there gave me an exuberant welcome. They were very well informed, and were jubilant over the turn events were taking in Burma as well as other places. They at once asked me a lot of questions, as if they thought that my words would have the power to make their hopes come true. But my thoughts were elsewhere; I just smiled at them and proceeded to my room upstairs. At that moment someone thrust his face close to me and grinned. He was an odd-looking fellow from the far Arakanese hill tracts who was detained in that prison for some obscure political reason which no one was able to discover. From bits of talk picked up from day to day he had gained a foggy notion that I had proclaimed myself a big chief or something like that and had attempted to seize the country.

“Hey, are you king?” he shouted as I passed him.

“No, are you?” I shouted back, laughing. Everyone then laughed, including this man. It was the first time either I or anyone round me had laughed since my arrival. I felt somewhat better after that.

CHAPTER 4

The Thirty Comrades

On August 14, 1940, eight days after my arrest, Aung San and another young man left Burma disguised as Chinese stowaways in a Norwegian freighter named *Hai Lee*. The boat was carrying rice to Amoy. As for Aung San, he was carrying a fragment of the Burmese dream into the unknown. And so began the story of the thirty comrades, which has now become a part of our Burmese folklore.

With a slow return to reality in Burma after the long paranoiac years following World War II, more people seem to wish to know the facts of this story apart from all the myth and heroics they have been hearing up till now. Many of the comrades themselves have assured me that they want it to be told just as it happened, because then people will know it to be true. As the party propagandists have told it, a piece of genuine history has become little better than a common make-believe tale, like something out of an old chronicle written to please some fantastic prince or people. The only way to put it right again is to get the story directly from those who were actually in it, from some of the thirty comrades themselves speaking together so that they could if necessary correct each other's recollection of the events, and from the people, Burmese as well as Japanese, who have a personal knowledge of one or more of the links in the chain of these events. I have tried to do this, and to put together whatever I have gathered as a result. I shall therefore be relating here not only facts which I know and recall personally, but also those I have learnt from the people who played a part in them. I have also obtained many of these facts from documents and records belonging to the period. Thus I have tried to make the narrative as factual as possible.

It is a singular story right through, the kind that seems so unreal, and yet is real. There are many surprises in it which not even the most far-seeing at the time could have believed to be possible. But it is not merely this that makes the story extraordinary. There is also the fact that the amazing venture which led the young men into the very heart of the future turned out to be right in nearly every way that mattered, in the choice of destination and time and purpose, so much so that one might even see something awesome in it, the hand of destiny or fate some would say, or historical necessity as some others would call it, or just the most fabulous stroke of luck. Whatever it was, it ended by altering the course of events in Burma.

These lads were a very mixed and mostly unremarkable lot, acting from all sorts of motives. Thakin Tun Oke and Bo Set Kya, two of the most conspicuous among them, have often said that many of those who went had been picked up at random from the streets. However, history often works that way, producing a mixture of results. What these young men did was, no matter how you look at it, plainly necessary at the time it occurred. In a way it was of course crazy, a madcap adventure, as someone has called it; but with the war already spreading, the times were just as crazy, and most action everywhere had become a gamble with fate, and there was almost nothing really left to do for a small subject people trying to gain their freedom with empty hands except to gamble along with the rest. These lads, being young, rootless, very much down and out, and subconsciously trying to escape from their own problems, were ready for a gamble in which they had very little to lose.

In the end they found themselves carried along on the fast rising tides of the world conflict; and when these tides reached the East and the Japanese armies at last marched into Burma, the thirty young men together with some others collected on the way marched in with them and discovered, probably to their surprise, that they were making as much history for their people, and as fast and gloriously too in a way, as the Japanese were doing. But however it happened and whatever may have been their actual military value, one thing is certain: the thirty comrades have changed our history enormously, both for good and for evil.

✓ The British used to say that the Burmese are born rebels to

whom the impulse to break out against their rulers comes periodically. Then whole villages start looking for charms, amulets, and such things as are believed to confer invulnerability, and, thus armoured, they seize any weapon they can find and go loose. Burmese history with its long succession of such episodes, which, however fantastically some of them may have begun or ended, were in reality racial explosions, seems to prove that the British are right, although the reasons they have given are wrong. The idea of preparing for an armed struggle, which took the thirty comrades abroad, was completely in keeping with this long Burmese tradition. It was to an extent the same racial explosion as in the past that drove the young men into their adventure.

But that is not the whole explanation for it. I have already related fairly fully the way things were simmering in Burma as the war approached and also the revolutionary currents that kept flowing from Europe and China into all the countries in the region during those years. It was inevitable that what happened elsewhere should also sooner or later happen in Burma, especially when it was happening so violently in China nearby and only a bit less so in India. It became only a question of time.

That time came with the war. The wounds left behind by the disasters the Burmese had gone through, particularly during the interwar years, never completely healed, and the new frustrations caused by a colonialism that continued to ignore the changing years and their needs deepened them, and the new revolutionary doctrines of which the Burmese were beginning to hear turned those wounds and frustrations into material with which a revolution starts; and then the consequences followed. One of the consequences was an embittered and revolutionary type of nationalism brewed out of past racial memories and present afflictions. Another was a newly learnt view of the future. Meanwhile, mass-based parties continued to grow, and out of them arose upon the outbreak of the war the Freedom Bloc and its great mass surge; and out of that surge arose in time the episode of the thirty comrades. This is the background to the story of these thirty young men.

Actually, it began in a haphazard way with a lot happening of itself and without anyone in it having any deep understanding of its implications, or in fact thinking very much about such things.

If, for instance, the question of the Burma–Yunnan Road had not existed then, which brought, speaking historically, the right Japanese to Burma at the right time to help the thirty comrades to carry out their plans, or even to have some plan at all, nothing would have come of it. There would have been no episode of the thirty comrades as we know it. Consequently, much in our history would have been different. For the most obvious reasons, Japan alone during that critical period would have been willing to give us that kind of help to fight the British and their allies, for she alone in the East had a strong enough motive for giving it as well as the means to do so. The story therefore begins with the Japanese and culminates with them, and it must be related that way.

I was able to learn during the war something about the Japanese approach to it. I think I learnt at the same time how the Japanese wartime interest in Burma began and, as circumstances changed, became so crucial. Japan looked upon the outbreak of the war in Europe exactly as all the other great powers did, as both a challenge and an opportunity, and the first quick defeat of the nations whose colonial possessions lay across her path seemed to bring that opportunity right to her doorstep. With her slightly mystical concept of history, especially her own, which she traces centuries back to an emperor descended from the sun goddess, she saw in the events taking place the moving hand, so to say, of destiny. Most Japanese whom I met during the war spoke openly of Japan's manifest destiny in Asia. But there was an immediate obstacle in the way. The war in China, the Chinese incident, as the Japanese chose to call it after the fashion of those days, would first of all have to be speedily won and ended. For that the Burma Road that was feeding the Chinese resistance against them would have to be cut. The only other existing supply route from the outside to China, the one passing through Urumchi from Soviet Russia, was of little military value.

✓ As far as I gathered from them, it was this fact that first turned Japanese thoughts more or less seriously to Burma. They had approached me when I was premier in 1938 and again in 1939, offering to spend a substantial sum of money if they could immobilise that road somehow, and I had told them that, apart

from other reasons, the Burmese could do nothing because they had no say at all in the matter. As for an uprising, the Burmese were not yet ready for it. When the world war broke out and the Germans overran the imperialist countries one by one, a stronger reason appeared for the Japanese to think of Burma. They thought of it now as a part of the wider region of Southeast Asia and as a means to achieve a bigger dream.

The long war in China, which was proving to be so inconclusive and costly, and in fact so unrealistic, had split Japanese opinion sharply. It set up two opposing schools, the northern and the southern. The first continued to believe that Japan's destiny, as they always called it, lay in the north and west; the second school, however, was convinced that the Japanese had looked for that destiny long enough in those directions and had never found it, so it was now time to look for it elsewhere. It must now be sought in the ampler and easier lands in the south, especially after the collapse of the Western powers which owned them threatened to create a vast vacuum there.

As the Western-held empires tottered more and more, the Japanese thought more and more of Southeast Asia. From their standpoint, they could not allow that vacuum in virtually the richest areas in their part of the world to remain open for others, like America and Russia and even China, to covet and seize while Japan just looked on. So when several negotiations with the Western powers proved fruitless and the one with the Dutch broke down in the middle of 1941, they were sure that America had designs, either territorial or economic or both, on the region. It was then, as far as one can gather from the course of events, that the Japanese decided to invade and take over whatever they could before other powers could do so or the defeated empires could rally again. For the Japanese, Burma was clearly an inseparable part of their new vision of an East Asian Co-Prosperity Community, which appears to have taken final shape in the middle of 1941. As far as I was able to put the pieces together, this was the way Japanese ambitions in Burma began and grew and eventually ripened into a plan to train and equip the Burmese for an armed revolt. So we are brought to the Japanese beginning of the story of the thirty comrades.

As their policy moved more towards Southeast Asia, it created

new tasks and problems for the Japanese. It led to another of the usual wrangles between the army and the navy, for each claimed the region, with its almost equal proportion of land and sea, as its natural field of operations. The Supreme Command however kept silent and was seemingly indifferent. Thus the field remained open to whoever in those two services wanted to undertake any operation there alone and was prepared to pay the price for it alone. It was in such conditions that the first Japanese began their secret work in Burma.

The navy took the lead in this new adventure. One of its men, Kokobu, a reserve naval officer, was already in Rangoon, where his wife was working as a dentist and he carried on some sort of business. He had come to know the Burmese and their ways rather well, and that helped him to make friends easily. However, the knowledge proved to be a mixed blessing. It smoothed his daily relations and movements a lot, but it also made him more self-confident and less cautious, with the result that the British came to learn of his activities. Knowing that the British knew, the Japanese consulate kept him at a distance. As a man, Kokobu was typical of his race and profession abroad, gentle-mannered and smooth and stoical outwardly, but torn within by the paradoxes latent in their explosive character and history. Mentally, he was in many ways limited, or rather blinkered, for most of the time he saw his side of a matter and very little of any other. For instance, he saw enough to know that the British were desperately anxious not to provoke Japan into entering the war, and he gambled to the limit on that fact.

"The British," he told me in effect as soon as he met me, "will save themselves first, and think of their friends afterwards. China is only a friend as we were once, and even that only as long as she is useful to them. They will not turn Japan into an enemy for the sake of saving China at this critical moment." From this Kokobu concluded that he could act boldly. His conclusion was true only in part.

The other part of the truth was that the British were well aware of most of the Japanese secret work in Burma as well as in the territories around, but let them go on as long as nothing vital, as they judged, was involved, in order to keep track of Japanese intentions in this part of Asia. Several secret documents the British

left behind undestroyed during their headlong retreat from Burma in 1942 prove that they were following such a policy. But Kokobu acted as if he did not know it, or did not care; or more likely he was in too much of a hurry to achieve something before other Japanese, especially from the army, could do so. This proved to be his final undoing.

Kokobu made one of his biggest mistakes when he visited together with a friend the Gokteik Viaduct, a vital railway bridge on the Burma-Yunnan Road, which was then kept very closely guarded. He was accompanied by Chuichi Ohashi, a prominent Japanese diplomat who in 1941 was vice-minister for foreign affairs under Matsuoka, and Japanese adviser to the Manchukuo government during the war, and many other things later. Shortly before that ill-timed visit the British had been warned that one General Tsuchihashi of the Japanese army was plotting to blow up the viaduct. They were therefore on the look-out for him. When Kokobu appeared at the place with Ohashi, the British concluded that Chuichi Ohashi was Tsuchihashi, the more so because Ohashi resembled the picture of Tsuchihashi that was in their possession. Ohashi and Kokobu were promptly arrested.

Kokobu fumed, and even threatened to seize the gun of one of the sentries and shoot his way out, but Ohashi, more poised and clear-headed, explained to him that that would be the best way of wrecking all future Japanese activities in Burma and even elsewhere in the region. They then did the sensible thing of getting into touch with the Japanese consulate in Rangoon, which soon straightened out the comedy of errors by explaining to the British that Chuichi Ohashi was not Tsuchihashi, and that the close resemblance of their names as well as their physical appearance was accidental and very much regretted by the Japanese government, and probably by the two persons themselves. The British, inwardly amused, I am sure, accepted the explanation and set the men free the next day; and so the comedy ended.

But it had its consequences for Kokobu. It jeopardised his relations with the consulate as well as his future usefulness in Burma. The espionage people in the Japanese army also did not come out of the incident too well. The Japanese consulate became more cautious and warned us to be the same, especially in meeting any Japanese who did not come to us through them. But Kokobu was

undismayed; he did not give up, but went on with his work indomitably. Although I was a little more reticent with him after the consulate's warning, he visited me often and even kept in touch with my family during the years I was in jail. His doggedness bore some fruit, as we shall see.

As success and failure are generally judged in such matters and at such times, Kokobu's work must be said to have failed, for it did not show any visible result in the end, whereas the work of others did. But he will be remembered in the full story of the thirty comrades for one accomplishment. It was he who obtained for the Burmese cause the first actual recognition from some authoritative body in Tokyo. He did this by dispatching to them along with his own report a plan of a sort for positive action during the war, drafted by Thakin Ba Sein's party, the splinter Thakin group working outside the Freedom Bloc. In reply, Kokobu was told to send Ba Sein to Tokyo. So he arranged for that young Burmese politician to go to Bangkok in order to meet Colonel Tamura, the military attaché at the Japanese embassy there, who, in the easier conditions existing in Thailand then, would be able to transport him to Japan. As it happened, Ba Sein did not get beyond the border. He was arrested close to it while he was, it is said, having a last nostalgic sleep on Burmese earth before crossing over. The attempt failed, but it left behind a trail. Hearing of it, Aung San and his group turned decisively towards Japan.

When the conspiracy of the thirty comrades began without him, Kokobu saw his work slipping out of his hands to others, and when in November 1940, Colonel Suzuki, an army man, succeeded in transporting Aung San to Tokyo and gaining control of the organisation which was set up by the Supreme Command itself to take charge of the secret relations with the Burmese, Kokobu slowly faded out and little of him was heard again. But some of his work continued through Fukai, of the Japanese consulate, who, in the changed conditions of 1942, was able to work for the Burmese cause more successfully than before.

In May 1940, while Kokobu was dashing around busily, a quiet, smiling Japanese arrived in Rangoon as the representative of *Yomiuri Shimbun*, one of the largest daily newspapers in Japan. He lived inconspicuously, spoke little, and spent most of his time listening to others and watching events. Soon he was casually

joined by two other Japanese who were travelling as representatives of a huge industrial firm in Tokyo. Thus the Japanese army at last entered the scene. The three men were Colonel Keiji Suzuki of the Japanese Imperial Army Headquarters, travelling under the name of Matsuo Minami, Mitsuru Sugii of the Economic Bureau of the Koa-In, the East Asia Development Organisation in Shanghai, a government-sponsored enterprise, and Mizutani, Sugii's travelling companion. They were on a mission of their own, which was to find a solution for the festering problem of the Burma Road by any means, even by setting the country on fire if necessary. Events proved that they were the right type of men for their work, had come at the right time, had learnt the right lessons, and had plenty of the right kind of luck. Yet another fact that helped them a lot was that they had nothing to do with any of the regular Japanese intelligence services, about which the British were fairly well informed. Consequently, they were able to carry on their work with considerable liberty. This was one of the results of the lesson they had gained from such incidents as that at Gokteik Viaduct.

Colonel Suzuki was a most remarkable person, the kind that emerges now and again out of a national crisis, like, for instance, Lawrence of Arabia in recent British history. He had had an unusual military career from the time he achieved the highest accolade at the Imperial Staff College by winning the Emperor's Sword till his service in the China war ended somewhat cloudily in 1939. He could be called essentially an adventurer with something like a sense of mission, as so many people in so many countries were during that era of apocalyptic faith and swashbuckling. Life could not run equably for such a man. Suzuki got into one trouble after another till the final trouble came in Shanghai.

It turned out to be the doorway he was really seeking. Without any right to do so, he stepped into a local dispute that was then churning among the various armed services in that war area. His action raised a storm and a howl. Suzuki was at once recalled to Tokyo where he was put out of the way, as they thought at the time, by being sent to a newly created and completely obscure department for the study of Southeast Asian affairs. Thus he came face to face with the problem of the Burma Road. As if an unseen hand were drawing the threads together, Thein Maung visited

Japan some time then, that is, towards the end of 1939, when the first Japan-Burma Society was formed in Tokyo. Suzuki seized the opportunity; he became a secretary in the society, then accompanied a delegation to Burma, joined in the general talk of culture and friendship and peace, quietly took in the situation, and left with his mind made up.

✓He got to work at once in Tokyo. I have been told that in the Japanese military world of those days the kind of enterprise that Suzuki had in mind meant that you had to do it all or nearly all by yourself, to make your own plans and find your own men as well as the means to carry them out. If you failed, you alone took the blow, and if you succeeded the Imperial Headquarters just nodded its head and took over your work. Such recognition, however, was for the Japanese warrior his finest moment and reward. Suzuki was well aware of this code. One Higuchi, a life-long friend, helped him to find most of the things he needed. Through Higuchi, Suzuki met Mitsuru Sugii. The two men discovered that they had been the closest friends years back in Taiwan when they had got into tight corners together and come out of them together, and so had learnt to trust each other. They at once agreed to try their luck together again. It was a strange reunion and pact, and as their plans developed and the obstacles were cleared away one by one, they began to believe that some power or fatality was leading them along. Sugii says he had such a feeling throughout the whole of that time. "I can't explain it," he says: "it was psychic; but whatever it was, it gave us an immense confidence in ourselves. I think it was largely this feeling that carried us through."

✓Everything moved quickly after that meeting. Okada, the millionaire owner of the Ensuiko Sugar Manufacturing Company in Taiwan, agreed to provide the necessary money for the project. The company also appointed Sugii and Mizutani as its representatives to enable them to travel abroad in its name, while Suzuki would go as a correspondent of *Yomiuri Shimbun*, which was at that time the organ of the Japanese military clique. And so these three men arrived in Burma, lured by a road, and perhaps a dream of destiny. The dream proved to be true even more than they had dared to expect; and later, when the tide turned catastrophically against Japan, it also proved to be false in a way they did not at all

expect. As has so often been the lot of this breed of men, they were in the end betrayed by their own dreams.

√ Unlike Kokobu, these men believed in a fourth dimension; that is to say, in time as a factor in allowing a situation to ripen according to its own laws. They were therefore not in a hurry. Some weeks passed even before Sugii and Mizutani joined Suzuki in his hotel in Rangoon. The only person they met often was a Japanese Buddhist monk named Nagayi, who had long been looked upon as an odd but colourful figure in Rangoon, where he had lived rather melodramatically for years, visiting pagodas when the crowd was largest and chanting his prayers and ringing his exotic little bells to the amusement of all. It happened that this monk also belonged to the wide-flung Japanese secret service, and he knew Thein Maung intimately.

√ Nagayi's part in our story was small and occasional, but it was a vital link in the sequence of events. He brought Thein Maung and Suzuki together again and kept them in touch with each other, for as a Buddhist monk begging for his daily food from house to house he was able to visit Burmese homes without arousing suspicion. This enabled him to meet Thein Maung freely. By hanging on to this trail Suzuki found his way into our political movement. During this period he also met on a few occasions some Thakin leaders, including Thakin Kodaw Hmaing, the father figure of the Thakins. As nothing concrete resulted from these contacts, Suzuki's purpose in pursuing them was perhaps to gain a more rounded view of the political situation. He did not meet the more important Thakins who were active then, like Aung San or U Nu; nor did he meet me. I believe this was a deliberate policy, which in the end proved to be wise.

So most of the time Suzuki and his companions simply watched events taking their course, or so it seemed. They knew from Thein Maung of my attempts to obtain Japanese support for the Freedom Bloc and its activities. They were, of course, also certain that no power except Japan would be willing to give that support to us. Besides, it was already apparent that, with Britain crippled and the threat to her daily mounting, the struggle in Burma would become violent at the first real chance; the Japanese had only to wait for the Freedom Bloc as a whole to turn to them for help, and

then to give it at a time and in a form that would suit them best. With all these signs to guide them, Suzuki and Sugii kept close to our movement, and when the Freedom Bloc made the move they had foreseen, they were ready with their own plans.

I have mentioned further back that the Japanese consulate had warned me to avoid violence or anything that would incite it while waiting to see how the situation in general would crystallise. Suzuki, however, was all for preparing for an armed rising. The military and the diplomatic sectors were pulling in different directions just as, so we learnt later, they were doing at home over the future line of Japanese policy—whether Japan was to seek her “place in the sun” by means of economic or of territorial expansion. It went on like this till the militarists put an end to it by sending out their own men to act directly under their orders in critical areas. Anyway, that was what took place in Burma with the coming of Suzuki and his two companions.



This brings us to the middle of 1940. I have already related a good deal of the Burmese part of the story up till that date. I will now take it up again and carry it to the time when the two parts of the story, the Burmese and the Japanese, come together at last with Aung San's departure, followed by the appearance of the thirty comrades.

We must again go back to April 1940, when the world situation exploded with the great German drive across Western Europe. Like everywhere else, the situation in Burma also fell completely apart. I met Kuga, the Japanese consul, and Dr. Suzuki several times during the dizzy weeks that followed. For the first time I told them that we were ready to organise an uprising within a year if the Japanese would give us active support. I think it was Kuga who told me that Subhas Chandra Bose had asked for the same thing for India, saying that if Japan would not give the help he needed he would turn to Russia for it, because he was determined to get it from somewhere. Bose, he said, had asked for ten million rupees and ten thousand rifles to begin with. “We want half that

amount in Burma to begin with," I replied. "We shall also want Japanese instructors." They promised to communicate my plan and request to Tokyo.

Nothing, however, came of it, for some two months later I was arrested and finally imprisoned, and so I lost touch with the consulate for good. But in the course of my last talks with Kuga and Dr. Suzuki I again gathered that Japan was reluctant to support during the war any armed action except as a part of her own military action. The consulate, however, showed an increased interest in the ideological tones of our movement. In particular they wanted to know whether it was genuinely nationalist or communist-led, as certain new red slogans which some among us had got into the habit of flaunting might imply. I concluded from these straws in the wind that Japan was beginning to think of the Burmese problem in closer coordination with her own; in other words, if she went to war she would widen her conflict to include us.

Those were schizoid days for most of us, when we suddenly found ourselves facing the biggest decision of our lives without being ready to make it; the question was whether we were prepared to seize the opportunity to resort to force that the turn in the war offered us, and if so when and with what means. It was a stark test of all we had spoken so bravely in the past. I have already said that within the Freedom Bloc itself people had begun to expect a blow-up sooner or later. Few, however, were yet prepared to say what part we should play in it when it came. As for me, although I had spoken of a revolt to the Japanese, I still had my moments of wavering as a result of my habit of seeing a thing too much in the abstract and from too many sides. But the same habit gave me the inner discipline to accept a situation and its demands completely once I had come to a decision. It was this discipline that made me go to prison at a time when wartime detention could go on without any end in sight, and later to remain true to our wartime bond with the Japanese to the very end. So I waited for the reply from the Japanese consulate; and the consulate in turn waited for word from Tokyo; and Tokyo, it seemed, was in no hurry to give it, for it knew that time was on its side. It could afford to wait and act in its own time. However, within less than a

year it decided to act; and so we come to the main part of the story of the thirty comrades.



The departure of Aung San and Bo Yan Aung for Japan as the first among the thirty comrades has a long background which is an essential part of the story itself. Soon after the war had begun, a few young men turned their thoughts vaguely to other countries in a search for friends for the Burmese cause. Some visited India and returned convinced by Gandhiji that violence in the circumstances prevailing then would be calamitous. Then, as I have said, not only circumstances, but the whole foundation beneath everything as it were gave way with the German victories in Europe and the events that followed headlong, such as the move in India towards mass action, our two freedom conferences mentioned earlier and the great mass upsurge they created, and finally the wholesale British repressions which drove many of our comrades into hiding.

It brought back to some the old thoughts about escaping to another country to seek help. But in the past they had indulged in such thoughts as dreamers and idealists in search of an ideal country into which they and their political notions would fit perfectly. They had spent their time till then idly picking the country they would like, regardless of whether that country would like them or not. In consequence, they got bogged down in a lot of daydreaming that led nowhere. Some of them wanted to go to China, without caring to find out if the Chinese would be willing to help them to fight the British at a time when the British were helping the Chinese to fight the Japanese. These people only remembered that Aung San and U Nu had visited Nationalist China as members of a goodwill mission before the war and had been received with the usual overflowing smiles and courtesies. U Nu had once spoken about it to Bo Let Ya. But now the war was moving rapidly towards Burma, and some Chinese troops were already on Burmese territory to show the Burmese the difference between peacetime smiles and deeds done during a war. A few suggested Yen-an, the embattled communist corner of China far up in the

north, instead of Kuomintang China, on account of Yen-an's long and vivid revolutionary fame. Japan also was, of course, debated. The result was, the talk went on, and then flickered down and ceased, and then went on again without getting anywhere till at last events put an end to it and decided the matter for them. It happened when the British remained adamant in rejecting Burmese demands and suppressed all open nationalist activity in the country.

The little group stopped talking airily and realised that help from another country was needed to carry out their plans. They also discovered that another group outside the Freedom Bloc had already thought of going to Japan; in fact, some had even got ahead of them, with the help of Kokobu, who had tried to send Ba Sein to that country. Immediately, a team led by Bo Let Ya, who later became an important member of the thirty comrades, decided to follow the route Ba Sein had taken by crossing over to Bangkok first, and proceeding by boat from there to Japan.

U Nu played a part in the affair at this juncture. He was in a suburban jail, where he met a Thai intelligence man named Bui Quantung, who subsequently turned out to be a double agent. U Nu got from that man a letter written to Luang Pridit, who was then a minister in the Thai government. In his letter Bui Quantung requested Pridit to recommend the young Burmese bringing it to him to Colonel Tamura, the military attaché at the Japanese embassy in Bangkok. Pridit was well known in those days for his leaning towards the Japanese, on account of their policy of Asia for the Asians. U Nu sent Bui Quantung's letter to the little group so that they could use it to find a way to get to Japan. It was in French, which neither Let Ya nor Nagani Tun Shwe, who were in possession of it, could understand.

At that time the group worked in secret in a back room of my house in Park Road. My wife, Kinmama, also worked with them; in fact, she was the resident member of the little group who provided them with the things that were essential for their work, such as office equipment and transport and funds in times of desperate need. Let Ya still speaks of those times with emotion. Tun Shwe is dead, and Ba Hein, another member of the group, is dead, but the names of these three freedom fighters will live on more enduringly than most others in our wartime story.

Coming back to that letter, Let Ya asked my wife to translate it, and she struggled hard to do it with the help of one of my French dictionaries, but it proved to be too much for her, and so she brought it secretly to me in Mogok. After receiving my translation Let Ya, Tun Shwe, and Kinmama carefully plotted out a route across the Thai border on a map, and Let Ya eventually followed it. "Our main food supply on the way was the biscuit tins that Ma Ma Gyi [referring to Kinmama as an elder sister with Burmese politeness] thoughtfully gave us," Let Ya told me later. To Kinmama the thought came as a matter of course, for one of her occupations during that period was to send food parcels to our more indigent party members who were in prison and also to help in various ways their equally needy families.

Thus armed with the secret introduction and Bui Quantung's glowing assurances, Let Ya and his companions crossed into Thailand, sent the letter to Pridit, and hopefully waited. The next day they were arrested and marched back to the border under a strong escort. Another group led by Yan Naing, who were on the way to join Let Ya in Bangkok, met them at the border crossing in the south, and all of them turned back, thoroughly sore and disgusted. "We looked like fools," Let Ya and Yan Naing told me in recalling the incident. "We felt that someone had either fooled us or betrayed us." It was only later they learnt that this rather sorry ending to their ardent journey was caused by one of the complications of Thai politics; Bui Quantung's letter had got into the hands of the wrong minister, who showed his disapproval of Pridit and his exotic policies by promptly packing the Burmese boys back to their country. Anyway, that was the explanation.

✓ Much sobered now, the group decided to keep clear of Thailand and to look for another route to their destination. They also decided that Aung San should go this time. So many in the Freedom Bloc had already been arrested and jailed and so many others also seemed likely to follow them that the little group believed that some should remain free by escaping to another country if necessary. Aung San preferred to escape rather than spend the rest of the war years in jail. They therefore agreed that he should get away. It was only when Aung San came to tell me about it that I learnt for the first time that a step was going to be

taken which could change the entire character and direction of our struggle.

✓ We had talked on the same subject once before and agreed generally that some of our men should go abroad to seek contacts and aid. Now Aung San told me that he himself would be going. Having worked closely with me in the Freedom Bloc, he must have felt it to be only right that he should inform me of his intention to leave us as well as his reason for doing so. He also wanted to get any help Thein Maung and I could give him. Too many of us were already in jail or would be there before long, and he did not want to be among them. He mentioned no other reason for going away, except in a very general way the opportunity he might get to gain contacts. I am sure he had nothing in his mind then beyond the thought of escaping from Burma to a friendly country. If, of course, the opportunity came, he would do something there he did not yet know, and then come back to do something in Burma he could not yet tell. There was nothing more tangible than that in his action until Aung San met Suzuki in Japan and his future path was settled for him there by the Japanese. From the time of that meeting in November 1940 till Suzuki left Burma in June 1942, Aung San was completely in the hands of Suzuki and his men.

Aung San was reluctant to leave the country, particularly at a time when our mass movement was making such enormous headway and the first signs of a revolutionary situation we had worked for so passionately were beginning to show. But the decision had been taken and he said he would go.

I think it was on the next day after this visit that I informed Kuga, the Japanese consul, of Aung San's intention and request. I pressed for an answer one way or the other, saying that the situation in Burma would not wait indefinitely, especially when the British were tightening the measures taken against the national movement and the leaders were being rounded up. Dr. Suzuki and Thein Maung, who were in touch with Colonel Suzuki, supported me. Kuga promised to warn the people in Japan that it was an opportunity that might not come again. He whole-heartedly agreed that someone with authority to speak for us should go to Japan; such a personal meeting would produce the best results, he

said. The consulate, he said, had its own difficulties, thus giving us a hint of the internal quarrels that were dividing the Japanese at that period. Meanwhile, however, he would try to find a way to take Aung San to Japan. That promise was like a door suddenly opening before us.

Some weeks later Fuki, the vice-consul, told me that they could not persuade any of the Japanese boats in the ports in Burma to take Aung San along, as the hazards were too great, for they were being watched all the time. He suggested that Aung San should first of all sail for a port in China on a boat belonging to a country that was friendly to the British. "Get to a Chinese port that way," he explained. "Get to Amoy. From there we will take him to Japan."

Meanwhile, Suzuki remained in the background. Owing to the tensions splitting the Japanese it seemed that the consulate and Suzuki were working independently of each other and that Suzuki was unaware of the consulate's moves. He therefore waited for his moment, which would come as soon as Aung San (or whoever else was going secretly to Japan) reached Taiwan on the way. Suzuki could rely on his military connections in Taiwan. Coming back to Fuki's suggestion, I decided that he and Aung San should meet and settle the matter directly between themselves.

They met in my house one night. Two attempts had to be made before that meeting took place. On the first occasion we were nearly caught red-handed. The police had received early information about it, and they planned a raid while we were together. Fortunately, one of the men working for me in the intelligence service warned me in time; I in turn quickly warned Fuki and Aung San to keep away. But I realised that some kind of meeting had to take place that night in order to quell suspicion and to make our secret activities somewhat easier in future. The intelligence service had also to be prevented from discovering that there were leaks among its members. So I called an emergency meeting of a few from my own party that night, and upon arrival they were told that, owing to my sudden indisposition, I would not be able to do anything for at least a week. Those who came left after a short while, and the police who checked them at the gates learnt of my illness; and so they were satisfied that a meeting had been arranged as they had been informed, satisfied that it was a routine

party executive affair, and above all satisfied that I would be sick and resting for some days. The next night Fuki and Aung San came, and Thein Maung and I met them.

√ This incident, though it alarmed me at first, did not turn out to be altogether bad. It led me to take certain countermeasures, which proved most revealing. Thus, wanting to know how far the intelligence department was aware of our secret activities, I planted some of my own men among its informers. To my utter amazement, more than one person from the department warned me about the "treachery" to me of these men who they knew belonged to my party and yet were informing against me as they thought, and more than once police action intended to be taken against some of us was leaked to me in time. I further discovered that, even more than I had calculated, the British military disasters in the West were already having their corrosive effect among the Burmese members of the administrative services. Those who had never wavered before in their almost mystical faith in the British began to do so. This service demoralisation, especially among the police and the intelligence men, marked one of the beginnings of the British debacle in Burma.

Like others, I suppose, who have lived through similar moments, I have often tried to guess what might have happened if events had taken another course; if, for instance, I had not been forewarned of the police raid I have mentioned. Nothing of course would have been changed fundamentally. History, as it accomplished itself, would have followed its own laws and been in the end the same. But it is almost certain that much that has happened on the surface, which constitutes the ripples as distinct from the tides and currents below, would have happened differently. Thein Maung, Aung San, and I would have been arrested at once and taken away from the movement at a crucial moment when we were most needed; our secret dealings with the Japanese would have been discovered and, with the British much more alert in future, the Japanese would have stopped those dealings at least for a period; and if they renewed them later it would have been with different people in different conditions, and hence it would have assumed a different pattern altogether.

One far-reaching consequence would have been that there

There would have been no thirty comrades and their story as we know it now. That, incidentally, would have changed the fortunes of the Thakin Party, for it would have lacked the magic which its association with that story gave it in the eyes of the Japanese army and the youth in Burma. The Thakins would also have lost the arms they got in the last days as a result of that association. To go on speculating further, with the thirty comrades no longer forming its core, the character of the Burmese army that the Japanese brought into existence would have been totally different, for it would not then have got into the hands of a single political set, but would have been far more balanced and representative of all the racial as well as social segments in the country. It would then have really been a broad-based national army in every sense, and that would have gone a great way in making the power base national also in the new independent state. If that had happened, a good deal in the history of our independence would have been more stable and less catastrophic. To give a single example, we might then have avoided the multiracial rebellions and similar problems, and the party squabbles, and finally the breakdown of the political system and power, all of which were the outcome of a long factional rule made inevitable by the factional nature of the power monopoly in the state.

One could go on speculating in this way, especially about events occurring at a turning point in the history of any land or people. There are times when men make history, that is to the extent to which such a thing is possible. There are also times when it is a long accumulation of events and the forces working behind them which by their pressure make history. There are yet other times when history is the result of a correlation between men and events. In the first case the speculation is naturally in regard to men and their behaviour and actions; in the second, we think mainly of events and what might have been if they had been different. In Burma during the war and the subsequent years, it was mostly events and the new forces at large that shaped our history, and so the speculation is in regard to those events.

Coming back to the narrative, Aung San, Thein Maung, and I met Fuki that night at my house. Fuki repeated his suggestion that Aung San should arrange to leave for Amoy by a boat the British would not suspect; from that port the Japanese army itself would

take him to Japan. Fuki spoke of his difficulties for the first time, and more obliquely of conditions in Japan, where the internal dissensions and intrigues round the throne were confusing policy as well as action. He wanted to prepare Aung San for any seeming setback he might encounter before he reached Japan or even after. It was a timely warning, which Aung San with his sensitive, high-strung nature needed. He looked relaxed and happy as he listened, especially when he heard that the Japanese army would be interested enough to help him. Most of his immediate problems seemed to vanish, and there was just the journey to Amoy to arrange at that moment. With so much of the problem taken out of our hands we thought lightly of what remained.

The immediate task now was to find a boat that would take Aung San to Amoy; and then to smuggle him into it. It was clear that the Japanese consulate would have to be kept out of this part of the affair. In fact, its participation might even injure us by putting the British on our trail. After Fuki had departed we continued late into the night debating the questions he had left behind. It would be necessary to get into touch with someone who could help us with an agency dealing with ships travelling to China. As for putting Aung San on the ship, we concluded that it could be done under cover of a dock labour gang loading it at night. There were many of our party members among the dock labourers, in particular Tun Shwe, of the Sinyetha Party, who was a well-known labour contractor and stevedore to the ships of the British India Steam Navigation Company and had a lot of influence at the docks. Consequently we soon dismissed that question. But we spent many hours speculating on the course Japan would be likely to take in the war, and its results for Burma as well as many other countries in Asia. The future remained for us largely poised on those questions, and with Aung San's departure for Japan we realised that it might become even more so. But all that was still very speculative and far away. We had no reason as yet to think so far.

DEPARTURE

I did not meet Aung San again before he left. The British repressions scattered us soon after that last meeting and we lost touch with each other. I spent most of my time travelling through-

out the country while Aung San and his comrades went into hiding, where, among other things, they planned the journey to Amoy. How they did it has been told me by Bo Let Ya and others.

They found a boat by which Aung San and his companion, Bo Yan Aung, would be able to leave, a Norwegian freighter shipping rice to Amoy, as I have already mentioned. A friend in the office of the agency handling that boat succeeded in arranging for the two young men to be carried as stowaways. To make the going easier, the two had to pose as Chinese, Aung San taking the name of Tan Lwan Chaung, which was the name of one of Let Ya's Chinese uncles. Their photographs were taken before they left and kept by Let Ya. This proved to be a thoughtful act which helped to rescue Aung San and his companion from a calamity that nearly ended their venture, as we shall see. They got on the boat with a rice-loading gang one night, and early next morning the boat sailed away with them.

It was a slow, agonizing voyage for those young men who had never travelled at sea before, and they barely survived it. Their troubles increased at Amoy. They found themselves stranded and lost in that utterly alien city, with their small supply of money getting smaller, and no one they knew and could turn to for help, and no way out that they could see. It looked like the end of everything for them.

✓ I asked the Japanese some years later how such a thing came to happen, and they attributed it to a lack of proper contact and planning. Being utterly inexperienced in such matters, Aung San and the group working for him assumed too easily from Fuki's assurances that once he landed in Amoy the Japanese army there would meet him and take care of him completely. Some members of the group even told me that they were too distracted by events at the time and left it all to be decided later in some way by the war, or by Aung San himself as best he could. Anyway, Aung San had failed to keep the Japanese consulate informed of his plans as they progressed, and thus nothing could be done for him in advance. He even left Burma without informing the consulate.

There was yet another reason, I am sure, that the Japanese did not mention. It was that the Japanese field armies operating in China knew very little about Burma and cared even less, and therefore they paid little attention to anything that had to do with

15. The subsequent help they gave Aung San was really the result of Suzuki's personal efforts, which won the intervention of the regional Kempetai (military police) command in Taiwan. Whatever the reasons were, the result was that Aung San found himself in the predicament I have just described, so badly off that he had to remove to the sleaziest lodging house to be found in a little village called Kun Long Su, near Amoy. From there he wrote desperately to Let Ya, telling him of his plight, his illness, almost his last rupee, and the need to arrange at once with the Japanese for his rescue. Let Ya with Kinmama's aid collected and sent him some money, then met Thein Maung and asked for help, and Thein Maung in turn asked for it from Suzuki and Sugii.

They met one evening in September at a Burmese theatrical performance to which Thein Maung had brought Suzuki and his two companions. Let Ya had already given Thein Maung the photographs of Aung San and the other young man, and Thein Maung passed them on to Suzuki that evening, urging him to do all he could without delay. Suzuki was only too willing. He and Sugii flew by the first available plane to Bangkok. From the Japanese embassy there, Suzuki sent the photographs to the Japanese Kempetai Headquarters in Taiwan along with the full story and a request for a quick search and rescue; from Taiwan the photographs were sent to the Kempetai in Amoy with orders to comb out the entire area till the Burmese lads were found.

Major Kanda finally traced them to the lodging house in Kun Long Su. Aung San lay sick and weak with dysentery and was in extremely low spirits. When he had picked up somewhat, he and his companion were sent to Taipeh in Taiwan, where they were passed off as relatives of Sugii from the Philippines who were on the way to Japan to study there. Aung San took the name of Omada and his companion was named Itoda. They were soon flown to Tokyo, where Suzuki met them upon landing. Thus in November 1940, Suzuki and Aung San at last met each other. Much was to follow that meeting.

Suzuki now took complete charge of the situation. With Aung San actually with him to bear witness to the storm clouds hovering over Burma and their vast portent for the Japanese, he was able to impress the Supreme Command sufficiently to get what he wanted from it. By an order from the Supreme Command Suzuki was

appointed the head of a small group which he himself very carefully picked from the various services. The group was to carry out Suzuki's projects for Burma. It was named Minami Kikan, and Suzuki's new name was Matsuo Minami, and its work was classified as a military secret. As regards its members, they included such influential men as Major Ozaki, of the Imperial Army Headquarters, Lt. Commander Hideka, of the Imperial Navy, and Higuchi, the man who had helped Suzuki so much in the past and who was to help him even more in creating a Burmese army. The organisation started work at once, although it received official recognition only in February 1941.

✓The general headquarters of the organisation was in Tokyo, but its operational centre was in Bangkok. Later, branches were set up in four towns near the Thai border, Chengmai, Rahaeng, Kanburi, and Ranong, which had already been picked as the springboards for the Japanese armies invading Burma in the event of war, or for the Burmese army if there was no war and that army had to enter Burma alone. Meanwhile, arms and equipment were secretly collected at those four places.

✓There would be a training camp in Hainan Island, in the Gulf of Tonkin, for the Burmese boys who would form the nucleus of the new army. It would be located at an agricultural training farm hidden away in the wooded countryside at the back of Sanya, a newly built naval base in the south of the island.

✓Suzuki selected the staff of the training camp with equal care. Kitajima and Akai Suzuki, who were among its earliest members, told me independently of each other that all of them had to take an oath before Suzuki, dedicating themselves completely to the new Burmese army and its task of liberating Burma. "This oath binds you before all other oaths," Suzuki told them solemnly. With this slapdash structure and a dedicated team led by Captain Kawashima, the camp commandant, Suzuki set to work with his eyes fixed on a single goal; he would forge the army of the Burmese revolution, and around it the revolution itself, and so a dream of destiny would come true.

Some months of waiting in Japan followed, which Aung San spent with Suzuki, Sugii, and Higuchi, at least one of whom was always with him discussing the Burmese future and his view of it. They were taking the measure of the man with whom they in-

tended to organise that future. It was a new experience for Aung San, who had never been in such a big, tense, and complex world before, and this seems to have had some effect on him. He began to take a more practical view of things. I believe this can be seen in a manifesto he wrote in January or February 1941, which he called "a draft constitution . . . to show roughly on what basis the new independent state will be constructed." The document has a certain importance. But first of all I will give its drift.

"Parliamentary government," Aung San says, giving vent to his basic authoritarian or "fascist" feelings,

fosters the spirit of individualism and thus gives a chance to individualistic disruptors and obstructionists to disturb and delay the course of administration. What we want is a strong state administration as exemplified in Germany and Italy. There shall be one nation, one state, one party, one leader. There shall be no parliamentary opposition, no nonsense of individualism. Everyone must submit to the state which is supreme over the individual. . . . One party rule is so far the best form to give and maintain a strong stable administration.

The ideological part ends somewhere here. Next follows a long list of aims and ideals with very little about means. Aung San pours out all that is boiling within him. He was learning that way. He ends with his face turned completely towards the Japanese. "In this building of the new economic life of the nation," he tells them,

the help of Japan is important. . . . Japanese investment in Burma, preferential treatment for Japanese goods, joining the yen bloc will be part of our new economic life. . . . We shall have to build powerful army, navy, and air forces, and here the help of Japan is imperative. In the process of our building, Japan must help us with technical and military advice and assistance, the Japanese imperial navy must protect the seaside.

I think it is worth while looking further into this illuminating little "blue-print for Burma," as we might call it. There is, of course, little in it that is not commonplace, as a good deal of what

it contains follows the trends and even the phrases current at that period. But it happens to be important for that very reason, that it reflects those trends as they existed in Burma, and in fact throughout most of Asia, and so shows how the winds were blowing there. That, really, is its significance. For example, the statement reveals the strong inner resistance that existed then among Asians in general to the political systems associated with the imperialist powers. They were regarded just as devices to slow down change in Asia and to keep its peoples backward and dependent and tied to the West as long as possible. To mention yet one more fact, the leadership concept of democracy which lay at the heart of those revolutions, whether of the right or of the left, touched something very old and deep in almost all the Asian peoples. It embodied the way they themselves had lived and evolved for generations, and so it "rang a bell" in them. As I have said, Aung San's blueprint shows those winds blowing in a small typical corner of Asia.

To come back to the story, Suzuki's next task was to find the material to lay the foundation for his new Burmese army. It was necessary to get a limited number of Burmese youths representing all the nationalist elements in the country who would be prepared to form such a nucleus. They would be given a short and intensive training at a camp in Hainan. After that they would be sent to the Burma-Thai border and across it, where they would organise a full-sized Burmese army of liberation to be armed, supplied, and secretly instructed by Japanese officers. There was no such training project for any of the other Southeast Asian countries for the simple reason that none of those countries had a man like Suzuki to conceive and put through such a project; also, they did not have such a problem as the Burma Road to China. The course was to last about six months. This fact is perhaps significant, for the training of the Burmese group as a whole began a little before the middle of 1941, and it was timed to be completed before the end of the year. It was speeded up in the later months, and the comrades were on the way back towards Burma in November; and in December Japan was at war and the invasion of Southeast Asia had begun. Aung San accepted the whole of Suzuki's plan.

Suzuki sent Sugii and Aung San back to Burma to find the necessary recruits. This time the journey went smoothly all the

way for Aung San, for the military party was now in firm control of Japanese policy, and the southern regions had begun to loom more largely in that policy, and in consequence the importance of the Minami Kikan had increased. So Sugii, as a member of that secret organisation, appearing at a mysterious and critical time, found people everywhere ready to help him. He and Aung San were put on a freighter named *Shunten Maru*, which was about to leave for Burma on a round trip. They carried with them orders appointing Sugii as purser on that boat and Aung San as a member of the crew. There was also a sealed order for the captain directing him to carry out any instruction that Sugii should give him during the journey. "That boat belonged to us while we were on it," Sugii would say wistfully whenever he recalled those days.

They arrived at Bassein, a southern Burmese port, in the beginning of March 1941. Very early the next morning Aung San landed alone, after he and Sugii had arranged to meet again in Rangoon, changed into Burmese dress in a deserted pagoda compound nearby, tried also to change his appearance more or less with a set of buck-teeth Sugii had given him, and took the first train to Rangoon. Upon arrival there, he at once looked for and found some of his old comrades. They rushed him off that very night to a little house in a distant garden in Thingangyun, an offshoot town close to Rangoon.

There Sugii and Aung San met the inner set who had sent Aung San to Japan. They explained the reason for their return. They wanted about thirty young men to take secret military training in Hainan. Thereafter this little group would, with the Japanese helping actively, create the Burmese army which would liberate Burma. To make it easier and safer, the recruits would be chosen and taken away in small batches at any time, however sudden, a boat was ready to carry them. The plan looked big and glowing and, with the Japanese themselves taking care of it, nothing, it seemed, could go amiss. The little set would only have to find a number of recruits and the Japanese would see to the rest. They agreed to find them.

Within the next few days the four young men who formed the first batch boarded the *Shunten Maru* in the same way as Aung San had done previously. Each of them had to do so on the very

day he agreed to go. Finally, Aung San and Sugii joined them and the boat left the next morning on March 12, 1941. The four in this batch were Bo Let Ya, Bo Yan Naing, Bo La Yaung, and Bo Mo. Bo Yan Naing was destined to play the most spectacular part in the actual military operations of the thirty comrades and the Burma Independence Army organised around them. Other batches followed in succession, and there were also one or two who joined individually. For instance, Bo Set Kya, one of Kokobu's young men, went alone by the Bangkok route as Ba Sein had once attempted to do. Unlike Ba Sein, however, Set Kya succeeded. He was even able to send word back to his party, that is the Thakin faction of Ba Sein and Tun Oke, that the Japanese asked for thirty to forty young men representing all the nationalist sectors in Burma.

This brings me to a matter that led to the first serious tension in the Freedom Bloc, and later destroyed its inner unity and purpose, and ultimately destroyed the entire organisation as well as whatever evolved from it. It arose out of the political composition of the thirty comrades. All who were picked to go to Japan were from one single sector, the Thakins and a few of their student friends. That fact gave a factional character to the group of comrades, which led to a recrudescence of the old factional spirit and intrigues in the Freedom Bloc and the subsequent nation-based political organisations; and that again made all future political developments in Burma factional and personal at bottom.

Looking back at it today, this factionalism appears as an inverted thing. It did not arise out of any basic differences among the rival factions, such as those of aim or doctrine or policy. Instead, such differences arose out of it, and in course of time became basic and disruptive. Most of our present ideological conflicts originated that way; they began as personal and factional conflicts. For this reason as well as many others, this factionalism resulting from the narrow clique-like composition of the thirty comrades is one of the most important facts in our postwar history. I shall therefore have to explain as a part of this story how such a thing came to happen.

✓ Within the Freedom Bloc we had always talked about seeking foreign contacts and going abroad as actions in which all the component parties would participate equally. In fact, the whole

meaning and purpose of the Bloc was to create a national front that would bring the parties within it together in a common national struggle. It was with such an understanding that Aung San and I had discussed the idea of sending a mission abroad at the proper time, that Thein Maung and I had helped Aung San to go to Japan, that most of the frontline leaders of the Bloc had gone to jail, leaving others to take over the movement and its work. The Japanese also were acting on a similar understanding. They insisted on the broadest approach from us. They wanted not only the Freedom Bloc, but as many groups outside it as were willing, such as Ba Sein's Thakin Party, to join with us in providing a nuclear body of thirty to forty young men to be trained in Japan. That would be how a genuinely national fighting force would be created and would win the support of the entire nation. The existence already of a national front leading a nation-based effort made such a similarly based project entirely right and obvious. However, it happened differently for certain reasons.

▼ One reason was the British repressions, which disorganised the leadership of the Freedom Bloc by arresting most of its active workers and scattering the rest. As a result, when Aung San returned with Sugii to Burma to explain the project and get the recruits for it, he was unable to meet anyone except his little group of the Thakins and students who were closest to him. The men who had kept the parties together in the Freedom Bloc were in jail, with the result that the parties lost touch with each other.

So it happened that the crucial task of picking the young men to go to Japan came to be done by a small clique of Thakins and students. Some of them have told me that they were aware of the understanding in the Freedom Bloc, and indeed wanted all the parties in it to share the adventure and its hazards, but they explained that the work they were undertaking was so new and complicated for them, and the need for secrecy so compelling, and the time given them to find the recruits and smuggle them into the boat always so short that they just had to take the chance and get hold of the nearest person they could get whenever the call came, which was always suddenly. It was always a frantic hunt to find someone willing to go and to get him to do it while he was still willing.

It is true that Aung San had sent word to Kinmama to get

recruits from our party ready, but she heard nothing further till she learnt that the group had left. This happened several times; someone would come to her and tell her to keep our recruits ready, and our party workers would do so, and then nothing more would be heard till that particular batch had left. This went on till the total number was obtained and the recruitment stopped. In this way most of the recruitment came to be done by a single party, or rather by a small clique within that party. Only a few who were independent of that clique succeeded in going, with the help of Fuki from the Japanese consulate. Thus it became a party affair, and the factional spirit soon entered into it thoroughly, and the clique chose only their men and kept all others out.

The results have been most insidious and far-reaching. The thirty comrades, around whom so much of our later history has evolved, became the instrument of a Thakin clique, and with all their newly acquired monopoly of military strength and aura, they and those jumping onto their bandwaggon were able to transform the image of Burma for a long period. The Burma Independence Army they organised became an army representing the Thakin Party and its followers; the central administration, as well as the peace preservation committees they formed in the trail of the advancing Japanese armies to restore peace and order everywhere, were partisan Thakin bodies. The Thakins made their party flag the national flag and their party song the national anthem. The Japanese militarists also were only too ready in later years to back the side that the Burmese army, which they regarded as their own, was backing. All this changed the political equilibrium in Burma completely. In fact, it doomed during the period of their military monopoly almost all opposition to the Thakins and their factions. Today they are reaping what they sowed for years. Military power which they used to destroy others has destroyed their power.

MILITARY TRAINING

The military training in Hainan now began. The boys were divided into three sections. The first, consisting of Aung San, Set Kya, and Ne Win, were intended for staff jobs because of their seniority in age; the second, including Let Ya, La Yaung, and Ze Ya, were allotted regular combat duty; the third section consisted of younger members who were considered to have individual

fighting skill and initiative and, led by Yan Naing, Lin Yone, and Min Gaung, would be trained for commando and guerrilla tasks.

They had a very rough time in that camp in Hainan. For generations the Burmese had not known any real military life and its rigours, and now these youths were being suddenly plunged into them under the Japanese, whose military disciplines were the most gruelling in the world.

The training almost broke them. Tun Oke, the civilian head of the group, has described some of its hardships in a book he has written on that period (*My Adventure*). "We ended each day completely limp and dazed with fatigue," he writes. "We often wondered if we would return alive to Burma." Tun Oke told me later that some of the young men became so desperate that they plotted to steal a boat and sail back to Burma. They abandoned the idea only when he explained to them how utterly crazy and ignorant the very thought of it was. However, Let Ya denies that these lads wanted to get away because they could not endure the life there. "They were ready to go through any amount of it," he protested,

but they resented the way the Japanese treated them. They also began to suspect Japanese intentions towards the Burmese because the daily routines were too Japanese, such as saluting the Japanese flag and bowing towards the imperial palace in Tokyo and singing Japanese songs. They did not understand that all this was part of the military discipline as the race-bound Japanese military mind understood it.

The truth, I think, is subjective, and lies between the two views. It was to a large extent a case of emotional transference. Without being aware of it, the boys were in revolt against the isolation and rigours of the life in that jungle camp. They were homesick too. They were unable to adjust themselves emotionally to that sort of existence for long. The feeling of revolt it created sharpened their edges, and in time transferred itself from the life they were living to the Japanese who made them live it. Thus an emotion against a discipline which almost became a daily agony was transformed in their conscious minds into an emotion against the Japanese; and the emotion soon found its reasons.

A very significant fact in connection with this matter is that

Aung San never had anything to say against Japanese behaviour to them in Hainan although he often spoke to me about those days; nor did any of the older comrades. On the contrary, they assured me that the Minami Kikan men in the camp did their best to impress upon them the need to create a pure and independent Burmese force to wage its own battle for national liberation, with Japanese collaboration if possible, but even without it if it had to be so. "You can't get your independence by begging for it or by asking others to get it for you," Suzuki once told U Nu. There was also the oath that, according to Kitajima and Akai Suzuki, all the Japanese officers at the camp had to take, pledging "to sacrifice our lives for Burmese independence." Suzuki and his men seem to have maintained this spirit of Hainan right through. In fact, this was one of the reasons for their conflict with the Japanese army command in Burma, as we shall soon see. The army accused them of trying to run a show of their own, and of inciting the Burmese also to do so.

✓ But however we might explain them, the reactions of those few in Hainan were most ominous, for they foreshadowed a psychological conflict which was to take on an immense aspect in the later wartime relations between the Japanese and the Burmese, and indeed between the Japanese and all the peoples of Southeast Asia. It was a sudden confrontation between two fundamentally opposed racial make-ups, which culminated at a time when the war fatigue and strains were greatest on both sides; and its outcome was catastrophic when at last the Japanese lost the war and were left friendless and defenceless.

Yet another complication crept into the scene as a result of the bickerings that never seemed to end between the army and the navy in Japan. The camp, which was not very far away from the main naval station in Hainan, was, so to speak, in naval territory; it depended on the navy for its supplies; also Burma with her long sea routes was geographically a naval concern. Yet the navy found itself playing a very secondary role in the secret plans and preparations being made for a Burmese campaign. In resentment it treated the Hainan project coldly, and when the Japanese invasion of Burma began and the question of transporting arms for the Burmese forces arose, the army was left to do most of it by land across almost impassable border terrain of mountain and jungle.

The result was that the newly created Burma Independence Army, as it was called, remained ill-armed, ill-equipped, and ill-supplied to the end. In these circumstances the young street-conscripted army acted as all such armies do in similar circumstances; it cursed the main Japanese army for the things it lacked while that army had them in seeming plenty, and it started to get those things by seizing them wherever it could from the people. With its appetite for seizures growing, it began to take other things too. The Japanese army tried to stop it from doing so in the rough-and-ready Japanese military way which revolted the Burmese in general. This was another cause of the first rifts between the two armies and peoples.

The training in Hainan was sufficiently completed before the end of September 1941. Under the directions of the Supreme Command, which was timing every move most meticulously in those critical months, Suzuki was now ready to get into action. The first steps were taken to remove the whole Minami Kikan set-up and its forces to Saigon and Bangkok in that month.

As a beginning, six comrades were picked to leave for the Burma border. There they were to organise at three focal points the first Burmese fighting forces. The six were Bo Let Ya, Bo Yan Jaing, Bo La Yaung, Bo Ze Ya, Bo Min Swe, and Bo Mo. They left Hainan in the last week of September. After remaining about a month in Tokyo to go through a final course, and test in manoeuvring while other preparations were being pushed through, a freighter, the *Kosei Maru*, took them secretly to Bangkok, where they arrived on October 25. Suzuki waited for them there.

On the same day, as the *Kosei Maru* was approaching Bangkok with the six comrades, a bomb exploded for Suzuki and the members of the Minami Kikan in Bangkok. They received a cable from the Supreme Command, which, translated into English, read: "Owing to the international situation you are instructed to head back at once the six pieces of luggage." It was an order recalling the six comrades before they could land in Bangkok. It threw the Minami men into a panic.

"We did not know then," Kitajima told me in describing what followed, "that the war in Southeast Asia was imminent so that the

utmost secrecy was needed. Nor did we know that the order was only intended to tighten that secrecy. We thought that the Supreme Command had suddenly lost faith in our project and wanted to drop it." It was a harrowing day for Suzuki and his men. But they soon got out of it very logically. They decided that since they were bound by a bond to the Burmese to carry out the project, they must go on with it in order to uphold Japanese faith and honour. But then there was also the other bond binding them to their own service and country. They thought of that too, and found a way out.

Suzuki could not be stopped now. The Supreme Command might have the strongest reasons to impose a complete lull before striking, but Suzuki had his own reasons too; he was now in the grip of an irresistible inner compulsion which drove him on. "I went through a hard struggle with myself," he always says when he talks of that day. "My head told me that the Supreme Command was right and, whether right or wrong, it must be obeyed. But something within me or above me told me that I was right too, and my plans would succeed. There I was, finely caught between two rights and compelled to choose between them. I decided to choose both by compromising. I would go on with what I had in mind, but it would be only on a token scale, only to keep my project alive till the way for it was open again."

Then followed a contest of wills. On the same day the Minami Kikan replied informing the Supreme Command that four out of the six pieces of luggage had disappeared and a search was being made for them; meanwhile the remaining two were being returned before landing. Its meaning was that Suzuki would keep four comrades with him and send back the two others to Tokyo. Again, on October 30, the Supreme Command sent another cable directing that all movements should cease. As their dilemma deepened, the Minami Kikan sent Captain Noda, the officer in charge of the headquarters office in Bangkok, to Tokyo to find out the intentions of the Supreme Command. Noda went and Suzuki received a cable from him which was as cryptic as those from the Supreme Command. It said that the situation was "better and moving forward step by step." To the people in Bangkok that was meaningless.

Suzuki also did something to protect his position in the Minami Kikan in order that he should not lose it at that critical moment.

He had it entered in the record of the Minami office that he arrived in Bangkok from Saigon only on the day after the first cable from the Supreme Command had been received so that he did not know about it. He also tried to increase the confusion so as to gain time to do what he wanted. Suzuki was staking all in order to win.

Meanwhile, the four comrades were kept in close hiding. They were Let Ya, La Yaung, Ze Ya and Min Swe. Yan Naing and Bo Mo had returned by the same boat to Tokyo. These two, as commando and guerrilla leaders, would have to do the active fighting, and Suzuki did not want such fighting to break out while the order of the Supreme Command was in force. That was part of the compromise he was making.

On November 13, two days after Noda's cable from Tokyo had been received, Suzuki ordered the four youths in his hands to proceed to two critical areas on the border where the main thrust of the Japanese invasion would occur in the event of war; one was Nat Eindaung, near Tavoy in the south of Burma, and the other was Mae Sot, higher up north. They were to probe the situation, establish contact with the political elements in those areas and start to get together the beginnings of a mass fighting force; they were to do all this at their own risk and without expecting any support from the Japanese for some time.

✓ Let Ya and La Yaung reached Nat Eindaung, but before they could do anything they ran into some Thai frontier police who stopped them and kept them in detention at the nearest jail in Kanburi. They remained there till they were set free by a Japanese detachment three days after the Pacific war began. Four days later they were back in Bangkok facing a stern-eyed Suzuki. They had disgraced themselves, he yelled at them. He said much more, while Let Ya and La Yaung writhed and wept. Seeing that they had learnt their lesson Suzuki softened and spoke like a father again. "You have now learnt that a soldier must either do or die. You have done neither, and so you have acted unworthily. Next time you will do better." That was always Suzuki's way with the Burmese lads. As for Ze Ya and Min Swe they succeeded in entering Burma by the Mae Sot route and were not heard of again till they reappeared in Rangoon just before the British evacuated that city in March 1942. Suzuki must have spoken to them pretty roughly too.

CHAPTER 5

The Burma Independence Army Enters the Conflict

At long last, on December 8, 1941, Japan was at war and the Minami Kikan was free again to pursue its plans and move ahead. It sent orders to its men in Tokyo, Taiwan, and Hainan to proceed secretly to Bangkok together with the Burmese boys. Meanwhile, Suzuki and Aung San waited at Saigon, which, in that precarious period when Thailand was still sitting on the fence, was considered safer for them than Bangkok. By December 27 the entire Minami Kikan and the thirty comrades, excepting the two who had returned to Burma, had reached Bangkok. Thailand had thrown in her lot with Japan, and all was safe.

Those five days from December 27 to 31 were tense ones for that little group. For Burma they were epochal; they witnessed the birth of a Burmese fighting force for the first time in almost a hundred years, a ready plan for that force to wage a war of liberation, and an opportunity to start that war under the shadow of an ally whose armies and navies were then triumphing everywhere.

First of all, they decided to call the new force the Burma Independence Army. It was a simple name, but for the Burmese every word in it was heart-stirring.

Next, they set out to follow an old Burmese military tradition by giving militant-sounding names to all the officers in the fledgling little army so that what it still lacked in substance should be made up for in sound and spirit. This most intuitive and far-seeing move instantly captured the Burmese masses; it kindled memories of a past that was still real for them. Suzuki received the name of Bo Mogyo; Kawashima, the camp commandant in Hainan, became Bo Aye; Aung San chose the name of Bo Te Za;

similarly all the rest received the names by which they have passed into history.

Colonel Suzuki was named Bo Mogyo, which means a thunderbolt, after the widely believed prophecy I have already recounted at length (see pages 93-94). This name would proclaim to the Burmese the coming of the thunderbolt which, according to the prophecy, would shatter the great umbrella of British rule in Burma. Along with this deeply emotional belief something from recent history was also revived round Suzuki. A story was spread that he was a descendant of Myingun, a Burmese prince in the direct line of succession to the throne who had fled to Thailand when the British seized the whole of Burma. This shrewd intermingling of fact and fantasy, of old folklore and a sad, wistful story out of the past, went straight to the deepest Burmese heart, especially in Upper Burma, where past beliefs and memories are more tenacious. The Freedom Bloc had already prepared the way by digging up such past sayings and promising the people that their fulfillment was near at hand; and now a man said to be a prince of the blood was leading a Burmese army to fulfil those sayings and drive the British out. As Bo Mogyo advanced into Burma with the thirty comrades, his name became a winged word that flew swiftly across the land; so did all the other names that brought back echoes of the old war gongs and drums.

The change of names was followed by a ceremony which also was deeply traditional and symbolic, the *Thwe thauk*, or blood-drinking, ceremony. All the comrades gathered round a silver bowl, slit a finger till some blood dropped from it into the bowl, mixed it with strong liquor, and each drank his full portion of it after having repeated in unison with the others an oath "to be indissolubly bound together by this bond of blood when fighting the British enemy." It was the ancient warrior's oath and communion of the Burmese, and it left the young men taut and inflamed. Being Thakin-dominated, the army adopted the Thakin party song and the Thakin party flag, which was a peacock on a background of yellow, green, and red equal-sized horizontal sections.

Immediately the search for recruits began. Mizutani and some comrades visited the old Burmese settlements in Bangkok and the areas close to the border and persuaded about three hundred

young descendents of Burmese settlers and their Thai connections to join up. It looked very successful, and the number kept on growing with each day.

On December 31 the famous *Shutsu-jin-shiki*, or leaving-for-the-front, ceremony was performed in accordance with Japanese military tradition in Bangkok. The tiny but spirited Burmese army of liberation came out in full parade with its flag flying and everyone proudly wearing a bright new silver cross pinned on his breast by Suzuki himself. After they had saluted the flag and him, Suzuki, as the head of the Minami Kikan, read out the last order of the organisation. It appointed Suzuki, to be known as Bo Mogyo, a general and the commander-in-chief of the new army, Captain Kawashima, to be known as Bo Aye, a lieutenant general and the second in command, Bo Aung San, now Bo Te Za, a major general, Mitsuru Sugii a colonel. All the other comrades and their Japanese instructors became officers of varying ranks and grades. With this order the Minami Kikan was dissolved and the Burma Independence Army formally came into existence.

Bo Mogyo, as its commander-in-chief, issued his first order of the day. It was a peremptory marching order. The army would go into action without delay in six units. The first two, consisting of the general staff and its combat arm, would be under the command of Bo Mogyo himself, who would be accompanied by Bo Aung San, Bo Set Kya, and Thakin Tun Oke; it would proceed to Rahaeng and take the Mae Sot route into Burma with the main body of the Japanese forces invading the country. The third unit, under Bo Ne Win and Lt. Tanaka, would act as a secret squad to incite rebellion and sabotage in the country; it also would go to Rahaeng, where it would cross over into Burma.

The fourth unit, under Bo Hpone Myint, would accompany the 55th Japanese Division into Burma to do its liaison work among the people. The fifth and the sixth were combat units. The one under Bo Let Ya, Bo La Yaung, and Captain Kawashima, or Bo Aye, would leave for Kanburi to get into Burma from Nat Eindaung near Tavoy. The sixth unit was the commando force of Bo Yan Naing, Bo Lin Yone, Bo Min Gaung, and Lt. Hirayama, or Bo Moke Seik; it was ordered to proceed to Ranong and enter at Victoria Point, the southernmost tip of Burma, and fight its way

northward through the length of the country. With this order the formal ceremony ended and the general feasting began.

On the night of December 31, 1941, the first unit of the Burma Independence Army left Bangkok for its destination, and by the middle of January all the units had either entered Burma or were poised near the border ready to do so. Thus the war of Burmese Independence, or the fourth and final Anglo-Burmese war as we called it very emotionally then, at last began.



So the Burma Independence Army (B.I.A.) was born during those last five days of 1941, with all the stars and omens favouring it; all except one, which lay dormant then because it was lodged deep within Suzuki's personality.

I have already described Suzuki, or Bo Mogyo as I shall call him from now on, and some of his conflicts with those above him. He was an incongruous character in many ways, a rebel by temperament and a conformist by upbringing, an individualist who had with difficulty learnt to live with others, intensely ambitious and pragmatic yet ready to throw everything away for a dream. As I have said before, the dream at that moment took the form of a conviction that he alone as the Japanese head of the Burmese forces of liberation could unite and complete the victory of the two peoples; in other words, he was the man of destiny in Burma. All his plans had gone without a hitch till then, and that turned his belief in himself into a fixation. He claimed to derive his authority directly from the Supreme Command, at whose head was Prince Kan In, the Emperor's uncle; that is, from the Emperor himself, as he insisted. Consequently, his was an independent and parallel campaign, a Burmese war fought side by side with that of the Japanese to secure Burmese as much as Japanese objectives. He wanted recognition for his Burmese army on that basis. For the Japanese the claim sounded almost like a challenge. It brought Bo Mogyo into a head-on collision with the Japanese Army Command in Burma. Soon he drew into this collision the new-born Burmese army, and thus the first seeds were sown of the conflict that in time

developed between the Japanese and the Burmese as the war dragged on.

Bo Mogyo aroused fear, distrust, and jealousy among the other Japanese in Burma. He reciprocated that ill-will in most cases. Before long these strained relations spread to the B.I.A. forces and their partisans, who had always eagerly picked up his ways and words. That, among other reasons, led the Japanese to turn against the B.I.A. itself in a large number of places, and the Burmese army and the masses that followed it retaliated with a secret hostility. So the rift began between the two peoples, and with time and growing strains and the certainty of defeat hanging over all of us in the latter days, these worsening tensions became one of the biggest problems we faced. That, according to many comrades, was how it happened. The problem, of course, was far more complicated, and I have shown how it began in yet another way, by the process of emotional transference as I called it loosely. I shall have occasion to come back to it again.

Nevertheless, they were right about Bo Mogyo. "He created our little army and we were completely in his hands," one of the thirty comrades explained to me after thinking over the matter for some time, "and as we say in Burmese, we feared him from our youth, and we also loved him. So his ways with the Japanese army became ours. Moreover, we liked it so, because it made us share Bo Mogyo's independence and importance and feel that we were fighting for our own cause and not that of the Japanese." I remember most particularly the phrase about their fear of Bo Mogyo beginning from their youth; Aung San used the same phrase to me when in June 1942 I suggested to him that it was time for Mogyo to leave and a Burmese, meaning him, to take over the B.I.A., which had become a national army, and he agreed with divided feelings.

The words of the comrade I have just mentioned reveal that Bo Mogyo's independent ways taught the Burmese much that was essential and timely. It is true that they created a lot of friction and even chaos in those first days, but at the same time Bo Mogyo, by his example, stiffened the backs of the Burmese in dealing with the victory-flushed Japanese armies. It turned out to be an essential lesson at the time, one that had to be learnt before it would be too late. I have also mentioned a little further back that Tokyo did

not take Bo Mogyo and his thirty comrades very seriously. But Bo Mogyo did, and he made others do it. It was largely this man's will and vision that had created the tiny force and later gave it a place in the vast story of the Japanese invasion and conquest of South-east Asia.

I am dwelling at length on Bo Mogyo because, balancing everything, he was the most vivid and dynamic force at that juncture of our story. Both for good and for evil his attitudes shaped those of the B.I.A. and the masses who flocked to his name, and they in turn shaped the general feelings in the country, notably those of the youth. Therefore to follow this part of the story we must understand Bo Mogyo and the appeal he made to the masses during that brief period. It ended when he left in June 1942, but while it lasted it was phenomenal. Colonel Hiraoka, the Japanese officer who was then in charge of relations between the Japanese and the Burmese, told me that the Japanese army regarded Bo Mogyo as its toughest problem in hand. "Your people are following him like children, and that may not be good for them in the long run," he explained to me at our very first meeting. I had not yet met Bo Mogyo, but Hiraoka's words first put the idea into my head of doing something to replace Bo Mogyo with a Burmese officer.

In his book *Burma under the Japanese** U Nu has recorded what Bo Mogyo told him when they met for the first time in May 1942. It throws so much light on the man and those times that I will quote it here in full. "Don't be worried about independence," Bo Mogyo said. "Independence is not the kind of thing you can get through begging for it from other people. You should proclaim it yourselves. The Japanese refuse to give it? Very well, then; tell them that you will cross over to some place like Twante and proclaim independence and set up your own government. What's the difficulty about that? If they start shooting, you just shoot back." U Nu, of course, doubted Bo Mogyo's sincerity; but then, since Japan's defeat U Nu does not believe that any Japanese is ever sincere or can be so. Furthermore, he was writing in 1945 when that was the propaganda line of the victor powers.

To find out the truth, I have asked several of the thirty comrades who knew Bo Mogyo most closely for their view of him. They assured me that what he told U Nu truthfully reflected his

* Published in 1954 by Macmillan, London.

attitude; even more, that was the attitude of all the Japanese they knew in the Minami Kikan. The Japanese instructors in Hainan had to take an oath to fight for Burmese independence. Let Ya remember that it was Kawashima who read out the proclamation of Burmese independence when their unit entered Tavoy. Other comrades likewise remembered similar incidents. "Bo Mogyo proved his sincerity by all he said and did," was the sum of their statements. "He showed his independence of the Japanese armies and even defied them at times. He was sent away from Burma because of that," which, by the way, was not quite true, as I know. On the other hand, they readily admitted that he had many ugly edges, that he was brusque, domineering, even shrill and brutal at times and easily provoked, but beneath all that "he was a soldier as well as a dreamer pursuing a dream and making others do so too; and a good part of that dream was to lead a Burmese army of liberation to set Burma free."

The Japanese who were with the thirty comrades all throughout, Sugii, Kitajima, Akai Suzuki, and several others, hold the same view. "We had given up everything to create a genuine Burmese army that would be independent of the Japanese forces," Kitajima told me in a voice that sounded pure and even pleading. "To betray its goal of Burmese independence would have been to betray ourselves, our oath, everything." Then, seeming to remember something, he added, "I am speaking of the Japanese in the B.I.A. that we organised. Things changed much after Bo Mogyo's departure." I understood only too clearly what he meant.

THE ADVANCE

In planning the campaign of the Burma Independence Army, Bo Mogyo naturally kept close to the Japanese plan for the invasion of Burma. At the same time he had certain clear purposes of his own. The first of these was to keep the Burmese army and its final objectives as separate and Burmese as the pressures created by the Japanese invasion would allow. It would be a Japanese-created army, but Burmese in spirit, fighting to gain its own objectives as a part of the larger objectives of the Asian war. His next purpose was the practical one of ensuring the safety of this tiny army still in the making. To achieve this it would have to follow the Japanese armies as they advanced and cleared the enemy out of the way.

Thus the B.I.A. would be able to grow in safety behind the Japanese armour and to move forward and gather the fruits of the Japanese victories, and to use them to win over the Burmese masses. As a third purpose it would learn its first lessons in active combat by engaging in small mopping-up operations here and there behind the Japanese advance. Lastly, there were the civilian tasks the B.I.A., as a Burmese force, would be most fitted to perform, such as winning the cooperation of the people, bringing back peace and order to the conquered areas by setting up local administrative bodies, and generally acting as the Burmese face of the Japanese war. The attainment of these purposes, Bo Mogyo calculated, would enable him and his army to realise their final dream of a Burma liberated and ruled by men working hand in hand with that army. It was with such careful designs that Bo Mogyo had sent his first small batch of troops to three border towns, and they were told to hang on closely to the Japanese advance across Burma.

To follow, therefore, the progress of the B.I.A. we must first have a general idea of the Japanese campaign in Burma in 1942. It will therefore be necessary to start with a brief outline of that campaign. The account that follows is based on material obtained from Japanese as well as British and American sources.

✓ The Japanese conquered the country with four divisions, the 55th and the 33rd Divisions of the 15th Army, commanded by Lt. General Iida, which were the first invading forces, and the 18th and the 56th Divisions, which arrived in April after their conquest of Malaya and Singapore had been completed and Rangoon taken. The two divisions of the 15th Army entered Burma from Mae Sot in Thailand by the old historic Myawaddy route, cutting across the deep, hill-locked jungle region which the British looked upon then as militarily impregnable. Only a few months before the invasion a former governor of Burma assured the people in England that that border terrain was a "formidable" natural defence, implying that the British need not fear an attack from that direction. Consequently, the Japanese attacked from that direction.

The two divisions advanced from the north, east, and south in a three-pronged drive towards Moulmein, the town looking towards the sea where Kipling's British soldier once heard the temple bells

calling him back; more factually, it was the first strategic base on the road to Rangoon from the east. The 55th Division, which spear-headed the attack, drove down on that town in a curving movement from the east and north. One of its units, the famed Uno Battalion, struck from the south across the Kra Isthmus in Thailand, entered at Victoria Point on the southern tip of Burma, and made its way northward towards the same town; simultaneously, the 33rd Division, sweeping in also from the east, cleared the enemy from the flank of the main force as well as the whole region around before joining that force in Moulmein.

After a short lull caused by the strain on their resources on the other battlegrounds of Southeast Asia and the fact that the sea routes were not yet sufficiently clear and safe to bring up their reinforcements more speedily, these divisions continued their drive towards Rangoon. They crossed the great Salween River at Pa-an, took Martaban, a British stronghold on the other side of the river from Moulmein, shattered the British defences at the Bilin and Sittang River crossings after inflicting very severe losses on the British in both men and material, outflanked Pegu, which guarded the way to Rangoon, cut the railway and other arterial routes in the area, forced a general British retreat along the whole line, and finally entered Rangoon on March 8, 1942. With the sea route now secured, they were joined there by the other two divisions, which were among the most war-seasoned in the Japanese army. That was the first phase of the campaign.

The second phase began with the 33rd Division pressing hard up the Irrawaddy valley and the 55th Division following the Sittang River. Their progress along those two great rivers flowing across the country was breathtaking. The British and Chinese forces were thrown back everywhere and continually harassed by widespread Japanese infiltration. The small British and American air force operating in Burma was smashed at Toungoo and Magwe. Finally, with the fall of the British strongholds in Prome, Toungoo, and Magwe, the whole of Lower Burma fell into the hands of the Japanese. This phase of the operation culminated in Toungoo where newly arrived Chinese reinforcements joined the British in a vain attempt to stem the Japanese breakthrough. From Toungoo the Japanese moved rapidly towards the vital oil region round Yenangyaung and Magwe in Central Burma in order

to prevent the retreating British from destroying the oil properties there. They sent Bo Mogyo and a B.I.A. contingent ahead of them to obtain the cooperation of the people in preventing such destruction. However, the British succeeded in carrying out a thorough demolition before they left.

In the third phase the Japanese attack fanned out in three directions, one heading straight for Mandalay, the old capital in the north, one going eastward to the Karenni and the Shan States, and the third driving up the Salween Valley. As John F. Cady has commented in his *History of Modern Burma*,* the retreat of the British and Chinese armies had now become a rout. The end came swiftly; Mandalay fell in the latter part of April; Taunggyi and Lashio, the key positions in the Shan States which lay on the northern line of retreat to China, fell in the last week of April. The abandonment of other strategic areas followed in quick succession; and before the month had ended the battle for Burma was practically over. "By the spring of 1942," Field Marshal William J. Slim says in his *Defeat into Victory*, † "we, the Allies, had been outmanoeuvred, outfought, and outgeneralled."

On April 28, the Allied commanders met in Shwebo further up north and decided to end the campaign by pulling out all that remained of their battered forces. After another meeting of a similar nature on May 1 the British began a general retreat towards India and the Chinese towards China. This was the closing phase of the campaign. Pursued relentlessly by the Japanese, who tried to cut off the withdrawal in every direction, the British succeeded at last in making their way to Chindwin District, in the northernmost part of Burma, from where they finally reached India. The Chinese troops did not have the same luck. They were mercilessly chased, cut, and scattered with the result that some had to flee to India and some to China.

On May 20, 1942, the British officially ended their campaign in Burma by terminating the appointment of the commander-in-chief of their Burma Army, which was thereafter placed under the military command in India. Thus, as Cady again sombrely observes, "by late May 1942, the Japanese victory was devastatingly complete." Describing the victory, Major John I. Christian writes

* Published in 1958 by Cornell University Press, Ithaca, N. Y.

† Published in 1956 (2nd Ed.), by Cassells, London.

in *Burma and the Japanese Invader* * that, together with others achieved within those brief months in the Pacific area and South-east Asia, it constitutes "one of the most astonishing military accomplishments in history."



Having now a very broad and rough picture of the Japanese advance in Burma, we shall be better able to follow the movements of the Burma Independence Army. The Burmese units generally kept close to the rear or flank of the two Japanese divisions they had followed from the time the invasion started. To do so, Bo Mogyo and the units that went with him to Rahaeng crossed the border somewhere a little above Myawaddy pass, in order to keep in the trail of the Japanese division entering Burma by that pass, and they remained within the shelter of that trail more or less throughout the whole of the operations.

The units of Bo Let Ya and Bo Yan Naing sought similar shelter by following the Uno Battalion, which entered from Victoria Point in the south. Bo Mogyo decided that this was the only sensible thing for the fledgling B.I.A. to do while the British and the Japanese fought it out. So, following such a plan, the Burmese units re-entered the country and advanced across it exactly as the Japanese invasion forces did; that is, from the north and the south and behind the Japanese forces. This advance from two opposite directions will have to be described separately.

We will begin with Bo Mogyo's units, which went to Rahaeng to march into Burma from there. Bo Aung San, Thakin Tun Oke, and several other prominent comrades were in these units. As I have said, Bo Mogyo had chosen this northern railway town lying on the route to Mae Sot in order to remain close to the Japanese 55th Division, which would lead the invasion from that town. But before the march began he got into a brawl with Major General Takeuchi, the commander of the division. It happened over Bo Mogyo's request for radio equipment for his units and Takeuchi's inability to give any to him because he himself was short of it. It led to Bo Mogyo's first open conflict with the Japanese army. It

* Published in 1945 by Thacker, Bombay, India.

aroused his latent combativeness and independence, which, as the campaign in Burma progressed, drove him into more conflicts with that army. In a fury he changed his plans. Instead of taking the Myawaddy route with Takeuchi's division as he had intended to do, he went further north up the Ping River and made his way westward to Ta-saung-chan, a small Thai outpost on the Thaung-yin River, which forms the boundary between Burma and Thailand in that remote region.

The same night the units crossed the river on bamboo rafts, and early on the morning of February 7, 1942, they were on Burmese soil. It was a poignant moment for all of them. "Everyone was thrilled and happy," Kitajima, who took part in the crossing, told me. "The Burmese boys sang and shouted, some danced, some even wept; all were most visibly homesick and eager to resume the march so as to get back to their homes and friends again even for a while. Seeing them wildly happy, we Japanese were happy too." By then the Japanese divisions had already passed through Myawaddy and the British had begun to evacuate the region and thus the Burmese units had a clear way before them.

They set out at once in the wake of the Japanese. The journey across that fantastically wild, aboriginal region of sheer hill and gorge and dense, steamy jungle teeming with every kind of tropical life and stretching around for miles and miles and days and days was itself a feat. The Burmese troops performed it magnificently and without losing a single man or weapon. Instead, they even increased their number with fresh recruits. As the Japanese forces penetrated deeper into the country, they also did likewise; and when the plains were reached and Moulmein captured, the whole region in the rear and around that pivotal town lay open to them. Bo Mogyo and his men got down to their business at once. They entered Hlaingbwe, the seat of a local administration in the Karen country near Moulmein, and "liberated" it. It was done very peacefully. They then set up their first B.I.A.-created local administration there. The little army of liberation was beginning to find itself.

Meanwhile, the Japanese advance continued and, as the British abandoned one area after another, the utmost expectations of the little Burmese force were quickly fulfilled; the people surged to the victors, the fame of the B.I.A. spread, Bo Mogyo's name be-

came a magic word, and there was a rush to join the Burmese army. Bo Mogyo seized this opportunity to increase and strengthen the hold of his men on the new administration of the country. He directed them to organise B.I.A. associations to run the local administrations in as many areas as possible. The Japanese kept a general control over these local bodies, but that did not worry Bo Mogyo. He shrewdly calculated that the Japanese forces would be too occupied with the military operations and too ignorant of Burmese affairs to make the control anything more than nominal; and by the time the operations ended the B.I.A. administration would be so firmly rooted and mass-backed that the Japanese control would be even less real than before, or would have vanished altogether. This, as Bo Mogyo worked it out, would pave the way for the recognition of the independent Burmese government that the B.I.A. would eventually set up. So began the B.I.A. drive to capture all civil power in the country before the military campaign ended and things had settled down. Aung San, Tun Oke, and in fact all the politicians in the army led the drive. It marked a new stage in the evolution of the Burma Independence Army.

The B.I.A. now came out openly as a mass organisation directing a political and administrative offensive which took two principal forms: recruitment through the students and the Thakin Party to increase its strength, and the formation of affiliated local administrative bodies by the same Thakin Party, or rather its two factions in rivalry with each other. Except for a few marches and unexpected skirmishes here and there it stopped fighting altogether. Its activities became political and administrative. They consisted mainly of forming local B.I.A. associations to run the affairs of the locality, and then controlling the associations. This civil power set-up lasted till June 5, 1942, when, in agreement with the Japanese Command and me, Aung San as the commander of the B.I.A. in Upper Burma issued an order directing the army "to keep out of administration as well as politics completely."

Aung San's order reveals the state of the country at the time. The army's drive for power soon became a scramble for it, and then an uncontrolled exercise of it. The lure of limitless power began to draw into the B.I.A. camp most of the flotsam thrown up by the war, and that element quickly captured the majority of the

local B.I.A. administrations and ran them as they liked. They created rivalries and conflicts all round. First of all the two Thakin factions dominating the administrative bodies started to impose at will their newly acquired authority on the local populace, including the other political parties as well as social and communal groups, and so antagonised them thoroughly. Then the antagonisms spread to the Thakin factions themselves when each tried to extend its power in rivalry with the other. In time the flames reached those sections of the B.I.A. which stood behind the two factions, and the Japanese Kempetai stepped in to put a stop to the orgies of those factions.

This was one of the ways in which the first tensions between the Japanese and the Burmese armies arose. To make matters worse, the militarists in the Japanese army refused to see the widening rift except in their own way and for their own purposes; and their ways and purposes were so utterly opposed to those of the Burmese that whatever they might do was bound to look wrong to the Burmese or, at best, incomprehensible. So with the passing of the first heady days, the rumblings of the racial storm ahead began to be heard.



Bo Mogyo and his units concentrated on the two tasks of getting more men for the B.I.A. militarily and more power for its political wing administratively. They started in earnest in Moulmein District, which the Japanese had occupied. They "liberated" every town they entered after the British administration had collapsed by bringing it under their own control.

They reached the Salween River at Shwegun when the battle for its crossing was at its height. While waiting for its outcome they travelled through the distant Karen towns and liberated them also by taking them over themselves.

√A small incident which occurred at Shwegun deserves to be mentioned to show the kind of thing that was happening then, the mixture of the sublime and the ridiculous that might be seen nearly everywhere, one turning into the other according to the way one looked at it at the time. Tun Oke has related it in his

book, *My Adventure*. One day he told the new recruits that their main duty would be to shoot the enemy wherever they sighted him. A young village recruit who had listened to his words intently decided to obey them. Shortly after, Tun Oke heard a gun fired. He looked out and saw the headman of the village running towards his bungalow with that new recruit hotly after him. It was learnt upon inquiry that the village youth, after hearing Tun Oke's words, went straight to the headman's house and tried to shoot him.

✓ "But why did you do such a murderous thing?" Tun Oke asked him sternly. "You might have killed him." The young recruit had his reply ready. "Sir, you ordered us to shoot the enemy wherever we found him. This headman has been my enemy for a long time. So I carried out your order." Such was the kind of material out of which our people were forging their revolution, sustained perhaps by the thought that most revolutions are forged that way.

There were heroic deeds and moments too. One, for instance, became an Asian legend during the war. At the height of the battle of the Salween River some Japanese officers asked for a Burmese boat to take them across. It meant almost certain death, as the passage was within the range and sight of the British guns in several places. Four Burmese boatmen, however, volunteered to row the boat across. Two of them, standing erect and impassive, plied the oars while the two others together with the Japanese officers lay flat in the bottom of the boat. When they reached the middle of the river where they were fully exposed to view from the shore, the two rowers slumped under a hail of bullets. Without a word or tremor the other two took their places and kept the oars plying. They too were shot and instantly killed just as the boat reached the other shore. It was a display of heroism that would be hard to match anywhere. The Japanese press and radio spread the story widely, and all Japan and Southeast Asia thrilled to hear it.

At last the Japanese crossed the Salween, drove the British forces back, seized Martaban, the British stronghold on the other shore, early in February 1942, and pressed forward towards Pegu and Rangoon. Bo Mogyo's units followed after crossing the river on bamboo rafts at Me-seik, a village further down. This first decisive

Japanese victory broke the century-old spell of British power. At the same time the Japanese spell grew, and so did that of the B.I.A., one following the other closely. The Burmese army was welcomed everywhere, and people swarmed into it in such large numbers that there were not enough arms for all, and many had to be armed with pointed bamboos or anything else they could use as a weapon. It was a free and easy-going army marching to victory as in the good old Burmese days, and that stirred the spirit of the people all the more.

Bo Mogyo pressed forward with his plans. He sent his men to the principal towns in Moulmein District, which the Japanese had captured. Meanwhile, Let Ya, Kawashima, and their troops, who had marched northward from Tavoy and were now greatly increased in number, reached Mudon in Moulmein District. Fresh recruits and arms had also arrived from Thailand. The Burmese army was really becoming an army. It was now large enough to spread itself out so as to maintain close contact all the time with the Japanese divisions pressing towards Rangoon from several points. For example, Yan Naing's unit, which had entered from Victoria Point, was now a full-grown military unit marching in triumph through the southern region and the delta districts to converge on Prome together with the Japanese southern division, which was preparing to storm that British stronghold.

Let Ya's small force, which also had grown considerably, was moving forward from Mudon in two separate sections. The one under Let Ya passed through Pegu and reached Rangoon three days after its fall. The other section, led by Kawashima and Bo Bala, took a more roundabout route towards Payagyi, a town to the north of Pegu, had a running fight with some British armoured cars retreating towards Toungoo, and finally got to Rangoon. Bo Mogyo, Aung San, Tun Oke, and their units kept out of the actual fighting zones and cut across the hilly Pegu Yoma tracts to reach the road by which the Japanese armies would soon head for that capital city. Bo Mogyo's gambit was to get to Rangoon as quickly as possible in order to set up the central B.I.A. administration there and so strengthen his hand against the Japanese Supreme Command. The struggle was becoming a dual one; while the Japanese armies were battling the British for a military

Victory at the front, another battle for the fruits of the victory had begun in the rear between the Japanese militarists and the B.I.A., symbolising all the racial dreams and passions of the Burmese.

Bo Mogyo and his units reached Taikkyi, about fifty miles away from Rangoon on the main road, where they waited for the Japanese armies pressing towards the capital from Prome. After the British forces in that area had fallen back Bo Mogyo's units continued their march, passing on the way through Pu-gyi, where a surprise skirmish occurred with some of the retreating British troops, in which Bo Mo, one of the thirty comrades, and four Burmese soldiers were killed. This tragedy nearly led to a far grimmer one. Bo Mogyo believed that the unexpected attack on his men had been brought about by secret information obtained by the British from The-bye-gon, a village near Pu-gyi. Furious over the loss of one of the thirty comrades, he ordered all the men in that village to line up to be shot. It was only after much pleading by the Burmese officers that he relented and spared those men, but he made them understand very plainly that if such a betrayal occurred again he would show no mercy. Those knowing him and his singular dedication to the thirty comrades were convinced that Bo Mogyo meant what he said.

The rest of their journey to Rangoon was peaceful and without incident. All the way people flocked to Bo Mogyo and his army, for they saw them visibly marching to victory. At Htauk-kyan, about twenty miles from Rangoon where the highways from Mandalay and Prome converge, a battle was still raging; and so they took another route across the Hlaing River nearby. Bo Mogyo and all with him entered Rangoon on March 18, 1942, ten days after the Japanese had taken it.



We will now follow the B.I.A. unit led by Let Ya and Kawashima, which had crossed into Burma at a point below Tavoy in the far south. This small band kept close to the Japanese Uno Battalion, occupied Tavoy in the wake of the retreating British troops, at once began a recruiting campaign for the B.I.A., set up a new B.I.A. civil administration in that town, and solemnly pro-

claimed the independence of Burma, Kawashima himself reading out the proclamation in front of the town bazaar. For days following, the Japanese radio broadcast this declaration of Burmese independence, and the whole country quickly learnt of it. The British found its effect so alarming that the governor refuted it publicly, describing the claim of independence as monstrous and treasonable, and condemning Let Ya to death by hanging for his unspeakable crime. However, the gubernatorial words could not stop the tides; the Japanese and the B.I.A., whose numbers were daily increasing, continued to drive the British back, the Burmese continued to affirm their independence, and to fight for it, and in the end achieved it.

Except for a few shots exchanged here and there with the troops covering the British retreat in the early stages, the march of Let Ya's army northward to Moulmein was as smooth and rhythmic as Bo Mogyo's; all the way the mass welcome was just as great, and the people thronged to it, and B.I.A. associations sprang up almost overnight in the places it passed through. It was a triumphal progress till it reached Moulmein. Then the first jolt occurred. As this army approached the town, it was stopped and turned back by the Japanese towards Mudon, which lies some miles away. Thus it was barred at the last moment from entering Moulmein.

The B.I.A. felt the blow keenly, for it had looked forward with mounting emotion to taking part in the occupation of that vital town as a demonstration to all of its share in the victory over the British. It was the first open breach between the Japanese and the Burmese troops. Many causes led to it, but the immediate one was said to be the lawlessness of some of the B.I.A. elements in the town. The townspeople, it appeared, had repeatedly asked the Kempetai for protection from these hooligan elements. Even more, they were terrified by reports that another B.I.A. unit was approaching from the south, about whom the most alarming accounts had reached the area, describing them as a gang of sea-dacoits on the rampage. Japanese reports repeated these stories. Thereupon a clique of young militarists in the Japanese army, the same in spirit as those who caused all similar mischief in Korea and China and even in their own homeland, decided to act drastically. One result was the expulsion of the B.I.A. from Moulmein.

These men could appropriately be described as the "Korea clique." They had learnt in Korea, Manchukuo, and China to believe that the Japanese were the master race in Asia and to deal with the other Asian races on that footing. They had already begun to deal with the Burmese in that way; and when, upon the arrival of Let Ya's troops, they had a seemingly good reason to strike the first blow at the B.I.A. in general, they seized it avidly by ordering those troops away from Moulmein. Their action went beyond the simple question of maintaining law and order; it looked very much like an attempt to curb the Burmese army and its objectives. Not understanding the new spirit abroad in countries like Burma which had gained their political orientation under the Western democracies, they would not similarly understand that spirit breaking out among the Burmese, but regarded it as racial defiance or pride, as the Japanese liked to call it.

It reminds me of a story Aung San once told me. As he and a Japanese officer were driving along a narrow road they came upon a cow that refused to move away in spite of all the hooting and shouting they did. Glaring at the beast as he veered the car away from it, the officer turned to Aung San and said, "You Burmese very proud. Even Burmese cows very proud." These Korea men did not realise that it was the pride of a people who, having once been robbed of it under a long alien domination, were asserting it to the limit to recapture it and to make sure that they should not be robbed of it again by another alien domination.

The new Burmese pride had the makings of a psychosis with all its disturbing symptoms. In fact, it might even be said that the deeper problem between the Burmese and the Japanese was psychotic. It could be viewed as a clash between two psychoses: that of a late-coming strong race trying to impress a weak race with its new strength and superiority, and that of a weak race trying not to be impressed in order not to expose its weakness. The final truth, or a good part of it, perhaps lies there.

The B.I.A. too, on its side, was watching every move the Japanese were making. Many in it who knew something about Korea and Manchukuo saw the Japanese action against their army in Moulmein as being much more than what the Japanese said it was. They traced a deep design in it which fitted in with increasing reports of Japanese highhandedness and brutality towards the

Burmese. This view soon spread among the troops, and then among the people till it became so firmly lodged that there was almost no way of dispelling it. And it seemed that the Japanese militarist clique did not have the slightest interest in dispelling anything. In fact, even I, who worked closely with them as the head of the state as well as of the government, could not detect any sign that they were even aware that such a universal feeling against them existed; nor, as I have said, did they seem to care. I found this to be one of the most baffling aspects of the character of the Japanese militarist, which to the Burmese was baffling enough as it was. This was yet another way in which the problem of the relations between the Japanese and the Burmese began.

To continue speaking on this sensitive subject, Let Ya and many other comrades are convinced that there was a small, rabidly racist clique within the Japanese army working against the Burmese. They readily admit that many in the B.I.A., which contained a lot of rough, hot-headed youths, had behaved viciously at times. Some were even plain criminals exploiting the name of the B.I.A., and some were from the shady political fringes, for whom freedom came to mean the right to loot and ravage freely. But these were just the scum, they said, hangers-on following every army, who could have been picked out and purged without resorting to the extreme measures the Japanese took against the whole force or a good part of it. The Burmese would have done it themselves if their cooperation had been sought, but the Japanese did not seek it, thus proving that they were not merely trying to restore order as they professed, but were engaged in a more sinister move in which the Burmese could have no part.

Let Ya remained for some days at Mudon with his troops. He met Aung San, Tun Oke, and a few other political leaders within the B.I.A. at Amherst, where they discussed the formation of a Burmese government as soon as possible. With the Moulmein incident as a warning, they realised the need for the Burmese to stand together behind a government of their own, which would be formed on the broadest possible basis, for only such a broad-based government could act effectively for the Burmese as a nation in the growing crisis.

The trouble was still confined to the lower Japanese ranks in

certain areas; in fact, mostly to the Kempetai. The top officers were not involved in it, as I learnt when I took the matter up with them later; they were then too busy fighting the military campaign to think of anything else. But for the B.I.A. in those days of its first contact with the Japanese army any Japanese troops happening to cross its path appeared to carry the authority of the whole army. The Burmese leaders who had kept aloof from the Japanese High Command under Bo Mogyo's orders were responsible for this blunder.

Another blunder they committed was in giving a party character to the B.I.A. and its local administrations and keeping all the other parties and communities out or nearly so. Because of this rebuff many turned to the Japanese. And so the B.I.A. and its civil administrations found themselves dealing with the local Japanese forces actually as just a single party, of dubious reputation, and not a whole nation. The Japanese High Command did not recognise the B.I.A. as a Burmese national army or even as an army, and the B.I.A. on its part did not seek such recognition; so no relations existed between the two armies, and in all administrative matters the B.I.A. was regarded as a charge of the Kempetai. This was roughly how the new situation arose.

To go back to the narrative, Let Ya's force pushed ahead in two sections, one under Let Ya himself and the other under Kawashima and Bo Bala. Let Ya and his section passed through Pegu and reached Rangoon without any incident on the way. Kawashima and Bo Bala had a much rougher time.

The Japanese had just broken through the British defences in the Pegu District and, as they drove forward, remnants of the British forces defending the area were left straggling in the rear. Soon these were joined by similar remnants from the south who were passing through this area as they picked their way towards Toungoo in Central Burma. Kawashima's unit encountered some of these stragglers here and there, and had its first real taste of fighting in a skirmish with them. There were small running fights with a few of these troops. But the biggest engagement of all occurred at Ta-sone, near Payagyi at the junction of the road from Waw and the highway from Rangoon to Mandalay, which passes through Pegu and Toungoo. It was a memorable encounter between a British armoured group and Kawashima's little force as it approached the highway.

✓ The British unit, consisting of some tanks and armoured cars, was racing towards Toungoo when it sighted the Burmese troops at a distance. It immediately opened fire on those troops, who had never before faced an armoured foe in battle. Kawashima rallied them in the nick of time. Quickly recovering, the Burmese boys stood firm, took up their positions as directed by Kawashima and the other officers, blazed away with all their guns at the attacking force, and then, led by the Japanese officers yelling their most ear-splitting war cries, rushed forward and hurled every hand grenade they had at those tanks and cars.

✓ The battle was short and fierce. The British lost two vehicles and some men. The rest, who apparently were in a hurry to get out of the area, soon broke off the fight and speeded away. For Kawashima and the B.I.A. it was a clear victory. They continued to follow in the track of the main battle that was now quickly moving towards Rangoon and soon reached the city.



The third B.I.A. unit, Bo Yan Naing's commandos, began their march from the southernmost end of the country and reached farthest north. "This army did all our actual fighting," Let Ya told me in a final summing-up. It was true; it was the fighting arm of the B.I.A. and, probably for this reason, its story has become the most legendary of all, and also the most magnified in the telling. However, its main events can be related accurately because they are still remembered by many, and letters and accounts exist that were written during the campaign itself by those who fought in it. One little book in particular contains the letters written by Bo Than Nyun, a young officer in this third force, which give an almost day-to-day account of the best part of the campaign, every letter freshly written after each action, and all the actions described before their impact had faded away. This fine young officer was killed in an air raid in Mandalay at the end of May 1942. His letters, written without much art or skill, have survived as some of the most authentic and vivid documents of the B.I.A. campaign. I have used them freely in narrating the story here.

On January 2, 1942, this B.I.A. wing, consisting of Bo Yan Naing, Bo Min Gaung, Bo Tauk Htein, Lt. Hirayama (Bo Moke

Seik), Lt. Ikeda (Bo Kwe Belu), Lt. Imamura (Bo Ngwe Da), and twenty-four young commandos, landed at Victoria Point soon after the British had started to retreat before the Japanese Uno Battalion. For the boys it was a thrilling return to their own country. After going up the Pakchan River, which flows between Burma and Thailand, in large country boats to collect the arms and equipment previously stored by the Minami organisation in secret depots along that stream, they set out by sea for Mergui, where they arrived on the morning of January 17. The British had just evacuated the town after destroying everything of military value in it.

After going through a good deal of public welcome and rejoicing, Yan Naing got down to the immediate business of enlarging and organising his little group of men into something like a fighting force. He also set up a B.I.A. administration for the locality. Both the tasks were successful, for the nationalist ferment was strong and active there, and the people readily responded. When it left about a fortnight later the little group had grown into a full-sized regiment, with a fairly good supply of arms. "It was a hopeful beginning," Yan Naing explained to me, recalling those days. "The boys soon learnt to carry their equipment and march and fire a gun in the right direction. Most of them were young and ardently patriotic, and so I knew that they would pick up the rest quickly." This proved true for a large number of them.

They sailed up north towards Amherst in Moulmein District in eleven motor boats. The sea was calm, even in the stretches where it is usually turbulent throughout the year, and the nights were cool and misty, with the distant lights along the coast bringing back a flood of memories of home according to Bo Than Nyun. The boats, however, were jam-packed, with just enough room for most to stand or sit and hardly any space to lie down, the food was stale and meagre, and those who were seasick fouled the place abominably. Yan Naing remembers in particular a young man who began to cry. "Why are you doing that?" they asked him. "I am thinking of my wife and child," the poor fellow moaned. "I may not see them again." "Now listen," someone who had learnt to speak like a soldier told him. "The gun you are holding is your wife till you get back. So think only of it." Those who heard the words smiled, but not very convincingly.

Amherst gave them a great reception. Almost the whole town turned out to greet them. The Japanese had already captured Moulmein, not many miles away, and the British forces had been cleared out of the area. Also nothing had yet occurred to mar the relations between the Japanese and the Burmese; there was still a great outburst of Asian feeling everywhere, which brought the two races closely together. Having come all the way by sea without stopping at any place, there was also nothing yet to say against this army from the south; and it was the first B.I.A. force in full strength to appear in the locality. So everything went wonderfully well for it.

After a short stay Yan Naing and his men sailed away and reached Pa-an to the north of Moulmein. There they met Bo Mogyo and his units, who had just arrived in that town from the Thai border. Those units had now swelled into a force of three or four hundred with Burmese recruits from Thailand, and they had brought with them a large stock of arms. Bo Mogyo was therefore able to provide Yan Naing's new recruits with the weapons they needed.

Much better equipped now, this B.I.A. commando force had its first taste of fighting at a small village called Mebon on the opposite bank of the river near Shwegun and a short distance away from Pa-an. Some British troops left behind by the retreating forces still kept up a show of resistance here and there. The Burmese force proceeding up the river ran into a group of them at Mebon; the group attacked one of the Burmese boats sailing ahead of the others and a short engagement followed. The Burmese boys jumped on a sandbank nearby, dug themselves in, and fought back very spiritedly. Lt. Ikeda led the fight with a machine gun, with which he kept up a deadly fire from different positions, racing from one place to another and thus keeping the enemy thoroughly misled and confused.

The British lost three men, but they succeeded in setting the Burmese boat on fire. They withdrew upon the approach of the other boats, being deceived by Ikeda's tactics as regards the firing power and capability of the Burmese force. The boys were jubilant at the thought of having "drawn white blood" so cheaply, but Yan Naing and the Japanese officers saw also the lessons the encounter taught; it brought home to them the fact that the boys

needed a good deal more training before they were again pitted against a seasoned and well-armed enemy in a bigger encounter. So the force turned back to Amherst, where it was given another short but intensive course in actual fighting tactics.

Bo Than Nyun gives quite an exciting account of the days at Amherst. He mentions the rice packets with which the town fed the troops, each packet containing a full meal of rice and curry for a single person. Some contained just bare rice without any curry or condiment—the Burmese way of having a little fun at the expense of the unfortunate fellows who would get them. The packets also contained all sorts of messages to enliven the meals. “So you are leaving me behind with a child, you big, black-hearted demon,” one message said. “May you die as cruelly as you have been cruel to me.” Another began lyrically to sharpen the sting at the end: “My heart’s blood, how can you leave me just when our love is blossoming like a flower, our happiness is shining like the moon, and I have become pregnant?” Yet another would be more grim and heroic. “Go forth bravely, comrade,” it exhorted. “Kill bravely or be killed bravely,” and so on. These little notes would be read out and passed around while all roared with laughter and teased each other. A few of them even led to a romance. One such note, I was told, brought a boy and a girl together, and they parted rather poignantly.

Another thing Than Nyun mentions has a special place in this story: the Burmese belief in charms and tattoos which confer invulnerability. Such charms are among the most enduring forms the belief in magic has taken among all races, man’s oldest reaction to danger, fear, or frustration, and to the need for protection against them. When the need is greatest and the material means to fulfill it are least, the resort to supernatural means is the most instinctive and prevalent. So it is among the Burmese too. In Yan Naing’s army nearly everyone carried some kind of amulet to ward off danger, either a small sacred relic or image worn round the neck, or a tightly rolled tin foil inscribed with a well-known spell, or something similarly magical and potent. Than Nyun, who seems to have been more emancipated in this matter than most others, says that he tested one of these amulets by tying it to a hen and shooting it. He describes what happened: “I shot it ten times

at close range, and amazingly none of the bullets penetrated the bird. But it died all the same, being pulverised internally." Jan 30
✓ The important thing was that people began to believe that Bo Yan Naing, Bo Min Gaung, and Bo Tauk Htein were invulnerable. The story in regard to Yan Naing spread widely. It started in the way such things do, probably around a campfire, which put the village boys in a mood for such fantasies and the thrill and comfort they gave, and it grew with each exploit or escape from danger; and as Yan Naing's force advanced further, and its exploits as well as its luck got bigger and more dramatic, Yan Naing's invulnerability became one of the best-known legends of those first days when legends were easily born. The first story to go around was that Yan Naing had in the presence of Hirayama thrust a revolver barrel into his mouth and pulled the trigger repeatedly, yet nothing had happened; the gun would not fire. From then on every daring act of Yan Naing's which left him unscathed increased the legend, and that further increased the aura round the Burmese army and its cause. All this helped the campaign prodigiously. It made the people have greater confidence in victory. It was particularly so with the troops, with the result that they fought better.

In the beginning of March, Yan Naing and his force set out again. They sailed for the Irrawaddy delta region in order to clear it of the last enemy remnants and take over its rich districts in the name of the B.I.A. before they joined the Japanese division that was driving up the Irrawaddy valley towards Northern Burma. While crossing the Gulf of Martaban in their little motor boats they sighted six British naval vessels steaming towards Rangoon. To avoid them the Burmese boats turned back to Dedaye, the nearest port within reach. But one boat, led by Min Gaung, who perhaps thought it a good occasion to demonstrate his invulnerability, turned towards the British ships and fired some rifle shots at them. The British at once replied with a naval gun and chased that boat till it stopped and surrendered. Min Gaung and all the boys with him were captured and taken away to a prison in Rangoon, where they remained till the city fell to the Japanese. ✓

The other boats carrying this B.I.A. force succeeded in reaching Dedaye the next day. They found the town almost empty. The

townspeople had fled in a panic because of rumours that Yan Naing's men were sea dacoits from the south who had come to raid and loot and carry away the young men. That very day some British planes attacked the town. Yan Naing and Hirayama shot down two of them. Their troops also came out boldly and put up a steady and effective barrage to keep the other planes away. The whole neighbourhood watched the battle and saw the two British planes hurtling down in flames and the others repelled. When the attack ceased late in the evening the whole atmosphere in the town had changed; the B.I.A. force had won the complete confidence of the people, who came streaming back to their homes; soon a local civil administration was organised, the first measures were taken to restore peace and order, and the town came back to life again. This force left Dedaye the next morning, with a vast happy crowd turning out to acclaim them as heroes and deliverers.

It was the same at all the places they passed through; everywhere the masses flocked to the little force and denied it nothing. When it reached Kyaiklat, a large town in one of the most important of these districts, Yan Naing remained there for a few days with some of his troops and sent scouting parties in various directions to keep in touch with the situation round him. One such party proceeded to Pyapon, the administrative centre of the district, and found the town hostile. The rumour that Yan Naing's men were sea dacoits from the south had been sown in that locality by certain civilian officers whom the British had left behind in order to set the people against the Burmese army. When Yan Naing's scouts eventually arrived a sharp night encounter followed. The senseless resistance was soon smashed, but it cost the scouting party some lives. When the scouting was done and all the parties had returned, the force continued its march, passing through the main towns in the three delta districts of Pyapon, Maubin, and Henzada, liberating them, and handing them over to the new B.I.A. civil authorities. Abandoning the boats, it next went by road to the town of Henzada, where it was again rousinglly received.

Unlike Pyapon, the rumour that agitated this town was that some British demolition squads were coming to burn it down in implementation of the British scorched-earth policy to leave nothing behind that might be of military value to the Japanese. It

proved to be true; such squads, composed of Australians and New Zealanders in retreat and consequently thirsting for revenge, were on the way to Henzada, and Yan Naing's troops arrived just in time to face them. Early the next morning, just as those British troops were landing from two large river boats on the western bank of the river a little way from the town, a raking fire met them from the Burmese force, which had waited for their arrival behind the embankments and piles of firewood lying along the shore. These first volleys proved to be deadly because they took the enemy completely by surprise. A full-scale fight followed which lasted for nearly two hours, the two sides dodging each other among the embankments and woodpiles and the tree clumps, with the Burmese boys proving to be nimbler and more eager to fight.

Describing this encounter, Bo Than Nyun contemptuously calls these British troops mercenaries or "pay-eaters" who had fought and lost elsewhere and were now on the run, whereas the B.I.A. boys had never yet lost and knew that their side was winning everywhere. This psychological factor seems to have been decisive. Than Nyun gives a lively account of his part in the fighting:

I made my way through an intermittent stream of bullets by stooping low and jumping from behind one woodpile to another, and finally raced to a clump of trees from where I saw some British officers who were apparently in command. Deciding to make a sudden rush at them, I turned around to see how many of my men had followed me, and discovered that I was alone. So I took my chance and, yelling the fiercest war cries I knew, Burmese as well as Japanese, to fool the enemy into thinking that they were outflanked by a large assorted force, I kept up a steady fire at those officers. My ruse succeeded; the officers ducked and vanished and almost a stampede resulted. I think I shot down at least one of them.

This was how it went on, with bursts of shooting and sniping, and it ended only when the British troops, whose hearts were not really in the fight, fell back to their boats and steamed away in such haste that they left behind a number of their dead and wounded and also some prisoners. Amazingly, the Burmese had only three casualties. It was their first real clash with white troops,

and they had put them to flight. They had also saved Henzada from a fearful fate.

Yan Naing kept his troops for four more days in Henzada, during which period the Sato Butai, the famous kamikaze or suicide battalion of the Japanese 55th Division, which had fought brilliantly in the southern campaign, arrived in that town. Sato was on the way to Prome from where he was due to march north along the Irrawaddy valley, so that he was going the same way as Yan Naing's force. After spending those four days in performing the routine tasks of mopping up the enemy remnants and so saving the locality from the British depredations, organising a local civil B.I.A. administration, and getting the best of the local youth for his army, Yan Naing left Henzada on the same day as Sato. When they reached Kyangin, which is a day's march north from Henzada, a Japanese plane dropped a message directing both the forces to proceed at once to Prome, where a critical battle was expected the next morning. They did as they were told; and so we come to the biggest engagement fought by the Burmese army during the war.

THE BATTLE OF SHWEDAUNG

Shwedaung, a small town about eight miles to the south of Prome, may be said to lie at the junction of three highways, the great arterial road running from Rangoon to Prome, the Irrawaddy River, which flows alongside the town, and a third, local road which penetrates some miles into the country around. The little town therefore lay right across the ceaseless movements and countermovements taking place on that fateful morning in preparation for the last of the great battles for Southern Burma. The British were concentrating heavily at this vital crossroads to keep every line of retreat open to Prome and from there to Central Burma, while the Japanese were trying to rout the retreating armies before they could mass together to make a last stand in Prome, and all the Japanese and Burmese units within that area at the time were rushing to join in the battle.

That morning Shwedaung became the meeting place of these converging forces. Also by an odd destiny Yan Naing's little army, which had marched a whole day and night almost without food or sleep or any real break, arrived at that particular place on that

particular morning and so found itself directly in the path of a full-scale British withdrawal and realignment.

As they approached the area and heard the sound of the first shots being fired, the Burmese troops were ordered to take up positions on the western side of the highway to Prome, while the Japanese would keep to the eastern side. This arrangement sent the Burmese troops to the town of Shwedaung, which was to become one of the focal points of the whole battle. The five battalions composing the Burmese army had arrived in a loosely strung marching formation which kept them at some distance from one another. The foremost battalion, acting as a vanguard, was led by Bo Tun Shein; next followed the headquarters and its combat troops under Yan Naing and the Japanese officers Hirayama and Ikeda; some way behind them were the others.

The battle began early in the morning of Sunday, March 29, 1942. With the appearance of a fleet of British tanks pounding along the main road, the fight got into full swing; and when, as a result of a lucky shot from the only antitank gun the Japanese possessed at that moment there, a British tank lay wrecked across a vital bridge on the road thus blocking it completely, the retreating troops took to the fields nearby and the battle spread out with them. British reinforcements from Prome poured in both by road and river to help the retreating forces to get through. In consequence, the Japanese and Burmese opposing them were caught between the enemy troops moving in from Prome and those proceeding there, and also between the troops coming by river and those on the road. Thus the battle, which lasted a whole day and night, became a complete tangle of sporadic fighting along the river and on the road and across the rice fields round Shwedaung.

✓ Most of the Burmese battalions lost touch with each other soon after the battle began. It was in this first confusion that Bo Tun Shein's vanguard battalion found itself cut off and surrounded. The unit was practically wiped out. The troops in it were raw young peasants with plenty of guts but little else. For instance, a group of them, never having seen a tank before, got too close to one and were instantly blown to pieces. At that time Yan Naing and his force of about four hundred troops were in Shwedaung desperately fighting back the enemy forces which were beginning to close in on them too. To escape the fate of their vanguard, they

got out of the town and took up positions in the fields just outside, where they remained stoutly blocking a part of the British retreat.

Suddenly, as evening approached and the enemy was unable to clear the roadblock created by Yan Naing and his small force, the battle took a new turn. They saw about seventy Indian sepoy commanded by British officers coming towards them with raised hands to signify their wish to surrender. Yan Naing and Hirayama ordered the Burmese to cease fire. At the same time they shouted to the Indian unit to throw down their arms. While the commanding officers on both sides were trying to arrange such a surrender, a stream of bullets streaked towards Yan Naing and the Japanese officers standing near him, and when it ceased Yan Naing stood alone while Hirayama, Ikeda, and some soldiers nearby lay in a heap at his feet. Someone from the rear lines of the British unit had opened fire without the knowledge of the officers in front.

✓ However, it had happened and the damage was done; Hirayama and Ikeda were dead and Yan Naing alone had escaped by a miracle or, as the story went quickly around the country, by the potency of the charms he carried. He at once ordered his troops to fire back on the whole British unit, which, unaware of the treachery committed by one or two of its men, was taken completely by surprise. Yan Naing himself grabbed an automatic gun and led the frenzied attack till the last man within reach was mowed down. It was a barbarous ending to a battle in which both sides had fought so magnificently the whole day, and Yan Naing as well as many others who were with him on that day still carry the memory of that indelible moment of the British surrender which was so cruelly marred by treachery and slaughter. "I had to act at once to protect my troops," Yan Naing explained to me. "It was no time to weigh things too long or nicely. And the sight of my two closest comrades lying crumpled and dead maddened me."

When it became too dark to continue the fighting, Yan Naing used the opportunity to regroup his entire force on the outskirts of Shwedaung, taking care to keep away from the town itself. The battle had now turned into a distant shelling of the town, which went on the whole of that night. The next morning, most of the retreating British forces had got beyond Shwedaung and only some rearguard action between the British and the Japanese con-

tinued here and there. With all his troops brought together again, Yan Naing was now able to piece together the events of those two prodigious days and gradually to realise that the Burmese had fought a truly great battle and won it.

But the price they paid was desolating. The losses on all sides had been heavy, but the Burmese losses were, in proportion to their strength, the heaviest of all. The British were estimated to have lost at least 800 in dead and wounded. The Japanese lost a little over 150. The Burmese, who had at the start of the battle 1300 men, lost more than half of that number; 60 were killed, 300 wounded, 50 to 60 captured by the British, who had acted more humanely towards the Burmese by accepting prisoners from them, and, most sickening of all, about 350 had run away in fright and panic. Some of the deserters returned at night, and counting them too, there were only about 600 troops left of that army. It had also lost most tragically, as we have seen, two men to whom it owed so much.

Than Nyun shows great contempt for the young misfits who hid or ran away from the fight, but Yan Naing understood their problem better as a completely human one, and he dealt with it in that spirit. What remained of that very mixed and tattered little army matured fast during the days that followed, which they spent in a ferment of conflicting emotions, of joy and sorrow and pride and shame, and also in a drastic reappraisal of a lot of things.

Out of the whole battle of Shwedaung, Yan Naing and his troops remember most vividly the death and burial of Hirayama and Ikeda. Than Nyun also has given a most touching account of these events, describing particularly the death of the two men as a personal loss for all of them, which "left the flesh of our hearts dry and worn out." I have already related how they died. What followed is also worth telling; I will let Than Nyun tell it.

As soon as Hirayama fell, Yan Naing rushed to him and, throwing himself upon the limp, quivering body, held it frenziedly in his arms. When he realised that his comrade was past all aid, he leapt to his feet to order his troops to attack the British unit instantly. He was covered with Hirayama's blood and this, together with the fact that he had dropped to the ground to hold the dying man, had led his own men to believe that he also was wounded and even killed. It was beginning to have a paralysing effect on the

troops; and then they saw him jump up and order an all-out assault and lead it himself. The result was almost magical; all the men rallied and rushed forward "like demons," Yan Naing told me, living that moment again.

As for the burial, here is Than Nyun's firsthand account of it:

On March 31 the Shwedaung fighting ended. So on that day we went to the place where the bodies of Hirayama and Ikeda still lay exposed. As soon as we arrived there, we stood before the two heroes and bowed deeply in salute and homage. Bo Yan Naing and all of us were weeping. Even the sky looked sad and dark with the lingering smoke of yesterday's battle, and the smell of gunpowder and blood and dead flesh drifted in the air. Solemnly we carried the two bodies to a bush close to a religious edifice that stood about twenty yards away from the field where most of the fighting had occurred. After the bodies had been slowly lowered to the ground and the last salute had been given, Bo Yang Naing poured a large quantity of petrol on them and set them alight; and as we watched the flames leap up we were all weeping and praying for a happy reincarnation in a higher abode for those two dear comrades. In a rush of grief, Bo Yan Naing went so close to the burning bodies while the petrol fumes were rising that his clothes caught fire and we had to pull him back and put the fire out. Fortunately, he was unhurt.

After the cremation, they returned to their camp, sadder, soberer, and more aware of the grim personal meaning of war; and, Yan Naing says, far more like an army. Thereafter, they became the steadiest wing of the B.I.A. and its civil administration, and were looked upon by all, Burmese and Japanese alike, as the most liberation-minded and the least loot-minded of them all.

That very day Yan Naing began a purge. He weeded out all the undesirable elements among his troops till there remained about four hundred, a good number of whom were former university students. He relied particularly on this educated core to raise the quality of the new force, which still had a long way to go across the country, and Yan Naing wanted to make certain that it would behave and stand up like an army and not an armed mob on the loose. With this done, they left for Prome.

The British had just evacuated that town after setting most of it on fire. Than Nyun describes the shambles, the roadsides and fields strewn with the mutilated bodies of women, children, and monks shot on sight, and almost the entire town plundered and gutted. Yan Naing's army remained in Prome for a week while he went down to Rangoon to meet the other units of the B.I.A. who were already in that city.

CHAPTER 6

The B. I. A. Period

The next stage in the progress of the Burmese army was now to begin. Bo Mogyo made his next move as soon as the main body of the B.I.A. had joined him in Rangoon. He consolidated all he had gained so far before attempting to gain more. His revolutionary army, like similar armies at such times, had grown into a motley, wild-eyed, armed crowd as it went along, and the time had come to shape them into something resembling a military force. Similarly, the local administrative bodies hurriedly improvised throughout the country would have to be cleaned up and unified under a central Burmese government supported by the army. With this accomplished, the Burmese government and army would, as Bo Mogyo planned it, fight side by side with the Japanese divisions against the common Anglo-American enemy. There was also some off-and-on talk about making a formal declaration of Burmese independence, but nothing came of it. Bo Mogyo realised that they must first strengthen their hands tangibly by having a regular government and army of their own before they took such a challenging step.

✓ Even as it was, the new moves as well as loose utterances of many in the Burmese army further strained its relations with the Japanese militarists, whose numbers were growing with the arrival of fresh divisions from East Asia. As their strength increased and their victory became more assured, the Japanese made their countermoves against the B.I.A. more boldly; they began to tighten up their control of that army and its local organs. When it discovered Bo Mogyo's plan to turn the official residence of the British governor in Rangoon, which was regarded as a symbol of

administrative power in the land, into the headquarters of the B.I.A., the Japanese army took it over before he could do so.

However, Bo Mogyo succeeded in carrying out what was essential in his plan. A central government was created, and the B.I.A. put on a proper military basis. The reorganised army now had a general headquarters and staff, a northern and southern command, two regular divisions, and some garrisons, including one in Rangoon itself. On March 22, 1942, it held a parade in full strength, which was generally estimated at well over five thousand troops; some even put it at ten thousand.

THE BURMA BAHU GOVERNMENT

Bo Mogyo was more cautious in forming a Burmese government. He first obtained the assent of the Japanese army command, which gave it tentatively, in order to get something done to stem the spreading anarchy before the Japanese conquest was completed and a lawfully constituted government under military control could be formed. The first announcement of an agreement between the two sides to create such a government appeared in an order proclaimed in Bo Mogyo's name on March 23, 1942. This announcement proves that the Japanese simply permitted the new governmental set-up to function, and there was nothing more. No similar announcement was made by them.

It was called the Burma Bahu (Central) Government. On April 7, 1942, Thakin Tun Oke, the Chief Administrator, issued its first administrative order to demarcate the basic administrative units and their jurisdiction, powers, and duties. It was the old British structure with slight modifications here and there. But there was one radical change reflecting the revolutionary trend of the times: it was to be a government by popular committees at every level. Actually, the authority of this government was just what the armies, both Burmese and Japanese, chose to give it, and even that was confined to Rangoon and a few neighbouring places, and even there it turned out to be very little beyond exacting taxes arbitrarily and punishing lawbreakers who happened to come within its reach.

For the rest it was much the same as before, with the local administrations set up by the two armies continuing to function by themselves. It seemed that the only things going on in the

central government of which the local units took any notice and followed as an example were the endless intrigues for position among the two Thakin cliques within that central body as well as around it, which destroyed all its effectiveness during a critical period. The factional squabbles spread at once to the local organs and riddled them too. The months of April, May, and June, during which all this turmoil was going on, mark one of the most lurid periods in the present story, as we shall see.

There is a good deal of controversy over the events of these months of April, May, and June. Many have been quick to lay the blame for most of the wrongs committed then as well as later on one particular sector or other, on the Japanese, on British partisans and secret agents, on the B.I.A. and their hangers-on, on just plain opportunists and criminals found in all the sectors; in short, on everyone except themselves and their own set. All such explanations of one of the darkest periods of the war in Burma are too simple and partisan to be true. To show this I will narrate in their order the events and changes that occurred then and their obvious causes. While doing so I may have to say again a few things I have already said before.

I will begin a little before April 1942, for that will give a fuller view of the swiftly changing drama of those months. It was really a drama taking place on a fantastic scale, and one can only convey its impact upon the Burmese by describing it in the overwhelmingly emotional way they felt it at the time. Any accurate account of it may seem a bit melodramatic at this distance, but that was how it was then. Those who lived through it swear that it was so; every day and event was overwhelming, and so were the feelings which were universally evoked.

For the Burmese those first days were like a prayer fulfilled. They felt as though they were being swept forward upon a tide that had kept on steadily rising since the first Japanese victories in Burma. After a century of foreign rule they suddenly saw that rule crumbling. The emotional effect was simply delirious. It made Burmese hearts beat wildly. In the universal explosion all round them the Burmese in general felt as if everything within them too was exploding. It was at the peak of this mood that they watched the Burmese army emerging in the months before April. As its first troops advanced together with the Japanese divisions they

brought back to our people for a brief euphoric period past dreams and memories, of kings and conquerors who had once built a great Burmese empire, and Burmese armies that had marched into Thailand in the east, and Assam and Manipur in the northwest, and Yunnan in the northeast, and had left behind an enduring story. All that seemed to come back to them in a stream of racial consciousness intermingled with a new conviction that their country would be great again and Buddhism recover its old glory and, as in a fairy tale, the Burmese would be happy ever after. The Burmese army symbolised all this nostalgia for the past and dreams for the future, and so the people rose to welcome it rapturously.

By April the British had evacuated Rangoon; Prome, their last stronghold in Lower Burma, had just fallen, and their forces were fleeing north; British power in Burma was visibly shattered. The Burmese army was often seen marching side by side with the Japanese victors, and for those who watched them it was, in fantasy, like seeing Asia on the march again. And shortly after, as a culmination, they heard of Shwedaung, where the Burmese forces had fought a full-scale battle against armoured British troops and won it and even wiped out a British unit. With all these fabulous things happening before their very eyes it was only natural that the Burmese should see the Japanese in a fabulous light. Everything was fabulous and emotionally clouded in those first days.

By the middle of April the situation had changed with a shock. The Japanese divisions were rapidly moving north, and the B.I.A. decided to follow them to pick up the gains along the way and set up its own civil administrative bodies in the liberated areas. Bo Mogyo instructed the troops to stay out of the actual fighting in order to keep intact the Burmese military strength, and his order was gladly obeyed. You might call it a tactical and far-sighted order, but, as it actually turned out, the consequences were disastrous. It let loose upon the country a swarming horde collected haphazardly and worked up to fighting pitch but without any enemy to fight against, with plenty of guns and other weapons and none to attack except their own people, nor any particular occupation except to show off their new power or go on a rampage. As a result, the evil elements within the B.I.A., and especially within their civil local administrations, perpetrated

something like a reign of terror over the people all along their route. The usual criminal elements were quick to join in.

To add to the confusion, the Japanese militarists, now more militarist than ever as their victories zoomed and they needed less Burmese help, came into it in order at first to stop the crimes of some of the B.I.A. and their creatures and also those of the other lawbreakers. However, in suppressing the new B.I.A. terror the militarists employed their own brand of terror, and the two terrors together let loose hell. A general confusion resulted during which the issues also became confused and twisted. The Burmese saw the Japanese action as a move against them racially, and so all the other issues began to be overshadowed by a dangerously racial one between the Burmese and the Japanese in general.

The people lived under this multiple terror during the three months of April to June, and even throughout the whole war in many places. One result of this was that a new emotional situation was created in which all military forces, both Japanese and Burmese, came largely to be feared and hated. It even came to be that for a vast number of people the horrors of those months were more real and palpable than the liberation which was being so loudly proclaimed. A whole lot of new problems thus appeared in place of the old.

I have spoken repeatedly of a reign of terror. To show what it was actually like, I will let those who personally witnessed some of the things that happened then describe them.

First of all, there are the accounts given by U Tun Pe, a veteran journalist and one-time member of the government in Burma after independence, in his book *Sun over Burma*.* It is not a very objective book, for Tun Pe dislikes too much anyone who disagrees with him and anything that goes against his own views, but his long years of news-reporting have taught him to state the facts as he sees them. He dislikes the Japanese, but, unlike many others, when a Japanese does something good or a Burmese does something wrong he says so plainly. Thus he relates how a Japanese soldier "made gestures requiring me to draw water for him. When I ignored his order he made a rush at me and I fully expected to be slapped, but another Japanese . . . cried out what sounded like a command and stopped him short. I suppose he was an

* Published in 1949 by Rasika Ranjani Press, Rangoon.

officer. . . . He just said, 'Ma kaung bu (not good),' and went away."

That gives us a somewhat more balanced picture of Japanese wartime behaviour. Tun Pe mentions a Japanese raid of the B.I.A. headquarters at Kyaukse in Upper Burma and the ill-treatment of the officer-in-charge by the Japanese soldiers, but he is silent about the reason for the raid. "That night," he continues, describing more Japanese outrages, "I discovered that Daung-ywa [a village in the neighbourhood] had its share of tragedies. People who had come from other places and witnessed scenes of horror told me their experiences. I heard of *pongyis* [monks] being slapped by Japanese soldiers, of monasteries being defiled, of sacred palms bearing inscriptions of the scriptures desecrated, of the shooting out of hand by the B.I.A. of bad hats." Incidentally, everyone shot at that time was declared to be a "bad hat" by those who did the shooting.

Tun Pe says a little further on that "slapping of faces was the Japanese method of chastisement everywhere." For the Burmese, and in fact for all in Southeast Asia, this outrageous practice of slapping the native peoples dramatised in an unforgettable way the whole horror of the Japanese militarist behaviour during the war.

Tun Pe has a lot to say about the B.I.A. too, particularly about "the new class of B.I.A. *bohs* or officers who found new wives and loaded them with the finest silks and the costliest jewelleries obtained by looting." It made him believe in the stories circulating widely of wholesale B.I.A. depredations. He goes on to describe "caravans of harvesters" who entered the towns, broke into locked houses, and carried away in their carts whatever they found worth taking; dacoit gangs who infested the roads; vast areas where security had ceased altogether to exist. It is a picture of an utter jungle and of jungle law.

There are other accounts as well, all equally sombre, equally, it might be contended, the price a revolution pays. The tragedy of paying and suffering so much and yet achieving in the end so little that was truly revolutionary was to follow only later. I will mention just one or two more incidents to give a fuller picture.

A headman of a village that lay across the path of several armies moving north to Mandalay told me how the whole village was

plundered by successive armed bands belonging to various armies and was finally burnt by some B.I.A. troops who, seeing the villagers flee in terror from them upon being summoned, declared it to be a hostile act which called for exemplary punishment. "Quite a number of villages were looted and burnt that way," he told me.

The story I heard from an old-time politician living in a small town in Central Burma was perhaps the most illuminating of all. I will give it in his words as far as I remember them. "The Japanese," he said, "were brutal and demanding. Their ways were strange to us, particularly their militarist system that placed the armed forces high above all else in the country. The man with the gun became a new class. The Burmese as a whole found it impossible to understand that. There was also the language barrier, which prevented us from understanding one another. Nevertheless, we noticed one thing. Most of the things the Japanese soldiers asked for from us were not for themselves, but for war purposes. On the other hand many of the B.I.A. troops who passed through our town were quite different. The party men who composed their civil administrative bodies were even worse. So we had to think of a way to protect ourselves against them. We naturally thought of the Japanese. This made us carry to the Japanese every sort of tale travelling around at that time about the B.I.A. misdeeds. Many Japanese believed us and they too saw the way the B.I.A. administrations were acting. From then on the Japanese Kempetai in our town turned against the B.I.A. and those stringing along with it. The common criminals were also rounded up. But when the Burmese terror was checked that way, the Japanese terror began. It went on like this till the end, one terror following another, and a lot of people trying to escape them by playing off one side against the other."

From all accounts, this was what was taking place everywhere in the country, with most people straddling and trying to pick and help the winner. This man's statement seems to contain a clue to many things that have happened in Burma since then, perhaps, most of all, to the final break between the Burmese and the Japanese.

Foreign historians also have written a lot about "the orgy of

looting and banditry coupled with the violent settling of old grudges to which the entire country was subjected during the interregnum," and how by early June the B.I.A. "had made itself thoroughly unpopular everywhere." British wartime intelligence reports too, which were confidential military documents and therefore had every reason to be factual and accurate, have described the conditions similarly. All these accounts put together give a fairly rounded idea of the general condition in Burma in the middle of 1942, when the Japanese had just completed the conquest of the country and a new era was about to begin for the Burmese.

I have painted a rather bleak picture of the period, but there is also a very luminous side to it which will in fact outweigh all else in the long reckoning of history. It was the new spirit stirring among the Burmese which I have described repeatedly. That spirit never died out. One has to be Burmese and to have lived in Burma during those days to understand this mystery. In fact, it is a mystery which lies at the core of every revolution of a people. Notwithstanding all the evil done by many in it, this spirit shone most fiercely in that ragtag army in the making. Nothing could wholly obliterate that army's role and significance in the revolutionary struggle which took place in Burma. During the entire period of its brief existence, it continued to be the only visible symbol and fighting arm of the Burmese revolution.

RACIAL CONFLICTS

The question of the relations between the Burmese and the Japanese during the war is so crucial that, although I have already touched upon it here and there, I must complete the picture by saying more. There are two sides to it and I will speak of both.

✓ To put the picture together I shall have to repeat a few facts. The Japanese came at a violent period which was completely dominated by violent men belonging to many different armies fighting desperately all over a country where the whole administrative structure had broken down. It was therefore a time when the rawest instincts within the Burmese and the Japanese, individual, racial, revolutionary, were suddenly let loose. Something similar was happening in practically every territory occupied by

foreign armies in that thoroughly total war. It was the day of the armed men wherever the war was fought, and it was so in Burma too.

Again, both the Japanese and the Burmese armies suddenly found themselves in a situation for which they were quite unprepared. Events had moved too fast and the success and power which came into their hands was far too great and sudden. In consequence, both were caught in a situation they did not knowingly create, and over which they had no control, and for which they were not ready, and from which they could not escape. One outcome of it was a racial collision caused largely by the brutalising effects of the total war.

What has just been said is true in a general way, but there were also the particular facts and events which caused the conflict. By far the most important of these facts is the Japanese wartime behaviour towards the people. To begin with, there cannot be the slightest doubt that the hard-core, fire-eating militarists within the Japanese army behaved brutally and put Burma and her peoples as well as resources to their own military use even more brutally. It is true that the war itself and the conditions it created were brutal and brutalising, but these militarists surpassed all others the Burmese had ever known. The brutality, arrogance, and racial pretensions of these men remain among the deepest Burmese memories of the war years; for a great many people in Southeast Asia these are all they remember of the war.

✓ I think the actual position will be better understood if we get down further into it. We must start from the fact that, like all armies waging a total war, especially in a foreign country, the Japanese forces in Burma were a very motley crowd made up of all the countless shades of character and upbringing existing in their country. Added to this, their early dazzling victories turned the heads of many of them. They brought out the evil, predatory side of the Japanese character. For the Burmese, the worst among the lot were the militarists with the outrageous master-race complex, whose number was small at first, but grew quickly when fresh divisions from the Far Eastern arenas arrived to fight in Burma. I have called them Korea men before, for they had served in the colonial wars and administrations in Korea and Manchukuo and China, and had there developed the fantasy of a Greater Japan

before whom all Asia must bow. They came flushed with victory and new dreams and old lusts and habits. They were convinced of their Asian destiny and determined to work out that destiny wherever they went. Meanwhile, their power was increased by the establishment of the Supreme Southeast Asia Command in Singapore, which the Korea men completely dominated. That command was under Count Terauchi, a kinsman of the Emperor; for the Japanese militarist this fact was the final sanction for the Korea policy in all Southeast Asia.

✓ I soon discovered that the Korea clique were never clear about their reasons for fighting in Burma, whether they were driving out the British to restore the country to the Burmese or to keep it for themselves. Most of them believed that they would keep it in some way, perhaps in the way they kept Korea or Manchukuo. Without giving the slightest thought to the fundamentally different historical as well as political conditioning of the Burmese, they started to behave towards them just as they did in their own colonies and colonial wars. These racists within the Japanese army promptly claimed all sorts of rights and privileges, made the population fetch and carry at their bidding, slapped and tortured men and women, seized labourers as well as property as they needed them, and posed as the master race, often going to the preposterous length of insisting wherever they could that they should be openly called masters and obeyed as such.

This position was at its worst in April, May, and June. It was excruciating enough for the Burmese, but was made even more so by the fact that the crimes committed by their own people, and in particular by many in the B.I.A. and their creatures, gave these Japanese militarists a certain right to work their own violence under a show of suppressing the Burmese violence. They gave the militarists the opportunity to use that sombre right and, as it happened, to abuse it freely too. And so, with the British gone, and the racial fevers running high, and the war and the general breakdown increasing them still further, the Burmese and the Japanese were trapped in a conflict with each other which neither side really wanted, but forces latent in their divergent character and history made inevitable.

There were of course the Burmese failings, too, which led to the conflict. I have already dwelt on the fact that the B.I.A. was hardly

more than an armed, vaguely revolutionary mob which had been collected at random with very little training or equipment or arms. Compelled to look after themselves they quickly did so on the principle that what they did not have and needed they had the right to take from those who had them, and as the general run of them were the sort who had very little of anything at any time they took a lot wherever they found it. It ended up with the criminal elements joining in to take whatever they could. One of the consequences was an orgy of looting throughout the country.

The B.I.A. lacked a lot, but most of all it lacked the right kind of leadership. Actually, there was no organised leadership to hold in check this mob-like army, which was expanding as fast as its fortunes were, as a result of the Japanese victories. All power within it was held by Bo Mogyo alone, who was a law unto himself. His sole passion was to see this army grow as big and fast as possible, so that he took all who came in indiscriminately; even worse, he distributed positions of power just as indiscriminately. Aung San told me that neither he nor the other old-time Burmese officers had much say in the matter. Things being so the Burmese officers had little effective control outside their own small units, which soon began to act independently of each other, till the B.I.A. became little more really than a bunch of armed local bands or factions operating more or less on their own. Whatever leadership these groups had was that of a single political party, the Thakins, who regarded all other parties and communal groups as enemies to be crushed as completely as the Japanese were doing to their own enemies. The result was the beginning of the interracial and interparty conflicts which have torn the country. At a time when they needed the support of all, they antagonised the other parties and communities and so found themselves facing the Japanese militarists alone, with the rest setting them and those militarists against each other.

By May both Bo Mogyo and Aung San realised their blunder and tried to undo it by planning to start a training school at Bhamo, up in the north, for the whole force. But it was too late; the Kempetai had stepped in to drive out the B.I.A. units from one town after another.

To understand the situation fully we must go even further into it, till we get to the innermost, built-in differences, so to say, be-

tween the two peoples, differences in racial make-up and conditioning, in war experience, in the way each looked at the war they were fighting together. As the conflict dragged on all this became mixed with war fatigue and the effects of many years of deprivation and a deepening sense of futility and defeat; and then there grew among some of the Burmese during the last days a subconscious wish to be on the winning side, and among the Japanese a mass panic at the thought of losing the war, which led them to drive themselves harder and to drive the Burmese as well along with themselves.

The circumstances in which the Burmese and the Japanese met were mostly wrong. No two races could be more different in essential ways, and no alliance was in a sense more ill-timed, because nothing could have brought out the differences more starkly than a total, all-out struggle such as that war proved to be. The fact that they were both Asian meant very much emotionally, but almost nothing otherwise; in fact, it made matters worse by raising too many expectations on both sides.

There was, to start with, the hard fact that the Japanese came as a conquering army prepared to fight to the last man, militaristic at the core, convinced that all East Asia lay at their feet. The Burmese, however, had their own notions, one of which was that the Japanese were just Asians helping to liberate Asians and nothing more. So the polarity was complete from the beginning.

Another fact is that both races were in the grip of racial reflexes which were irresistibly shaping their behaviour. The Burmese reflexes were the outcome of their colonial past. For instance, they had had no modern war experience; they had not fought a war for generations, let alone a total, world-sized one. All they had actually seen of such a war was what was fought around them by others, including the Japanese victory in Burma within a few quick months. So somewhere deep within their minds the Burmese believed that the rest of the war would be quick and easy too, that while the Japanese fought they could follow in the wake and pick up the gains just as they had done in the first months; also that while the Japanese were throwing everything into the fight, the Burmese need not do so, but could go on living as if the war were already won and over. It was in a sense an infantile view originating perhaps from the fact that the Burmese had not during

a whole century of colonial rule been given a chance to grow up militarily; they had as a race been denied every form of military training. But the Japanese, who were very war-experienced and war-hardened and knew its crushing weight, took a completely contrary view and, since they could never forget that they were fighting for their very existence, uncompromisingly put that view before everything else in dealing with the Burmese. They were not sparing themselves, nor had they any thought of sparing others. And so the way was prepared for the future tensions and the final break.

Yet another fact is that the two races had come together for very pragmatic reasons. The Burmese had looked to the Japanese for help in their struggle for independence; they had it most spectacularly at first, but as the conflict went on it seemed that actually they were helping the Japanese with whatever they possessed without the Japanese helping them to achieve their real objectives. So most of their reasons for joining Japan in the war vanished, and once that happened there were few bonds left that were strong and tangible enough to keep the Burmese as a people in a sinking boat. So the two imperceptibly drifted apart, and soon many Burmese sought and found reasons for widening the breach in almost everything the Japanese did to them; and finally with the Western powers waiting to receive them these men found reasons also for going over openly.

There was also something else at work. In a situation like this a vast section of the Burmese follow an old instinct to seek escape from it by throwing the blame on somebody, usually a stranger, or by propitiating some angry spirit or planet. Things were definitely going from bad to worse in those years, and this class of people instinctively looked for a scapegoat to blame. They found a ready-made one in the Japanese, just as it had been the British for everything that went wrong in the colonial days. Lying beneath it all was the instinctive fear and distrust of the stranger, especially a powerful one, which exists among all weak and exploited peoples. I have mentioned this important fact before. It is very pertinent here too.

We must also not forget the extraordinary skill with which British propaganda exploited these various elements in the crumbling situation, the war weariness of the people, the Japanese

brutalities made to seem more brutal and racial than they actually were, the widespread misery and sufferings, and, not least, the desire of many people to land on the winning side. In the last days when Japanese defeat became a certainty the British found plenty among these people who were only too eager to be with them in the final victory.

✓ As for the Japanese militarists, few people were mentally so race-bound, so one-dimensional in their thinking, and in consequence so totally incapable either of understanding others, or of making themselves understood by others. That was why so much of what they did during the war in Southeast Asia, whether it was right or wrong, always appeared to be wrong to the people there. The militarists saw everything only in a Japanese perspective and, even worse, they insisted that all others dealing with them should do the same. For them there was only one way to do a thing, the Japanese way; only one goal and interest, the Japanese interest; only one destiny for the East Asian countries, to become so many Manchukuos or Koreas tied forever to Japan. These racial impositions—they were just that—made any real understanding between the Japanese militarists and the peoples of our region virtually impossible.

✓ The case of Japan is indeed tragic. Looking at it historically, no nation has done so much to liberate Asia from white domination, yet no nation has been so misunderstood by the very peoples whom it has helped either to liberate or to set an example to in many things. Japan was betrayed by her militarists and their racial fantasies. Had her Asian instincts been true, had she only been faithful to the concept of Asia for the Asians that she herself had proclaimed at the beginning of the war, Japan's fate would have been very different. No military defeat could then have robbed her of the trust and gratitude of half of Asia or even more, and that would have mattered a great deal in finding for her a new, great, and abiding place in a postwar world in which Asia was coming into her own. Even now, even as things actually are, nothing can ever obliterate the role Japan has played in bringing liberation to countless colonial peoples. The phenomenal Japanese victories in the Pacific and in Southeast Asia which really marked the beginning of the end of all imperialism and colonial-

ism, the national armies Japan helped to create during the war which in their turn created a new spirit and will in a large part of Asia, the independent states she set up in several Southeast Asian countries as well as her recognition of the provisional government of Free India at a time when not a single other belligerent power permitted even the talk of independence within its own dominions, and finally a demonstration by the entire Japanese people of the invincibility of the Asian spirit when they rose out of the ashes to a new greatness, these will outlive all the passing wartime strains and passions and betrayals in the final summing-up of history.



The Burmese and the Japanese were not the only people who collided in Burma during the war. There were similar troubles among the native races too, and between those races and the Chinese troops. They broke out wherever the multiracial armies roamed and had dealings with the people. This part of the story also has so great a bearing on the course events were to take later in Burma that it must be related at some length.

Of all these conflicts, the most savage and senseless was the one that broke out in the southern delta region between the Burmese and the Karens, with the Indians drawn into it in many places. It lasted for weeks and culminated in a cold-blooded mass slaughter in Myaungmya and the countryside around it. In a sense the fight still goes on; a Karen rebellion has raged for years now with the avowed purpose of setting up an independent Karen state. It is a tangled, sordid story which, if told in full, would go very far back. But I will confine it to what is relevant here. I will narrate the occurrences as I have learnt them from both sides, and, to be candid, without much hope of pleasing either side completely.

The Karens are a large indigenous race in Burma with a clear racial identity derived from a separate folk history, folk values, and folk outlook, all kept alive tenaciously. Politically, they followed in the colonial years the practice of the minorities by using the ruling British power as a shield against the pressure of the majority Burmese race. It was an act of political expediency,

but it had its consequences; it drove a deep wedge between the two races. Under the British-made constitutions they became two separate communities, and at each stage of reform and growth during the British period the Karens drifted further away from the Burmese. In consequence, the Karens lagged behind while the Burmese struggled and moved ahead.

The Karens sought security for themselves and their interests by remaining tribal instead of becoming national in their general outlook. In fact, a large number of them believe that a Burmese-dominated nation to which they are indissolubly tied will mean their gradual extinction as a community, or at least permanent neglect and inferiority to the Burmese. They also believe that, unless their rights are protected in some immutable way, they will sooner or later lose them to the more numerous, sharp-witted, and aggressive Burmese. These feelings are so old and deep-rooted that they have become more or less a part of the basic make-up of that race.

The British were quick to see this. They consequently decided to give such protection to the Karens as they did to the minority races in India. Thus they created a minority problem in Burma, or at any rate made the problem bigger and graver than it really was. They also gave the Karens military training in the British army in Burma, whereas the Burmese, in spite of their long and notable fighting history, were kept out altogether. In many similar ways the British encouraged the two races to be more aware of their differences and less of their common interests and destiny. When the war came, the Karens as a community remained loyal to the British, and Karen troops in the British army fought staunchly till the end. When at last the British withdrew from Lower Burma, the disbanded Karens returned to their homes in the districts and there came face to face with the victory-flushed, race-obsessed B.I.A. and its new, free-swinging civil administrations. More ominously, all the jails had been thrown open at about the same time, which set free a large number of criminals. These men quickly joined one side or the other to exploit the disorder prevailing then, and so brought the communal conflict nearer. Disbanded Karen soldiers returning to their delta homes in the last days of March took back with them their army weapons. It happened also that at that time the B.I.A. was badly in need of

firearms for the large number of recruits continuing to join it as well as for its various local associations. When, therefore, it learnt of the arms in the possession of the Karens, it decided to seize them. People who had not only fought for the British enemy but had shown every sign of remaining loyal to them had necessarily to be disarmed; up to that point the B.I.A. was in the right.

Unhappily, however, everything went wrong after that. With every advance they made, racial hysteria mounted among the B.I.A. troops and their growing camp, racial slogans became more strident and threatening, and racial hate and arrogance increased. And when the B.I.A. ordered the Karens to surrender their firearms, the Karens as well as the Indians grew suspicious of Burmese intentions. However, upon being assured by some of their leaders, like Saw Pe Tha, a former minister in the Burma government, that it was the usual thing done in a war, a few Karen villages complied with the order. Very soon those villages were attacked and looted by roving, well-armed gangs while, according to the Karens, the B.I.A. looked on or even joined in and led the raids. The Karens concluded that behind the B.I.A. treachery, as they saw it, there was a plan to rob and exterminate their community.

The Indians shared the fear in regard to themselves. In fact, there was already an Indian massacre, or the signs of one, which had caused the Indians in the delta to migrate in large numbers to the safer districts nearby where their communal strength was great. In Myaungmya District, however, the racial passions were more rampant and thus the fears were greater and the danger more real. Also the strength of the two main communities in a large number of areas in the district was roughly equal.

So the Karens and the Indians decided to defend themselves; even more, to strike back with equal violence if necessary. In one instance they did so, killing some B.I.A. men. Then the fat was in the fire, as the British would say. The Japanese armies were then fully occupied with the campaign in the north so that meanwhile they left most civil matters to the B.I.A. and its local bodies. The result was a full-scale communal gang war in the delta, which raged till the Japanese were able to step in and suppress it after they had captured the rest of Burma.

{ The Karens stopped surrendering their weapons and threatened

to shoot at sight any of their leaders who spoke of further relations with the B.I.A. In several places they removed in a body to their larger villages, which they fortified stoutly, and from this security they raided the Burmese villages, plundering and burning with equal rage. Armed gangs also ambushed and disrupted river transport. This proved to be a severe blow to the Burmese. The B.I.A. men retaliated, but did so at a great disadvantage, for while the Karens fought defensively from well-prepared strongholds with tough war veterans leading them, the bulk of the new Burmese force in that area was hardly a fighting force, and they attacked from exposed positions. For two months or more the raids and counterraids went on in Myaungmya District and even spread to the adjoining Karen areas in Bassein, Henzada, and Pyapon.

At that juncture it happened that in one Karen attack Lt. Colonel Ijima, a friend of Bo Mogyo's, was killed. This led Bo Mogyo to perpetrate one of his foulest deeds. He ordered the extermination of two large Karen villages, Kanazogon and Thayagon, with all their inhabitants, although they had nothing to do with Ijima's death. The villages were surrounded at night and set on fire at one end. As the men, women, and children rushed in a panic to flee from the other end, B.I.A. troops who waited there cut down every one within their reach with swords in the traditional Japanese fashion. Few escaped, and all the wounded were left to die in the flames. After this shambles it became an open race war. The Karens, now thoroughly desperate and fighting-mad, retaliated by attacking more Burmese villages and being more brutal. Even religious edifices did not escape, and pagodas and monasteries as well as Christian mission houses were set on fire. Both sides were out for the utmost revenge.

As the havoc spread and one village after another was destroyed or abandoned, the Burmese refugees flocked into the town of Myaungmya, which became the main Burmese refugee camp, while the fleeing Karens and Indians made their way to the protected Karen centres. Myaungmya seethed with all the hate and fear that the senseless conflict had stirred, and its Karen community lived as virtual hostages in Burmese hands. This state of affairs led to a Karen blunder which spread the flames still further.

San Po Thin, a sincere, brave, but completely muddle-headed

Karen leader, decided to attack Myaungmya in order to rescue Saw Pe Tha and the rest of his community from their plight in that Burmese town. He wrote a secret message to Saw Pe Tha to inform him that the attack would take place on May 26 and, incredible as it seems, sent it by a Burmese runner whose family he held as hostage for the man's good behaviour. It never occurred to him that he had no means of checking that behaviour except by what the man himself told him, nor did he realise that he would be giving Saw Pe Tha a treacherously false impression of the man's reliability, for, believing that San Po Thin trusted the man, he would be led to trust him equally.

Saw Pe Tha fell into that trap. The Burmese runner took the message he carried to the B.I.A. authorities who, after noting its content, told him to deliver it to Saw Pe Tha and bring them back the reply before taking it back to San Po Thin. All this was done. Saw Pe Tha replied that as his efforts to restore communal peace had failed, he would leave San Po Thin to act as he thought best. To the B.I.A. this reply was deeply compromising. It had also other reasons to believe that Saw Pe Tha and certain Karen leaders were playing a double game.

Anyway, when the attack was launched early on the morning of the fixed date the B.I.A. was ready for it. As the whole element of surprise on which the Karens depended was gone, it was easily beaten back. It is said that in order to achieve the necessary speed and secrecy for a quick victory the Karens had come lightly armed, with the result that their ammunition ran out before they could breach the Burmese defence. The attack was also crippled from the start by internal discords, for the more cautious Karen leaders had persuaded two out of the three units of the assault force to stay away.

The whole abortive adventure turned out to be a farce. But its consequences proved very grave. A fearful punishment followed for the Karen community in Myaungmya. All except Saw Pe Tha and his family were immediately arrested and thrown into prison as hostages, and their houses were ransacked. As for Saw Pe Tha, a mob led by a Thakin who had never forgiven him for refusing him a favour when Saw Pe Tha was a government judicial minister surrounded his house, broke in and massacred him and his entire family, except a young son who miraculously escaped, and burnt the entire house down.

For nearly two weeks the destruction raged, and so did the mass arrests and torture and killings around Myaungmya, especially of hostages held by both sides. "The Karens operating in gangs terrorised large areas," an old Thakin leader who witnessed most of it told me. "There was also every sign that they were hiding the arms left them by the British to be used one day against us and the Japanese. But I must say in fairness that many of the young local Thakins who were then on the way to power started the terrorism. Most of the first incidents were provoked by their atrocities." He mentioned many names and incidents to support his statement.

"For instance," the Thakin leader continued, recalling one incident in particular, "on the very day I arrived at Myaungmya, I saw a row of Karens kept standing on shaky logs with their raised arms tied to a beam high above their heads. It was a slow and excruciating form of torture the B.I.A. had learnt from the Japanese. Those men had been kept like that for hours without food, drink, or respite of any kind. No one seemed to know how long the torture would continue. After a long, tactful talk with the B.I.A. officer in charge, I succeeded in bringing it to an end. I know that some of the things done elsewhere were even more appalling."

"And what about the things the Karens did?" I asked him, to keep the picture balanced.

"I saw a lot of that too," he replied just as readily. "I saw a number of Burmese villages robbed and gutted. At one place I saw a pile of corpses of Burmese men, women, and children with their skulls cracked and their bodies hacked all over. The Karens did not spare even the dead. Once, while travelling on a steamer up the river, Karen terrorists opened fire on us and we narrowly escaped. A small launch that followed a little later did not have the same luck; it was held up, completely looted, and many in it taken away as hostages. They were never seen again." He stopped, and then, regaining his perspective, continued. "There was not much to choose between the two sides. Both were acting like demons." Thus, according to all the eye-witness accounts I have obtained, the orgy of mutual killing and burning and torture went on implacably for weeks.

In Myaungmya jail, batches of twenty and sometimes more Karen and Indian hostages would be executed daily as a reprisal for the Karen attack on the town, as well as for their atrocities in

the countryside, and the Karens would retaliate with more atrocities. And so the gruesome business continued, and the toll climbed, and would have gone on climbing to an unbearable culmination if certain other events had not intervened almost miraculously.

The military campaign in Burma ended in the latter part of May 1942, and the Japanese were now able to take up the task of creating a proper administration in the country. By then they had discovered the utter failure of the B.I.A. and its local organs in trying to carry out such a task, and had actually begun to disband them in many areas. Also in that third week of May I had come out of my hiding in the northern hills, and the Japanese had taken me to Mandalay. Having thus found me they were able to take the first actual steps for the setting up of a central civil administrative body. This was done in Maymyo, a northern hill station, on June 4. The next day I, as the Chief Civilian Administrator, and Aung San, as the representative of the B.I.A., agreed to the dissolution of that army and all its various creations.

As the chief of the civilian administration, I had discussed the general situation with the Japanese High Command, in the course of which I had drawn its attention, and also Bo Mogyo's a day or two later, to the imperative need to stop the communal carnage in the delta. Both General Nasu, the Deputy Chief of Staff of the Japanese Army, and Bo Mogyo fully agreed with me. Nasu even told me that this communal strife and bloodshed had worried them for some time.

During the second week of June the Japanese army moved into the racially torn areas and took control of them till the new civil authorities would be ready to take over. The effect was almost instantaneous. All hostages in Myaungmya jail as well as elsewhere were set free, the Karens willingly gave up their arms to the Japanese in the changed circumstances, and a general calm followed. By the middle of the month the larger communal fires had died out. But the cinders remained, as a postwar Karen rebellion that has now gone on for well over a decade has so unmistakably revealed.

I will now let some of the Burmese and Karens who know the facts personally narrate them in their own way. A Karen leader,

whose name I promised not to reveal to enable him to speak more freely, told me of what he himself went through in those black weeks. "Even before the Karen attack on the town we Karens in Myaungmya had a foreboding that something was brewing which would make our lot very much worse. The B.I.A. men were behaving more arrogantly, and that was a bad sign for us. Then it all occurred with a rush after the Karen attack on the town. That morning my family and I, and in fact the whole Karen community, sat in our homes and waited in suspense for the worst to happen. Soon I heard a crowd collecting at my gate and noisily ordering us to come out. I went, and all of them glowered at me ferociously. The leader stopped glowering when he saw my very expensive wrist watch. He asked me at once to take it off and hand it over to him. I did so, hoping that it would pacify him a bit. It did; his face looked better as he started to strap the watch on his own wrist. Then he turned to the crowd and told them not to be too rough with us. I knew then that my family and I were safe at least for the moment. Next, we were told to line up in the street. We obeyed. Then we were told to follow them to the jail. Again we obeyed, leaving our possessions behind in the house never to see them again. On the way we saw all the other Karen households being similarly herded to the jail. It is a large jail, and we were kept in separate groups. Out of each group twenty men were taken and locked away separately. I was among the twenty from our group. It was only later that we knew we were picked out as hostages to be executed in groups."

"How did you come to know that?" I asked.

"I myself saw two large groups, one Indian and the other Karen, being led out, and they never returned. We learnt that this was also happening elsewhere in the jail. On the days when it occurred, strangled cries and moans would be heard, and then the sound of a lot of digging and dumping and the dull thud of falling earth would follow from just outside the jail wall, which told us grimly what was going on. When at last a Japanese officer took me and my family away from that jail, he showed us some long, freshly filled trenches and asked if we wanted to recover the bodies of any of our relatives who had been executed and buried there. We burst into tears and replied that we did not want them or to see them again."

"And how did you happen to escape?" I asked him. I can almost see him again, his face slightly turned away as if he was afraid I would notice too much how he was feeling.

"By a miracle; in fact, two," he replied after a long pause. He now spoke slowly and with frequent pauses. "I had a Burmese friend who knew one of the more important-looking jailors rather well. He asked this jailor to see that I and another man with me were safe. The other man was a Burmese friend who was voluntarily sharing our fate for the sake of his Karen wife. It also happened that this jailor was a soccer fan who had seen me play in some of the big soccer matches in Rangoon. One day he took the two of us away from our group of hostages. An hour or so later the group was led out and executed. Two nephews of mine were in the group." He stopped again and looked away. I could see that he was almost breaking down, for the story was bringing back many memories he had tried to forget. After a short while he recovered and went on. He seemed now determined to give me the whole story as he knew it.

✓ "The second miracle happened one day in June when a Japanese officer visited the jail. He looked carefully at us, picked me out, and, after asking me a few questions to see if I was intelligent and honest enough for his purpose, took me away for interrogation. I had the presence of mind to ask him to allow my family to go with me. He did so when he saw the state we were in, literally bundles of skin and bones and rags. He questioned me about Karen loyalty to the British. He wanted to know the reason for it. I told him quite simply. The British had always protected the Karens against the Burmese as well as the other communities who were pushing them out of everything, and treated them fairly. The Japanese could win Karen loyalty in the same way. There was nothing more to it than that, I told him. He must have been convinced that I was speaking the truth, for he shook his head up and down very decisively several times and sent me away. The next day or so he and his men took control of the administration; they took over the jail, released the Karens and Indians still found alive, and finally suppressed all further lawlessness in Myaungmya. Soon the whole town was more or less normal and safe again. For me, it was like a third miracle."

✓ Several other Karen leaders told me of similar experiences. That

is why I have given this man's story in full; it is in essence the story of all of them. I also found that, unlike the Burmese, they still remember with great vividness and even pain the delta incidents. In fact, it was dismaying to hear them speak of the atrocities as if they had happened only recently, so much so that almost in despair I asked some of them if the Karens would never forgive and forget it all, now that the two races were bound together by a new destiny. One reply I got was so searing that I made a note of it.

"It's a hard question to answer," this man replied, trying at first to keep a hold on himself, but carried away completely as he went on. "For a minority always exposed to such sort of dangers, it is not easy or safe to forget what they have endured again and again. It comes back with each fresh sign of danger. Also, many Burmese actions are not helping us to forget anything. Compared with the Burmese, we may be regarded as slow in our ways, slow to act as well as react. Perhaps it is because we live more closely to the soil, and so move with its slow pace. Thus it takes a lot to rouse us, but once that happens, it takes an equal lot to make us forget what roused us. Most of our people have slowly come to the conclusion that the Burmese—that is those we have had to deal with—have tried to treat the Karens as they treated the Japanese, by using them and then, when their usefulness had been exhausted, by turning against them. They used us to appease the British in the last days of the war and to gain their independence later. But after they had got what they wanted, they started to refuse us what we wanted. They did much more; Karen villages were again attacked, and our men and women slaughtered in cold blood as had often happened before. This time the Karens have replied with a full-sized rebellion."

He spoke convulsively, almost hysterically, so much so that he often had to stop to regain his breath. "As long as the Burmese big-race ways towards us do not change," he continued, "this rebellion, even if it should be crushed in the end by superior numbers and arms, will go on in the hearts of the Karens, and will break out again and again till the two races part for good." Again he stopped, and then discovered more to say.

"The Burmese are smart," he said letting himself go at last, "but many of them try to be smarter than they really are. Because

they got the better of the Japanese in their defeat that way, they think they can get the better of everybody in the same way. This time the Karens are determined not to be outsmarted by them. Our people now fighting in the jungles want nothing less than to be permanently free from such Burmese. They are fighting for nothing less than complete independence."

✓ This was the drift of the man's words, which I have made a little more coherent and perhaps more dramatic also than they actually were. To make sure that I had understood him correctly, I explained to him what I have written here, and he endorsed every word of it. He was of course expressing the extreme Karen view, but further talks with many Karen leaders have convinced me that this view dominates the community. No Karen when talking to me alone has denied it. Its importance goes even beyond that community, for it states with considerable accuracy the whole problem of our race relations in Burma, a problem which has got sharper in recent years. The Karens are typical of all our national races; they have long traumatic memories in racial matters.

✓ The Burmese as a whole, however, do not have such memories. In keeping with their racial temperament, they act quickly, subside quickly, and forget quickly. When they are violent or destructive, they act so as children do, that is, on impulse and without any deep consciousness of right or wrong at such times. It is this temperamental difference that has made the barrier between the two races seem a lot bigger than it really is or should be. One thing, however, is true: the Burmese do as a rule show a big-race mentality in their dealings with the smaller native races; they find it hard to forget their long historical domination over those races. The Karens also cannot forget the Burmese domination, but needless to say for very different reasons; most of all, for what they have suffered or lost materially in consequence. This explains the barrier to a large extent. On one side there are the Burmese with their old ingrown spirit of superiority breaking out in a crisis, temperamental and violent when that happens but not for long, so much so that it hardly even leaves behind a sense of guilt; and on the other side, the Karens, whose reflexes as a race are slow but deep and lasting, whose continual frustrations have made them

morbidly sensitive and suspicious of those who they believe have been the cause of those frustrations.

When to this long-standing inner tension is added the new tensions resulting from the war, especially that created by the sudden outburst of the racial spirit in this part of Asia when Japan drove the white powers out of it, the ground was prepared for all the racial militancy and overtones that followed. The newly liberated peoples just went race-mad. There is not the slightest reason to doubt that the Burmese, always aggressive on such occasions, were aggressive towards the Karens and the Indians in the first months of the war. But as against this fact there are others to remember: the fact first that it was a time when a huge portion of Eastern Asia was exploding racially; that most other things were exploding too in the wake of the war and the national revolutions it stirred up, one of the first things to be blown to bits being the whole structure of law and order; that in the vast transitory jungle left behind, all the power and responsibility were suddenly thrust into the hands of a very mixed collection of youths who had never had the slightest notion of such things before. There was also the fact that the two races as a whole had taken opposite sides in what was generally regarded in Burma as a race war. This split them still wider apart.

Yet one more fact, perhaps the most basic of all, is that a great upheaval throws up the good as well as the bad, and the bad that rises to the top is largely the froth or scum floating for a brief while on the vast tides below and not a part of the tides themselves; or as a Burmese saying describes them, they are "jungle cats clapping their arms during a jungle fire." Froth or jungle cats are just excrescences that soon pass away, as they actually did after some weeks in the wartime conflict between the Burmese and the Karens, thus proving further that they had little communal significance. Such are some of the facts that the two races must learn to recognise in order to understand their problem correctly. Both will have to see the problem from more than one side. The Karens must learn not only to remember but also to forget, and the Burmese must not only forget but remember as well. Only so will both be able to obliterate the past and live with each other as they should and must in the years ahead; only a long and complete per-

spective can save both of them, and indeed all the races belonging to Burma.



The Karen trouble in the delta was only the sharp, outer edge of the interracial crisis building up in several areas in Burma during those early months, particularly in the north. The hill peoples there had lived under the shelter of British power, and now that that power was crumbling, their old fears of the big race in the southern plains that the British had kept alive by various devices returned; and when the Burmese army and its assorted following approached their territories, those fears increased.

✓ But first of all I will deal with the race incidents in Burma proper. They occurred chiefly in the central districts like Toun-goo, Pegu, and Tharrawaddy, where the minority communities were large in number. The conflicts were accompanied by the usual raids, but those were sporadic and incidental. Some of the Karens, Indians, and Chinese fought back, some turned to the Japanese for protection as they once had to the British. Most of the Indians and Chinese, however, took fright and either joined the great mass trek to India and China, or moved to larger communal concentrations.

The amazing flight to India was one of the saddest tragedies of the war in Burma. There is really no adequate explanation for it except mass panic of the most hysterical kind. Owing to the communal outbreaks involving Indians here and there in the period of anarchy that followed the break between two administrations during the Japanese invasion when all the communities including the Burmese suffered equally, a section of Indians lost their heads and the British for their own reasons encouraged them to do so. The result was that thousands of them abandoned almost everything in a panic and fled to India by the most preposterous routes. I asked many of them their reason for doing it. There was none they could give circumstantially except those who fled from Arakan. The refugees from Arakan had a good reason for fleeing. The others, however, did not really have any. In many cases it appeared that their fears were partly subconscious stirrings of the memory of past

race riots, or a vague fear of a Burmese attempt to settle old scores. But mostly it was race nostalgia, a feeling that at a time when the world around seemed to be collapsing the homeland was safest and best for them.

✓ I put a straight question to Tyabji, the veteran Indian Congress leader in Burma, who also fled across the northern Naga Hills with Stilwell's forces. "Did either the Japanese or the Burmese obstruct or harass the refugees in any way during this fantastic trek to India?" I asked.

✓ "No," he replied without hesitation. "Japanese planes would fly low over us and our camps, and then I would tell all to put on their Indian caps and sit quietly on the ground. The planes would then fly away. Nothing more happened. In fact, the Burmese and the hill people helped us all the way." He stopped for a moment, and then continued with a sudden bitterness. "It was only when we stepped across the border into India right on top one of those Naga hills which leave you panting and wishing you were dead that we did not get the welcome and help from our own people that we had expected would be waiting for us. For two more days we trudged along with our feet almost falling off before we reached a place which offered us some sort of hospitality. Finally we got to Imphal, where the British army received us warmly and saw to all our needs."

✓ When I told him that there was not a single race incident involving Indians or any other minority community in Burma under my government right till the end of the war, that we had given all the help we could to Subhas Chandra Bose and seen his Free India grow and become real in the shadow of our hospitality, he looked deeply interested and wistful, but said nothing. For me it was as if he had said everything.

✓ The mass migration to India took four routes passing respectively through Tamu, the Naga Hills, the Hukong Valley, and Maungdaw and Buthidaung in Arakan. Soon it became a stampede and took a fearsome toll. In the wild Hukong Valley it became catastrophic; thousands trapped in its treacherous swamps and quicksands died in slow agony. So many perished there that it came to be called the *evacuees'* graveyard. Still more were swallowed up by the impenetrable jungles and were never heard of again. The journey across the Naga Hills was somewhat better,

and the toll, chiefly as a result of fevers and epidemics, was less large. According to British estimates, which understandably kept the figures low, nearly half a million fled to India, of whom a great many, whose number no one cared to keep count, died on the way. It is even said that this terror-stricken flight killed or destroyed in other ways more people than the whole of the early military operations in Burma did.

The northern peoples met the crisis in their customary ways. The Shans were the first to do so. Quite early in the campaign, they foresaw the change that was coming and acted in accordance with the good old rule, the simple plan, of such races, which was to accept their fate from the hands of the conqueror, and in return to ask for the best terms they could get from him. As soon as the Japanese army moved into the Shan States, the *sawbwas* or chiefs formally submitted to it and requested that all other armies, the Chinese and the Burmese in particular, should be kept out of their territories. By then the friction between the Japanese and the B.I.A. had increased, and so had the rumours of the B.I.A. terror. The Chinese forces were also in full flight to Yunnan. In consequence, the Japanese readily complied with the Shan request, which suited their plans perfectly. A small platoon of the Burmese army that had just entered the Shan States was ordered to leave at once. That unit had lost no time in footing the Shans, and upon its return to Burmese territory Bo Let Ya had its commanding officer summarily shot for the crimes he had committed. Another Burmese unit that had attempted to follow the Japanese into those states was also turned back.

As for the Chinese, they were savagely chased out by the Japanese wherever they were found. Within a year all the chiefs had sworn allegiance to Japan, and were permitted to continue to run their states under general Japanese control, a system which ended only when Burma gained her independence in August 1943. Thus in the absence of the Burmese army, there was no outbreak of racial feeling against the Burmese in the Shan States. But something else occurred which was materially more damaging for the Shans.

We have seen how, after their defeat in the Karenni hills in the middle of April 1942, the Chinese forces fell back into the Shan States in order to escape by that route into Yunnan in China. But

they found themselves trapped there by the Japanese, whose motorised forces got in before them, both from the south and from Thailand in the north, and captured Lashio. That town straddles the road to China. The Japanese were consequently able to cut the road in several places, as well as the Chinese armies pouring into it. Caught thus, "the panic-stricken Chinese forces became an undisciplined rabble," as an American historian, John F. Cady,* has put it bluntly. They disintegrated into open bandit gangs who roamed the countryside, raiding the villages they passed to take everything they could carry away. I will soon describe some of the incidents I personally witnessed at the time.

There was a historical reason for the Shan request for protection. For centuries from the far-off time when the Mongols destroyed Nan-chao, the ancient Thai kingdom, and a little later the Pagan dynasty in Burma, up till the last Shan revolt against the last Burmese king less than a century ago, the Shans as well as the other tribes inhabiting the border hill country lived precariously between China and Burma, and their story was one of unending raids and conquests and demands for tribute by the Chinese on one side and the Burmese on the other. Not being a region where much occurs, whatever does occur is magnified and remembered for a long time. Thus tribal memories there, just as elsewhere, are few but tenacious, and it takes very little to stir them up again. In the present case they returned when the war approached Shan territory, and the Chinese terror revived to such an extent that, according to a British writer who had no reason to accuse the Chinese falsely for any action during the war, the Shans in general kept saying in dismay, "It is easy to ask them [the Chinese] in, but how are you ever going to get them out?" A similar misgiving, of course, existed in regard to the Burmese army as well. The Japanese army dispelled these fears by driving both the Chinese and the Burmese armies out. The hill peoples seemed to have been considerably pacified as a result.

From all accounts given by their friends as well as their enemies, the Chinese armies behaved barbarously throughout their entire campaign in Burma, and in flight they became plain looters and bandits. Even official British wartime intelligence publications, which normally would conceal such a fact, mentioned it. "The

* In *History of Modern Burma*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, N. Y., 1978.

Chinese troops seem to have made themselves thoroughly unpopular with Burmans wherever they went," one such report states. "From the Kachin Hills and the Shan States also come tales of looting, murder, forced labour, and failure to give payment or compensation, all of which will take the Chinese some time to live down." Considering that it was made by their British ally at a critical moment in the war, the indictment could not be more damning.

✓ It was in many essential ways the same in the Kachin Hills farther north and west. The Kachins shared with the other tribes living around them the same memories of the Chinese, and now the havoc spread by the Chinese troops passing through the region brought those memories back most grimly. According to a British intelligence report, large numbers of the Kachins acted as the Shans did; they sought the protection of the Japanese against these Chinese bandits who, after their defeat in the Mandalay area, were making their way to Myitkyina and the Kachin Hills in order to escape into China. For instance, a British report mentions that the Japanese were invited by the Kachins into the heart of their country near Bhamo "to protect them against the looting of Chinese troops."

✓ These experiences left the Kachin leadership split and confused for the rest of the war; while some continued to be loyal to the British, many of their tribal chiefs worked with the Japanese and the Burmese. As for the mass of the people, they remained utterly fatalistic and unconcerned with the alien struggle going on around them. In these circumstances the Japanese succeeded in getting all the collaboration they needed from these people. They also kept the Burmese army out of the Kachin country; the few Burmese troops who reached Myitkyina were soon made to go back to Burma proper. Even after Burmese independence was recognised in 1943 that part of Burma remained under Japanese military administration as an emergency war measure against the British threat from India. The Kachins willingly agreed to remain under the Japanese.

Similarly, there was no racial trouble in the Chin Hills, where, surprisingly, a British remnant continued to stay on for another year or so after the military campaign in Burma had ended. The Chins on the whole followed the policy of all those hill tribes,

which was to keep clear of other people's feuds and problems, and it appears that they succeeded in doing so throughout the last war. At any rate, they did not collide with any other race; neither the Chinese nor the Burmese army got into their territory, while the Japanese left them alone for the most part because they also left the Japanese alone.

√ In Arakan, the southwestern part of Burma adjoining India, the racial strife—in a way the worst that tore Burma during that period of the war—took its own geographical configuration. It was almost entirely an affair between the Arakanese and the large community of Indian settlers and immigrants in the region. The B.I.A. came into it at times only in order to restore peace, while the Japanese kept out altogether in pursuance of the military policy they were following then of keeping the people near the Indian border as friendly as possible and of avoiding all action which might cause misunderstanding in India.

The B.I.A. unit under the command of Bo Yan Aung, the first of the thirty comrades to accompany Aung San to Japan in 1940, left for Arakan at the end of March 1942. It preceded the Japanese by a few days. After a brief skirmish with some straggling British troops at Ponnagyun and a short halt there till the last British forces had left the area, this army entered Akyab, the capital town. All along the way it had carried out the two tasks of getting recruits for itself and giving its own civil administration to the people. For the same historical reasons as in the case of the other smaller races, relations between the Burmese and the Arakanese are always a touchy matter, but the B.I.A. that marched into Arakan proved to be popular.

√ There were three main reasons for it; the new national surge and its various pressures had brought the two peoples closer to each other for some years; under the unrelaxing vigilance of Yan Aung and the right type of young Arakanese officers he had gathered around him, the Burmese army as a whole behaved somewhat like a real army and not an armed rabble; lastly, the communal conflicts between the Arakanese and Indians were already spreading in Akyab District when this army first made its appearance, and the two communities at war with each other hailed its coming for their own reasons, the Arakanese expecting arms and other forms of support against the Indians and the Indians expecting it

as a military unit to protect them by quelling all lawlessness. By then Arakanese recruits were crowding into the B.I.A. in Arakan, but by firm handling Yan Aung and his team succeeded in keeping those who joined them out of the communal fray.

The wartime tensions between the two communities in Arakan, the Arakanese and the Indian, began soon after the first British setbacks, and by the time the British evacuation was completed, Akyab District was in open turmoil. The Arakanese attacked the large Indian concentrations in such areas as Myebon, Minbya, and Myohaung, and the Indians were forced to flee to the settlements near the Indian border or across into India. Kyauktaw, Alegyun, and several other large Indian villages were set on fire. The more far-seeing Arakanese tried to protect those who were Indian merely by ancestry and religion but belonged to the country in all other ways. Most of the mischief, however, had been done by then, and a great portion of the native Indian community in that district had been plundered, uprooted, and driven out.

✓As was to be expected, reprisals soon followed in the border areas where the Indian settlements were strong and numerous, and the Indians, continually replenished from India, which lies just across a narrow stream, far outnumbered the Arakanese. In turn Arakanese villages in the Maungdaw and Buthidaung area near the border were sacked and burnt and the Arakanese inhabitants made to flee to the two towns. There is a story that some five hundred Arakanese maidens were forcibly carried away by the Indians. Most of the Arakanese cattle and grain also disappeared similarly. The atrocities were so widespread and revolting that the B.I.A. and the Arakanese population requested the Japanese to suppress them. But, as I have said, the Japanese did nothing. They even advised the B.I.A. not to visit the stricken areas.

✓The B.I.A. however went to protect the Burmese and Arakanese refugees in the two large towns. As soon as the Burmese troops reached Maungdaw and Buthidaung, the towns were threatened by the vast hordes from the Indian settlements around. Being in danger of being cut off and overwhelmed, the B.I.A. decided to pull out from Maungdaw together with as many of the refugees as could be taken away in the boats that were at their disposal. A tragedy followed: there was such a panic-stricken rush for the big boats that one of them sank under the weight of the people crowd-

ing into it. Almost all on the boat were drowned. The B.I.A. departed with the refugees on the other boats after advising the rest in the two towns to seek temporary peace with the local Indian community as best they could.

✓ Bo Nyo Tun, the young Arakanese officer who was closest to Bo Yan Aung then and who later became a colourful resistance figure and still later a minister in a Burmese government after the war's end, told me the story of those few days in Buthidaung and Maungdaw. "As soon as we got to these towns we realised how big the problem was," he said. "We saw the refugees streaming in day and night, we heard their stories, which seemed to grow more harrowing. We heard how they had lost their homes and rice stocks and cattle. Finally, we heard of the seizure of the five hundred virgins. A day or so later we heard that the towns would be attacked if we stayed on. Militarily, it was a hopeless situation for us, because we were too few and unprepared, and our supplies were too small, and there was no chance whatever of getting any help from the Japanese. By fighting in these circumstances we should only have been bringing destruction to those whom we came to protect. Also the Japanese policy to discountenance any border action fettered us. So we decided to withdraw, after advising the local people to come to a peaceful understanding with the Indian settlements nearby. They agreed that there was no other course.

✓ But we still wanted to rescue the five hundred women who had been assaulted and carried away. Again we were frustrated. Most of them could not be traced, while those who could replied that it was too late: it was their fate, they said, to see their virginity and lives ended, and they must submit to fate. What was done could not be undone, they said. In any case, they could not bear the anguish of meeting again those who knew them and their awful degradation. Meeting with such easy resignation we could do nothing."

✓ As for the relations between the B.I.A. and the people in Arakan, Nyo Tun as well as several others said that, on the whole, they were smooth. Yan Aung was a tough disciplinarian. "He even had a few shot as an example to others," Nyo Tun told me. According to him, this had a striking effect; the B.I.A. in Arakan won the popular confidence at a time when in most places elsewhere the people were in terror of it.

When in June it was decided to disband the B.I.A. and create in its place a new regular army, Yan Aung's force was recalled. It returned, bringing back over 1,800,000 rupees collected from the local British treasuries. Every rupee was duly made over to the military headquarters in Rangoon.

Such, in broad outline, was the state of race relations in Burma during those three lurid months before the Provisional Burmese Central Committee was set up in June 1942 and went to work. It shows how, while the old problems looked as if they were getting close to a solution, a new one was taking shape—or rather a very old problem with a new contemporary edge, that of the relations between the various ethnic communities within the country in the fast-approaching day when it would be free and running itself. The problem, of course, is not peculiar to Burma. It exists in every land with a plural society composed of a number of races who have not succeeded in evolving a common national identity, as well as common interests strong enough to unify them.

In Burma, the upheaval caused by the Japanese invasion laid bare a great many facts hidden before. For instance, it revealed that the people still acted tribally in a lot of ways during a crisis, and their old tribal fear of the stranger returned at such times. This is partly the explanation for the very similar and spontaneous nature of the racial troubles that broke out in different areas in the country then. It also explains much that has happened since then. It is a sign of a return to the tribe. The numerous races that either lived in Burma or met there for the first time under the stark conditions of a total world conflict appeared to be seized by a sudden fear and distrust of one another; the Japanese, the Chinese, the Indians, the Burmese together with the other indigenous peoples, all were turning against one another under the stress of old, atavistic fears and suspicions, all finding the enemy in the nearest stranger, as they did in their tribal days. They were subconsciously returning to those days.

There were other causes too for the racial animosities. One of them definitely was the brutality and lawlessness of certain elements in the various armies roving throughout Burma in that open period, the Korea men in the Japanese army, the bandits among the Chinese troops, and the gunmen and political vermin,

as we call them in Burmese, hanging round the B.I.A. In the welter prevailing then, these creatures came to be hated, and this hatred spread to the races or communities or armies they represented. This perhaps is another explanation for the long racial turmoil that has continued in Burma for over two decades now, the Burmese conflict with the Japanese in the last days of the war, those with the Karens, the hill peoples, and the Mujahids after the war's end, and those seething even now in large areas. They all started more or less in the same way: during a war an army loses its head and behaves damnably towards the people of the country or certain ethnic communities among them; those people see the offending troops not as men brutalized by the war but as the races they belong to, and so whole nations are dragged in and the flames spread.

In the case of the conflicts among the native peoples themselves there are other reasons for them that go further back. It is the revenge that history has taken for the failure of these peoples to evolve from their tribal fragmentation into a single integrated nation. Being thus balked the forces of history have, in their well-known way, created contradictions which in Burma have given rise to the big-race and the small-race complexes. This is one of the germinal causes of our interracial tensions.

Yet another cause exists which must not be forgotten. It is connected with the political phenomena of the times. The driving force behind the Burmese struggle against British rule was essentially racial; it was a part of the revolt of the peoples of Asia against domination by other races. Consequently, the spirit that was driving the Burmese forward was likewise driving the other Asian peoples, both large and small, and making them equally race-conscious in their relations with each other. All were worked up to the same pitch of racial pride and intolerance, and in such a condition it was inevitable that at one time or another the races should collide. This is another way of viewing these wartime conflicts in Burma. They were in part the outcome of the new race-consciousness and the extreme susceptibilities it bred.

THE END OF THE B.I.A.

I will now get back to the main B.I.A. story itself. That army is about to march across the country.

✓ It takes us again to the beginning of April 1942. The Japanese divisions were rapidly pushing northward and the bulk of the Burmese army decided to follow them right up to Gangaw, a distant northern town lying on the way to India, where the British forces were expected to converge before finally falling back into that country. When the two divisions composing the main body of the B.I.A. and the army's entire headquarters reached Central Burma, they were sent ahead to the oil region round Magwe and Yenangaung in an attempt to prevent the British from destroying the oil properties before the first Japanese units could get there. The attempt failed, and these Burmese divisions continued their march north, setting up as usual local administrative bodies, or B.I.A. associations as they were called, to take over the liberated areas on the way. Upon reaching Kani in Upper Burma they were again ordered to change their route and to proceed to Myitkyina in the northern Kachin territory, but a little farther south. From there they were sent south to Mandalay, and then to Amarapura some miles away. The march of the two Burmese divisions ended there.

✓ These changes, which completely disrupted the last stage of the march of the B.I.A. across Burma, were the outcome of a storm that the two divisions left in their trail as they progressed north. Some of the causes of the trouble have been indicated before. Briefly, it arose out of the collision between the local administrations the B.I.A. created and the local Japanese military police, between the terror these administrations let loose and the Japanese terror. In the end the Japanese militarists decided to curb the B.I.A. as a whole by expelling it and its men from one town after another till almost the whole army was herded into Amarapura.

At the same time as those two divisions were travelling north, Yan Naing's seventh regiment also was heading north towards Tamu, the northernmost frontier town from where the last lap of the road to India starts. This B.I.A. unit had much more luck than the two divisions. When it began its long march along a route parallel to that taken by the advancing Japanese divisions, it had already become legendary.

The regiment's achievement was, however, not all just luck. There was also a lot of solid effort in it. Yan Naing had sense

enough to clean up and tighten up his army before the march. He got rid of the scum in all the ranks. A personal factor also helped him; it was the very real bond of comradeship, or a flesh-and-blood brotherhood as the Burmese say, existing between him and his officers as well as troops, for many reasons, one of which was Yan Naing's complete identification of himself with his men at all times, but most of all in times of hardship and peril.

The seventh regiment under Yan Naing was therefore in many ways the pick of the hastily improvised Burmese army, and people welcomed it frenziedly. The regiment likewise got on very well with the Japanese all along the route. Everywhere Yan Naing was hailed as the hero of the day. The towns he passed through vied with each other to honour him and his regiment, to name public streets and buildings after him, to name even dancing girls and cakes after him. This prodigious emotional demonstration shows how greatly the very appearance of a Burmese army had stirred the hearts of the people and how much the best in it meant to them. It shows too that the discord that arose in several places between the B.I.A., the Kempetai, and various elements in the local population was caused by shortcomings not of any one of them alone, but of all. Yan Naing says that there was never any friction worth mentioning between his men and others either Japanese or Burmese, all along his route.

But the two divisions taking another route did not have the same luck. They sowed a storm as they went along which spread and overtook them at first, and then the other B.I.A. forces. Thus the storm caught up with Yan Naing's regiment when he reached Monywa in the north. The regiment was ordered to stop its march and proceed towards Shwebo a little further north of Monywa, and then to Shwegu nearby, and finally to Amarapura to join the other Burmese forces. This was the end of the most memorable march accomplished by the Burma Independence Army during the whole of its brief and tempestuous existence.

During the same period a third B.I.A. unit, led by Bo Yan Aung, visited Arakan in the southwest. I have already spoken about its journey. The relations of this force with the Japanese as well as the local population were excellent, owing largely to Yan Aung's firm leadership. Its sudden recall to Rangoon was also part

of the action the Japanese militarists were taking against the Burmese army as a whole.



We are now at the last stage of the long B.I.A. story. It began in May 1942, when the whole of Burma had practically fallen into the hands of the Japanese. As for me, I had just arrived in Mandalay after having escaped from Mogok jail and wandered for a ghastly month among the Palaung hills till I met the Japanese forces after the fall of the northern Shan States. Almost as soon as I got to Mandalay I found myself right in the B.I.A. mess. From now on, therefore, I shall have to relate the part I played in clearing up that mess and bringing it to an end.

Aung San visited me within a week of my arrival in Mandalay. During this period my Kempetai guard was keeping a close watch to prevent any of the B.I.A. men from getting near me, so Aung San and his companion had to come after dark and in civilian dress in order not to be recognised. The town was tense with the wildest rumours and alarms, but chiefly with all sorts of stories about the tension between the two armies. Meanwhile, the Kempetai had driven the B.I.A. as well as its various organisations out of nearly every town, till finally the last remnants of that badly shaken army were ordered to remove from Mandalay to Amara-pura. As Aung San went on explaining the facts to me I realised that I could not keep out of it, but would have to join the others in trying to find a solution somehow.

Aung San took a very practical view of the situation. For example, he did not talk emotionally about the matter as did another Thakin leader, Kyaw Nyein, nor did he even put the blame on the Japanese as far as I can recollect, but he went straight to the need to find a way out. He saw that a good part of the B.I.A. problem lay within the B.I.A. itself. This army had without the slightest doubt gone out of control, he explained, mainly because too many were in control of its separate units and were acting independently of each other, and Bo Mogyo was in control of the whole of it independently of all the others. Bo Mogyo had now seen his error, he continued, and they had a scheme ready to start a properly run

and controlled training camp in Bhamo to reorganise the entire force. He also pointed out the immediate need for a new central civil authority and administration which must be backed by all the political parties supporting the national struggle. It was the first really sensible and constructive statement I had heard since my return, and I was much impressed. I felt that the spirit of the Freedom Bloc was returning and we were picking up the threads again from where we had left off two years ago. I promised Aung San to do all I could to help him.

"By the way," I said, getting down to the business at once, "you have so far been dealing only with the Kempetai. You cannot stop there. You must go higher up, if necessary to the highest summit. Whom do you know well in their general staff?"

"None," he replied, quite frankly. "I have met none of them."

I could hardly believe it. He then explained that it was Bo Mogyo's policy to keep the B.I.A., which he regarded as his personal army, aloof from the Japanese High Command. Bo Mogyo himself remained aloof, and they all had to follow his example. Without going further into this rather extraordinary situation I told Aung San that I would soon be taken to Maymyo to meet these top people, and I wanted him to come along with me. I should then be able to arrange an interview for him as well. Meanwhile, I suggested that we think out a plan to present to the Japanese. With that load off our minds for the time being, we spoke of the future as buoyantly as we used to do in the early days of the Freedom Bloc, but with a little less self-importance and complacency.

So we went together to Maymyo, where, after I had done my business, which related to the formation of a preparatory committee of administration, I was able to arrange with the Japanese general staff a meeting between some of its members and Aung San accompanied by me in order to discuss the B.I.A. problem. General Nasu, the deputy chief-of-staff, readily consented and we met the next day. That evening before the meeting I informed Aung San of a plan I had thought out meanwhile. I told him that in my view his Bhamo training project, or any other into which the Japanese did not come substantially, was sure to founder for the obvious reason that the Burmese by themselves had neither the modern military background nor the means to undertake such a

prodigious job, whereas the Japanese had all of them. Further, the two armies would have to live with each other throughout the war, and the relations between them could only be kept right if the Japanese were brought into the business of overhauling the Burmese army, for if they shared the responsibility for it they would also have to make a good job of it and recognize it as an army; there would be no more nonsense in future of seeking a pretext to destroy it.

My plan therefore was to insist that the Japanese should come into it directly; in other words, the new Burmese force which was to replace the B.I.A. should be a regular and permanent army, trained, equipped, and instructed by the Japanese. However, it would be completely Burmese in its composition and command at all levels. I saw the whole matter in that limited and pragmatic way. What I was too inexperienced to foresee then was that the Japanese militarists and racists, among the most fanatical in the world, would impart to the impressionable young Burmese force their own violent and paranoiac attitudes, and that would set a much bigger problem in the future than any that would be immediately solved.

Aung San liked my proposal. He was so gripped by the fear that a Burmese army would cease to exist altogether that he was ready to do almost anything to prevent such a calamity. He was in his realistic mood and he kept on repeating, "There must be a Burmese fighting force at any cost." I could not have agreed with him more. "It must be a Burmese force belonging to the Burmese," I added, "and to make it so we must have it effectively under a Burmese command. It means that Bo Mogyo must go, leaving you and your staff in control."

Aung San's face lit up, showing that I had said something which he himself wanted to say but could not, owing to the nature of his relations with Bo Mogyo. Then he said, as if he were trying to explain why he agreed with me, "Bo Mogyo is our teacher, and we have learnt to fear him as it were from the beginning of our days. This keeps us in his shadow always. As long as he is with us he will be leading us and we shall be following him. We shall not feel free to do what we really want." Saying this he agreed as to what we should tell the Japanese.

✓ The meeting took place the next morning. It went off very

smoothly. In presenting the Burmese viewpoint I carefully avoided saying anything that was likely to provoke a conflict and came to our proposal at once to the visible surprise of the Japanese. I could see that our constructive attitude cleared the air a lot and put the Japanese into an equally constructive and accommodating mood. The outcome of the talk was far-reaching: the B.I.A. would be disbanded, and in its place the Japanese would organise a new Burmese fighting force to be called the Burma Defence Army, or the B.D.A. for short. The new force would be completely Burmese and under Burmese command. Aung San, with the rank of a colonel in the Japanese army, would be its commander-in-chief.

It was a singularly successful meeting, most of all for Aung San. This was the first time the Japanese High Command had met him, and they were captivated by his quiet and unassuming behaviour; it was so different from the stories they had heard about B.I.A. officers in general. At this first meeting with Aung San they saw him in his most realistic mood. Colonel Hiraoka, the officer handling the relations between the Japanese and the Burmese, told me later that the Japanese present at the meeting had noticed a tear in Aung San's crumpled shirt which impressed them greatly; it seemed to convince them of Aung San's affinity with the Japanese soldiers. And when they observed that he spoke very little beyond agreeing with the proposal under discussion, they were further won over. In their eyes that torn shirt was a clear symbol, and so was Aung San's lack of speech; they were soldierly samurai virtues most valued by the Japanese. "He is one of us," they concluded. "He will never betray us."

The Japanese never lost their faith in Aung San and his torn shirt till he openly broke away from them, and even then they believed that he did so against his true will. Subhas Chandra Bose, who had to abandon everything he had built up so laboriously in Burma on account of the Burmese resistance, agreed with this view. Both of us were objective enough to come to the conclusion that a resistance in favour of the victors was inevitable in all the countries which were trying to save themselves from the consequences of a defeat. Actually, the Burmese resistance forces did just that, and Aung San could not break away from them without, as he thought, ruining himself politically. He too believed that

he had to be on the winning side along with those forces, a fact which Field Marshal Lord Slim makes clear in his *Defeat into Victory*. When they met, Aung San began by saying that it was because the Japanese had refused to give real independence to Burma that "he had, relying on our promise, turned to us as a better hope." (I may mention here that the only tangible promise Britain had given Burma upon victory was the notorious *Blueprint for Burma*, issued by Churchill's Conservative Party, which actually proposed to keep the Burmese under virtual military control for several years after the war. There were also Churchill's declarations that the Atlantic Charter did not apply to the British colonies and that he would refuse to preside at the liquidation of the British empire.) Slim brushed aside Aung San's words and came to the point. "Go on, Aung San," he said, cutting him short, "you only came to us because you see we are winning," and Aung San, taken by surprise, replied very simply, "It wouldn't be much good coming to you if you weren't, would it?" So it was the British victory that did it.



Coming back again to the actual story, Aung San accompanied me again when, at the beginning of June, I went up to Maymyo to set up the Provisional Committee, which would eventually organise the new Burmese government. The committee was formed the next day. One of my first acts as its head was to formally submit to General Iida, the Japanese Supreme Commander, my project regarding the new Burmese army, with Aung San in command. Aung San was with me at the time. General Iida knew the project already, and he at once gave his formal assent to it. It was also agreed to withdraw the B.I.A. and its local organs from all administrative functions and to recognize the civil authority of the Provisional Committee and its permanent services before the committee was replaced by a proper government.

The next day, which was June 5, 1942, Aung San issued the following order: "The Burma Independence Army shall not interfere with the administration of the country. Its officers and men shall also keep out of party politics or else they will be severely

punished. . . . As regards the formation of a government, the Japanese Supreme Commander, in consultation with the leaders of the country, has set up a preparatory committee to undertake it, and the B.I.A. has therefore no longer any administrative responsibility." He was in his realistic mood then and he made his part in the dissolution of the B.I.A. and the creation of the new Burmese army quite clear. It was only later, after he had obtained all the personal gains out of the changes, that, yielding to the political and anti-Japanese pressures kept up against all of us, his other mood set in.

Within the next few days Aung San returned to Amarapura, and I together with the other members of the Provisional Committee went down to Rangoon to commence our work. When I met him again after a month or so much had happened. As soon as the B.I.A. ranks heard that they would be disbanded, a storm broke over me. They did not wait to hear the whole plan or the reasons that made it imperative, but straightaway accused me of plotting with the Japanese to destroy the Burmese army and its political base, to drive out Bo Mogyo, the father of that army, and to use Aung San for my own designs, which were, they said, to concentrate all civil power in my hands. The local B.I.A. associations in every district and the political factions behind them joined in the cry as soon as they heard that all their power would be transferred to the Provisional Committee and the permanent public services, and this spread the accusation against me more widely. Needless to say, the British agents and partisans as well as the elements thriving on the anarchy rampant at the time joined in the attack.

✓ For various reasons I was unable to defend myself. First of all, I had just left prison where I had remained cut off from the people for two years. Also, owing to the restrictions placed upon my movements now, for my personal security as the Japanese explained, I was unable to meet the masses freely. There was also the crushing task of building up again from the first stones as it were the whole administration and the need to seek continual assistance in a hundred things from the Japanese Army Command, which prevented me from thinking of anything else. Finally, the extremely sensitive nature of the matter with its sharp Japanese angles made it impossible for me to explain it adequately to the

country at that time. In this dilemma I expected Aung San, whose duty in the matter was clear, to place the full facts before his army, to accept his share of the responsibility for what we had done together, and so put everything right again. But he did nothing and left me to face the storm alone. In fact, his silence and behaviour lent colour to the accusations.

While the attacks on me went on, Aung San kept himself away. I was never able to ascertain whether he did this deliberately, but the fact was that I was unable to get in touch with him. During all that time the B.I.A. fury raged, and even plots to assassinate me were uncovered. It caused the first real rift in the inner unity of our struggle. In this cloudy atmosphere one thing followed another. Thakin Ba Sein, a member of the Provisional Committee, was accused of secretly attempting to persuade General Nasu to appoint Bo Ne Win, his party man, as the commander-in-chief of the new army in place of Aung San. Upon learning of it, Aung San came fuming out of his silence and demanded Ba Sein's dismissal from the Provisional Committee. I declined to burn my fingers again for him, especially when the extreme action he wanted me to take would have shaken the national unity at a critical moment.

About a fortnight or so later Aung San accused Than Tun, another member of the Provisional Committee, of organising secret communist cells within the new army without his knowledge, an action which, he declared, was bound to subvert his own authority over his troops. Again he wanted me to deal drastically with Than Tun, and again I declined to be drawn into the army's affairs. However, I spoke to Than Tun about it, after which I heard no more of the matter.

The final breach occurred when I decided to keep the civil and military services apart by refusing to accept any past service with the B.I.A. as constituting in itself a claim to the better administrative posts. All my past experience convinced me that the civil administration must be kept efficient and independent at all costs, especially in the unprecedented crisis that had overtaken us. There were also the flood of reports I had received and was still receiving about the conduct of the B.I.A. administrations in the days of their power; it would clearly be incongruous to put these same men back into power again. Thus the rift widened; and as

the fortunes of the war fluctuated and conditions deteriorated, further rifts and antagonisms appeared which ultimately led to new alignments. As for me, I was learning in an excruciating way many new lessons, about myself, about others, about the realities of war and revolution and military power and the struggle for power.

Preparations for organising the new Burmese army got underway at once. Throughout June and July the B.I.A. forces were brought back to Rangoon and the first recruits were selected from them after a Japanese screening. This was followed by an open campaign in the country to obtain the recruits still needed. The new army, consisting of three battalions, each 1,000 strong, was trained and kept in Pinyinmana, a strategically situated town in Central Burma. There was also an officers' training school in Mingaladon, the military cantonment near Rangoon, to train 300 cadet officers for this army. After a year thirty of the best graduate cadets were selected and sent for a more intensive course in Japan while the rest joined the battalions in Pinyinmana. The next batch of 300 cadets were similarly trained, while this time forty graduate cadets were sent to Japan, out of whom ten were to form the nucleus of a Burmese air force. By the time the war ended the Burma Defence Army had doubled in size.

As I have already said, it was a completely Burmese army under a Burmese command headed by General Aung San as the commander-in-chief, but Japanese military advisers were attached to it at every level, with a chief Japanese adviser directing them. With the first foundations of the new army now firmly laid, the old Burma Independence Army was disbanded on July 24, 1942, and a month later, on August 26, the Burma Defence Army officially came into existence.

So ends the story of the Burma Independence Army with all its welter of lights and shadows and gold and dross. Viewing it as a whole, it is the story of a revolutionary mob which strove for a national revolution and its fruits, achieved them at times and lost them at times, till finally it perished in the fires it lit, to be reincarnated again, purged and disciplined, as the Burma Defence Army. To put it more fundamentally, the Burma Independence Army was a spontaneous race explosion at a very confused, desperate, and violently racial moment in the struggle of a people to recover what they had lost or lacked for centuries.

CHAPTER 7

Prison and Freedom

PRISON

I will now take up my own story from the day I was sent to Mandalay prison, that is, August 28, 1940.

All of us engaged in the fight against British rule during the war knew that we were staking everything—our liberty, our future, and even our very lives. So when at last I found myself within a jail it did not shake me too badly. I was prepared for it in my thoughts. But there was much in the real thing that I discovered I was not quite prepared for. When I got there I found a jail to be a lot different from what I had speculated it to be. Perhaps the last hectic weeks before I landed there sharpened the difference. I had spent those days in a rush of activities so that by the time I got to jail I was physically almost breaking up. The first days there, so utterly strange and hollow, were like a passage from one world to another, a ghostly one with everything in it just moving round and round within a narrow, ghostly circle and yet, in the thoroughly spent-out condition I was in then, somehow placid and healing.

Going through my diaries again I am able to recall that I passed those days either tossing about in my bed or walking for hours in my long empty room, or in the corridor just outside, or in the little compound below. My thoughts were tossing wildly too, as if they were trying to break free from the confinement of the body. So I continued to live in a daze, my mind as well as body seeking either complete rest or complete motion, and slipping from one into the other without my being conscious of it.

I had slept very little till then. Then late one night, as I paced

up and down the room thoroughly tired out, I became aware of a book lying under the light on the table. Almost mechanically I picked it up and found it to be Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath*. Some knowing jailor, who perhaps understood from long experience with political prisoners the crisis I was passing through, had placed it there with a few other books of a similar kind. I had not noticed them till that moment. Being completely exhausted by then, I got into bed taking with me Steinbeck's book, which had once moved me so much. I turned to the episode of the poor migrant worker who was travelling to the other end of the continent to find a job, and how while he was buying, after carefully counting his small means, a supply of bread for his long journey, his two small sons stared hungrily at some striped candies they saw on the counter. Although the candies were worth much more the woman at the counter sold them to the worker for one cent because that was all that the man had in his hand at the moment. Thereupon two truck drivers who had watched this poignant transaction left their own change behind to pay for those candies, after telling the woman, who reminded them that they were forgetting to take it, to "go to hell."

I had read this chapter more than once before. But reading it again that night in the state I was in, the whole incident became unbearably tragic and personal for me. As I read on I found myself weeping as I did not remember having done for a very long time. "I wept unashamedly till I was exhausted" was what I wrote down in my diary. At last I fell off to sleep, for the first time really since my arrival in jail, and did not wake up till late the next afternoon. I felt immensely relaxed and hungry. Up till then I had practically survived on tea, a few dry biscuits, and interminable cigars, but now I asked for the biggest meal I could get and actually finished it, to the amazement of all who watched me.

The event caused such a stir among the jail staff who had to make a daily report on my condition that they at once sent word to the superintendent, who was a medical man. That officer came over at once, found me in a new relaxed mood, and after talking with me for a while and thumping me here and there told me that, medically speaking, I had got over the worst part of the crisis. It was true; from that evening onwards I felt more rested, more like my real self, and the days and events around me fell into some

pattern once more. According to this medical man, the quiet and rest of the jail had saved me from a serious breakdown.

Very soon I began to look around. The narrowness of my new life and surroundings did not surprise me, nor did its impositions, for I had expected them, and my wants even at the best of times outside had never been much. The deputy commissioner of Mandalay showed the best side of the British character by instructing the jail authorities beforehand to see that I got the things he guessed I should need at once, such as cigars and reading matter, and to be left alone as much as possible. I had them in plenty. My food was all I could expect in the circumstances, every legitimate need of mine was promptly met, and the jailors and warders could not have been kinder or the prisoners serving me more devoted and untiring. When I mentioned to the chief jailor the remarkable quiet around, I was told that the prisoners themselves had decided to stop all noise that would reach and disturb me. "You should have heard the sort of language they used before your arrival," he said. I could imagine it.

✓ And so the first days passed while, most incongruously, I made one discovery after another of the best side of human nature in a place where I had expected to find only the worst. Not that the worst did not show at times, but I saw little of it while I was there. It changed many angles for me. For one thing, I saw in it a proof that the racial spirit we had set alight among the people had reached even the jails. There was no other explanation for all the care and loyalty I was receiving; and if that was true within a jail, I concluded, it must be very much more so elsewhere in the country. I felt extraordinarily elated at the thought.

✓ There was however another side to jail too, which I soon discovered, the real side which makes a jail what it essentially is. For instance, I began to miss a lot of things that one comes to regard as a part of life itself. Most of them were of course what every prisoner in every jail misses—colour and laughter and such things. Soon I became achingly aware of the grayness and deadness everywhere. The days and their events were always the same, the mealtimes, the empty featureless hours between spent emptily, even self-destructively, by most of the prisoners, the day-long shuffling sound of the feet of men in a pretence at work, the warders helping to keep up that pretence, and the jail bell tolling

out the quarter hours all day and all night, till all the days and nights became mostly the sound of that bell that never varied or rested. It's like being buried alive, when you find everything closing around you and you try to struggle out by throwing yourself into some activity, like gardening or aimless reading and writing at all hours, in fact anything to get rid of that feeling of a living death. And yet you cannot escape the feeling altogether; slowly it claims you till you find yourself becoming a part of that gray subworld and its curse. It is only after some time has passed that you find yourself again, chiefly through the activities you have kept up meanwhile, but by then you are a changed man whether you know it or not. As you go on living more or less alone with yourself reality becomes for you more subjective and abstract, and to that extent you begin to lose touch with the outside realities. On the other hand your general understanding is widened, for you have had more time and solitude to think things out to the end. Such understanding often breaks through like a sudden vision out of a lonely night. And, of course, there are also the dreams that loneliness soon brings.

✓The jail routines never changed; nothing ever changed; everything went on unvaryingly, like a perpetual treadmill moving round and round without any sense or purpose except to turn the men treading it into what they are treading. Everything within that jail looked gray and ghostly, its maze of walls of all shapes and sizes, the gravelled paths, the bare, treeless spots here and there, the uniforms of the prisoners, their set ashen faces, their very souls as far as one could see them in those faces, and their slow, dragging motions and the toneless voices that sounded like the low buzzing of innumerable flies. It was a grayness that caught up with you till you learnt to escape it by looking upwards at the open blue sky and air and sending your thoughts to roam at will there. I quickly learnt to do that.

✓With each day or month that went by you missed more things, and then there came a day when you no longer missed them simply because they had ceased to exist or matter even in your memory. Actually, that was worse than if they existed and were being denied to you, for now you had even forgotten their existence. Of course you had never expected most of them at any time, but not expecting them nor their unimportance did not

lessen the poignancy of not finding them or ceasing even to know that there were such things. For many prisoners it was this fact more than any other that created an inner sense of alienation; they would never feel again that they belonged to a society that had robbed them of so much for so long, robbed them even of their memories.

With so many within the jail who were friendly to me I succeeded in establishing contacts with the political activities going on outside. I was given all the newspapers I wanted, and the warders showed the utmost willingness to bring me secret messages from my party workers and to carry my instructions to them. Thus I learnt that they had started a mass defiance of the law. I had been punished for issuing the seven antiwar orders at the Mandalay conference, and so the party workers including a large number of monks read out those very orders publicly at mass meetings and urged the people to carry them out by refusing to fight for the British in the war. A kind of civil disobedience movement began to crystallize. It started in Upper Burma, and before long spread to several other areas, especially those where the memories of the great wunthanu rebellion of 1930 still smouldered. Many volunteers were promptly arrested, tried, and imprisoned. That led to more volunteers coming forward, and more arrests, and a wider participation of the masses in the national struggle. Hundreds of men, women, and monks from my party alone were thrown into prison under the defence laws and detained there indefinitely. Many Thakins also were rounded up.

When we were satisfied that the movement had done its work for the moment by rousing the country through the example of collective action and sacrifice set by the leaders, it was called off to prepare for the next stage. We did not want the movement to lose all its front-line workers before that stage was reached. Those who remained free decided to lie low or go underground till Britain had been further weakened by her military disasters and we were ready to renew our struggle in more favourable conditions. It was at this juncture that the thirty comrades began to leave for Japan.

After a few weeks the government decided that my presence even in a jail in Mandalay would keep that important area in a ferment, and so I was removed to the central jail in Rangoon.

That did not make things better for them; in fact, by thus bringing me closer to the hub of things more trouble was created for them. The result was that within a month or so I was sent to the small mining town of Mogok among the Shan hills in Northern Burma. Their purpose was to keep me well out of their way for an indefinite period. It did to an extent, but with consequences they never bargained for. Mogok proved to be the beginning of everything that lay ahead for me. Its perfect climate and quiet and beauty restored me both physically and mentally, gave me the time and leisure to go deeply into many problems awaiting me in the future, as I believed, gave me the freedom I needed to keep up the most vital contacts during a vital period, and finally gave me the opportunity to escape from prison and join the advancing Japanese forces at the right moment. Thus a new road was opened to me in that far-away little hill town.



Mogok is known to the outside world somewhat romantically as "the valley of gems," for the finest rubies, sapphires, and other precious stones are to be found there. It is a little town in a hill-hugged valley far up in the north, one of the sweetest and most salubrious, and incidentally the sleepest, to be found anywhere. Its days and nights are always mellow and never too hot or too cold, and the low rolling country around is always green, and the skies above are soft and blue with the rich dreamy blueness of its sapphires, while white lazy-moving clouds shine in the sun all day against the clear blue and mauve of the sky. Everywhere you see silver pines and eucalyptus and wild cherry trees sway and gleam and hear their leaves rustling in the wind that comes from the nearby hills, and the brightest flowers of all colours bloom riotously too throughout the year, and the water from the hill streams is the purest and freshest in the whole land. One could go on praising this little dream-town and also its people, who are Shans by origin and as gentle and lovable as the cool, misty hills among which they live.

Everything in Mogok is dominated by the quest for precious stones, which has gone on passionately for centuries. The entire

town has grown around that quest, and so has a separate way of life, simple, secretive, believing above all else in luck, or fate as they would like to call it, because so much in the lives of its people depends on that elusive factor. This belief in luck has made the inhabitants turn to religion in its most superstitious forms, and the results have been rather mixed. Thus nearly every household makes it a duty to maintain an altar where a collection of sacred images are kept and worshipped, and daily the loveliest flowers are offered to them. This has not only brought beauty and fragrance and certain spiritual values into almost every home in that town but it has created a large flower business, which has proved to be a boon to the countryside economically. Ethically, it has made religion and the good life necessary for success in business, and one practical result of this has been to keep crime figures down. On the other hand, of course, it has turned religion among these people into just a means to make money.

So in keeping with the low crime rate of the town and the surrounding area, Mogok jail is a small place with never more than a hundred inmates at any time, and as sleepy and unreal as the town and its people. While I was there the gem fever raged even within this penal area, for many prisoners spent a good part of their long idle hours hopefully digging for precious stones. I was told that a few were even known to have struck luck. But, as I saw it, their real luck was in finding something to do that kept a flicker of hope alive within them which helped to carry them through from day to day.

Practically all the prisoners were Shans or belonged to some neighbouring hill tribe. Most of them were there for what were actually minor offences, the clear result of their hard economic existence. It could even be said of many of them that their guilt had never been proved in a true sense, for, as I found out, they had been too poor and ignorant to be able to defend themselves in a court of law. The pervasive fatalism of the region made them accept their punishment not as a matter of law and justice, but of fate; they believed that they were expiating if not a present offence at least one they must have committed in a previous existence.

However, there were a few murderers and bandits in that jail in my time, nearly all of whom had killed or robbed under a strange

social custom. They had held high position among their tribes, and according to their tribal taboos they could not earn their livelihood by manual labour. It had to be done more heroically, which in their circumstances came to mean by banditry and bloodshed and seasonal tribal raids. Whatever they acquired that way was regarded as a reward from the gods for their personal valour and leadership of the tribe. The tribe benefited by obtaining security and wealth from their exploits. The leader's heroic deeds, no matter what the law called them, had a practical social value, for they spread his fighting fame among the local tribes, and that gave his own people greater power; it also gave them greater strength in their perpetual struggle for survival in those wild, virtually unadministered hill regions. Thus a strange transvaluation had taken place in the darkness of the border hills and jungles lying between Burma and China, and evil had been dialectically turned into good. But unhappily for the tribes, times and values had changed and the administration in Burma did not recognise their dialectics, but promptly charged the tribal heroes whenever they were caught acting according to them with common banditry accompanied by murder.

One such chief was among the prisoners who were looking after my needs, a fine, magnificently built fellow, always composed and dignified, but a bit slow-witted; it was clear that the physical qualities were more important than a quick wit in those twilight regions.

"What will you do now?" I asked him upon learning that he was about to be set free.

"I will go back to my people in the north and live and work as I did before," he replied.

"What will that work be" I continued.

"Tribal raid and dacoity. I am not permitted to do anything else. There are taboos I cannot break."

"But that would bring you back here again. Does not the government do something about it, to find a way for you and the other chiefs to gain a living for yourself as well as security for your people without breaking the law?"

He looked quite bewildered. He did not at all understand what I was saying. So I put it in a direct way.

"Wouldn't that get you into trouble again?"

He understood that. "I cannot help it," he replied, still looking bewildered by a way of life which made his a crime.

"It's a custom of my people which I must follow or else leave them."

We fully expected to see him back among us again, but the sudden turn the war took dispersed all of us and so I heard nothing more of him.

As I have already said, it was a small and friendly sort of jail, situated at the edge of the town where the road passes into the hills sloping down into the Shan valleys and beyond them to Mandalay and Upper Burma. This fact became very important for me later. The number of prisoners was always small while I was there. I was lodged in a separate little building enclosed within an inner wall, which was at one time occupied by female prisoners. This gave me complete privacy, and almost a feeling of being in a home of my own. I had the pick of the prisoners as servants. In short, nothing was left undone to make the place as little like a jail as possible for me.

Without believing in luck in the way the town did, I struck the biggest possible luck in having as the superintendent of the jail for almost a year of my detention there a man who shared my political views. He was Dr. S. C. Sen, the government medical officer in Mogok. He changed my whole jail existence into one of complete rest, recuperation, and constant medical care. And then there were the daily talks we had together. Sen's deep knowledge of Indian politics acquired in the seething conditions prevailing in Bengal proved very useful to me.

Those talks had another good result. I learnt from them to take a more hopeful view of the problem posed by those of our people who were in the numerous government services in the country. To all appearances they were cooperating with the British wholeheartedly. They were among our best educated and trained men and women, thousands of them, and the country would need their cooperation and loyalty in the struggle that was going on and after independence was won, at least until a new generation was ready to take their place. But much of what I had learnt of their ways had made me regard them dubiously, as split personalities whose interests and even values and loyalties were similarly split and divided between the British who claimed their spirit and the

Burmese who claimed their flesh. I had seen this happen among some of the best of them, and I came to consider it one of our toughest problems then as well as later.

✓However, Sen and also the other members of the jail staff, by the tangible proof they gave me of actual feelings among the services, made me see the problem differently. I must mention that many on the jail staff cooperated with me in some of my most secret and dangerous plans as much as Sen did; how much that was will appear later. It seemed that I was mistaken in generalising from cases in which the service men had clearly been given no other choice: he had either to do what was expected from him or to find himself marked and even thrown out of his job. So I concluded that our best men and women who were serving the British with such seeming zeal were not all really lost to us, that most of them would find their way back when the British left and we were free and Burmese again. This new confidence in our own service people in general led me later to pursue a policy based upon it, and that made my task of restoring the administration after the British departure very much easier than it would have been otherwise. But, as usual, the solution of one problem resulted in another arising.

This time it was the problem of appeasing the political sectors who thoroughly believed in the spoils system and regarded all government posts from the highest to the lowest as the juiciest part of the spoils which, as they saw it, rightly belonged to those who had helped to turn the British out: that is, to them. Nothing has bedevilled the situation in Burma more than this scramble for the spoils, which has been pursued insatiably by every party or faction in power since the war and during the years following it. Once it started few able to join in could keep out of it. I remember Than Tun, the Communist leader who was in my wartime government, telling me once when we were discussing the way a good deal of our work was stalling that too many of the new men we had brought into the services were incapable of coping with the work. There were, he said, some of his own men, whom he had to take into his departments, who could not even add or subtract correctly and he himself had often to do it all over again. But he could do nothing about it, he added; nor could I, it must be confessed, in the situation existing then. The political parties expected their

full share of the spoils, which in practice meant the best and the most of everything, and they could not be denied without rocking the whole party structure. Whether they could add or subtract was not so important.

ESCAPE

And so the days passed, with each day or month indistinguishable from another, and time became only divided into day and night and the changing seasons. For me in particular, since my detention seemed to be going on indefinitely, time almost ceased to count, and only events retained shape and meaning, and, needless to say, my own hopes and plans for the future. So most of the days and months I lived, as it were, in a historical time, in the future ahead, till it came to possess me totally; and I saw that future in a single perspective. I regarded the war as an all-out assault on imperialism, on racism as the root of all imperialism, on the exploitation of race by race as the whole meaning of imperialism; and in my circumstances imperialism was visually the British empire in Burma first of all, and in Asia next, and elsewhere finally.

✓ Suddenly in the middle of 1941 I heard on my secret radio that the German armies were marching into Russia. That sent me into the wildest speculations about what would now happen in Asia, for I was convinced that the flames which were beginning to spread eastwards would soon reach us and Japan would not be able to keep out for long. True enough, within the next months Japanese activities visibly increased. The Japanese consulate got into touch more frequently with my party leaders outside, particularly with my wife, Kinmama. It wanted to know more about my future plans. I replied that we were dead set on an armed uprising as soon as there was a fair chance of success, and that would depend upon how the war was going and the help we got from others, from Japan in particular, which was already training our thirty comrades to form the nucleus of a Burmese army of liberation. I also told them obliquely that some of our leaders now in detention would have to regain their liberty somehow. I kept pressing for a firm and concrete promise of support. A period of torturing silence followed. It was only later that I discovered that this total black-out was the usual lull before the storm.

The Russian entry into the war was potentially a crucial

turning point for our own national struggle; subsequent events have proved that it was the most crucial of all the turning points. By spreading the war in the direction of Japan it took us a long way towards our goal, but at the same time it caused the first fissures in that goal. So far we had succeeded in keeping all divisive ideologies out of our common front and in forging it around the single vision of a Burma liberated from the British. But now that vision broke into two. While the nationalists among us held on as before to the view that we were at war with British imperialism as the enemy actually riding on our necks, as we say in Burmese, a few leaders began to look upon fascism, the immediate enemy of Russia and the Western Allies, as the immediate enemy too and to feel that we would have to fight that enemy instead of the fellow on our necks.

And so the confusion began. Suddenly friends were seen as foes and foes as friends. Britain was now regarded by those elements who saw the war through a cloud of rudimentary abstractions no longer as the imperialist power from whose clutches Burma must be liberated, but as the ally of communist Russia, which must be liberated from the fascists. Later when Italy and Japan joined Germany the war changed its character still further for them. Finally when the tides turned and the victory of the Western Allies became certain the antifascist trends which began in that small, abstract sort of way became a wider emotion and movement among a section of the Burmese, culminating in an antifascist resistance during the last days of the war, an antifascist political organisation and a growing number of communist factions after the war, an antifascist postwar government, and an armed Communist rebellion, which together with several others goes on to this day. Thus from such faraway and seemingly unrelated beginnings as the German attack on Russia and Russia's eventual victory together with the Western Allies, a new history opened in Burma marked with all the passions, all the dreams as well as the realities of the new revolutionary age.

I am anticipating a lot of what was to happen only later and gradually. Needless to say, I did not at the time foresee it at all in the way I have just described it. But I did have some foreboding of what might follow when I heard that a few leaders from the Freedom Bloc who were at that time in Mandalay jail had represented to the British authorities that, since Russia was now in the war, the

character of the conflict had changed dialectically, as they would say, so that they were willing to cooperate with Britain in fighting against the fascist powers. This was a clear sign of the latent cracks in the very foundation of our national struggle. The ideological differences we had tried to keep out had returned, and at a time when we were doing our best to get help from Japan and when the thirty comrades were actually being trained in that country to lead an anti-British revolt in Burma. Those of whom I have just spoken did not seem to care very much about these realities, or they believed that their easy catchphrases were more absolute and real than the realities. All this will give you an idea of the utter confusion prevailing within the leadership of the national front throughout that period and, indeed, through all the years since then. If anything has saved us meanwhile, it is the forces of history which have carried us forward with the rest of the world in spite of ourselves.

So the days continued to pass, but too, too slowly now for me as I strained to hear the first clear rumble of the storm breaking over Asia. I seized every bit of information that came my way and let my thoughts wander to the farthest reaches of possibility. That is the only thing one can do within a jail, and I had to do something to keep alive and be in touch with events moving so palpably towards us. All throughout that period the Japanese embassy had nothing to tell us except that we must wait and watch just as they themselves were compelled to do.

Then suddenly one evening early in December 1941, the news of Pearl Harbour came sizzling over the air. The Japanese repeated it untiringly and I listened to it just as untiringly. However, when the jail officers came around to see me the next morning all agog with the news I had had time to recover my composure. I had also decided upon my strategy with them from then on. I told them that the severe cold weather had brought back the aches in my body and I would keep to my bed and rest completely. Dr. Sen agreed with me and duly reported the fact to the central government. Meanwhile, my wife was allowed to visit me regularly. Thus I was left free to work out my own secret schemes with Kinmama at a time when new emergency measures were being enforced against the political prisoners in the other jails.

So at last Japan was in the war. She had got into it with a phenomenal victory, and the weeks which followed were even more phenomenal and breath-taking. Indo-China fell, then Thailand, then Malaya, and finally Singapore and Indonesia. Within a month or so some of the Japanese armies were massed on the Burma-Thai border. I was now convinced that a Burmese army organised around the thirty comrades was with these armies and would soon get active in Burma even if the Japanese forces did not cross over. So I began at once to lay my plans accordingly. Before everything else, I had to escape from the jail at the right moment and to the right area.

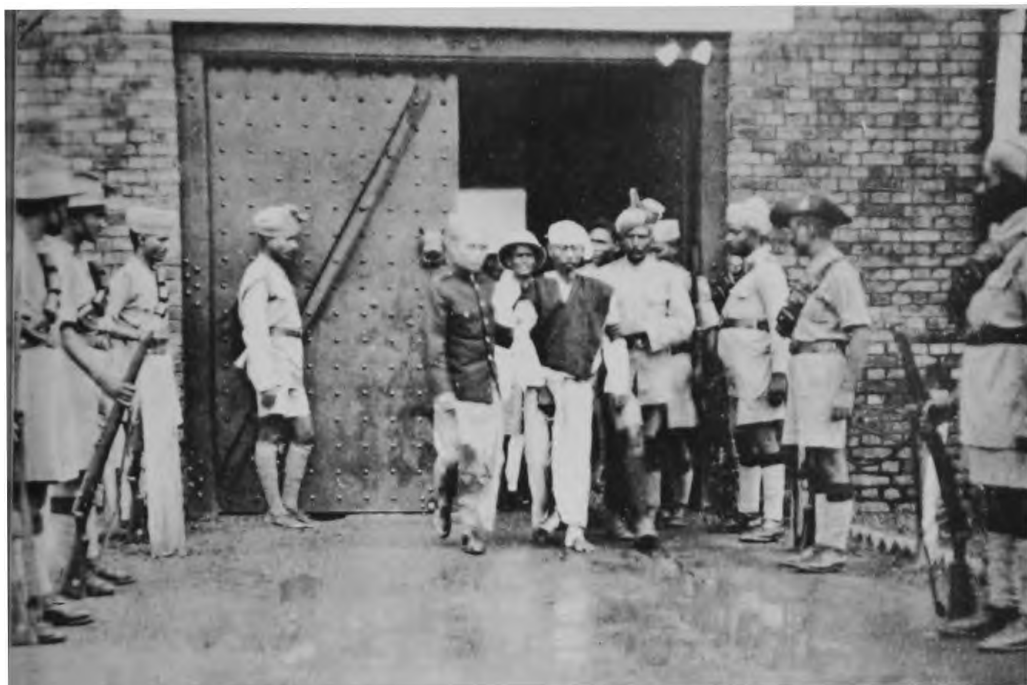
Looking back now, I think those months between the outbreak of the war in the Far East in December and my escape and subsequent meeting with the Japanese forces in the following April were the most nerve-racking I have ever gone through. It was a blind, long-drawn-out gamble against all the odds known at the time. You threw into it everything that counted for you. You staked everything on all sorts of contingencies turning out the right way, the course the war would take, the time, the events, the opportunity and the hazards, the ability to see a bit ahead in your plans and to get the right people along with you in carrying them out; and, looming over all, there was the increased British vigilance to outwit and later the inevitable pursuit to evade successfully. To escape was not the only problem. The far bigger one was to survive after escape in the utter anarchy and terror swirling all around and to succeed in contacting friendly troops at the right time and place. Thinking out these problems in an abstract, cold-blooded sort of way only made them appear more menacing and created more problems, till at last I found that the only way to put an end to them was to stop thinking of all of them at once, to deal with what was actually before me at the moment, and to leave the future to the future. That was what I eventually did. By sheer luck it proved to be right.

I must mention that, notwithstanding all I have just said, I had many periods of self-questioning. It is perfectly true that I saw the Japanese victories as a victory over the Western imperialist powers, as a victory for all the victims of that imperialism, but there were also bleak, stubborn periods when I saw the ugly face of the Japanese terror in China and Manchuria and Korea, and

together with it the even uglier terror of the Nazi racists, who had shown their intention to keep all lesser breeds subdued within the Nordic new order. Seeing a thing in the abstract and seeing it in reality can be very different. So it was with me at the time when the Japanese armies were actually sweeping towards Burma. But in the end I drove all these thoughts away. I had to, in order to hold fast to my faith and purpose in our anticolonial struggle. Again I decided to leave the future to the future.

So I got down to the first business before me, which was to escape from British hands and join the Japanese. The British were now literally fighting with their backs to the wall. Their multiplying disasters elsewhere in Southeast Asia had sent them into a panic in Burma too. All their long, imperial euphoria was now gone. They began to lose their heads in many ways. But someone kept his head sufficiently to remember that in the crisis the British empire was up against, all enemies of that empire, even if they were safely locked away in the jails, were still enemies and dangerous.

✓ In my own case this person was the Indian official who was then the Inspector General of Jails. He sent a new man as the superintendent of Mogok jail in place of Dr. Sen. An additional chief jailor was also appointed and the number of warders increased. This new jailor was an old-type Karen who showed every sign of having been drilled for a lifetime into a blind, dog-like devotion to those in authority over him. They constituted his whole horizon. He made it clear by the measures he took upon arrival that he had been sent to keep me under his eye continually. But while he watched me the old jailors whom I had won over watched him and gave me all the information about him that I wanted for my purpose, such as his level of intelligence, his habits, his particular weaknesses. Thus I learnt that he was, as I had already judged, essentially a dull-witted, routine-bound fellow, the sort that never forgets what he has been taught and never learns anything more. He was convinced that prisoners escaped only at night and mostly by scaling over walls or through tunnels bored under them. He was also a heavy drinker. All these factors were to play into my hands later. Meanwhile, I continued to complain of my bad health, and particularly of my rheumatism which kept me indoors.



1. Saya San, nationalist leader of the 1930 Peasant Rebellion, being brought to trial under heavy guard. Tharrawaddy Jail, 1931



2. Dr. Ba Maw, when he first entered public life as Defence Counsel for Saya San and other leaders of the Peasant Rebellion, 1931



3. Dr. Ba Maw and Daw Kinmama Maw, in formal court dress, May 1937, on the occasion of the coronation of George VI, which Dr. Ba Maw attended as Prime Minister of Burma.



4. Dr. Ba Maw, head of the Freedom Bloc, with his sons Zali Maw (*left*) and Binmya Maw (*right*), wearing dama caps (Sinyetha Party symbols), just before his arrest by the British, Rangoon, August 1940.



7. BOI MUGAO: Major General Kenji Suzuki, creator of the Burma Independence Army, 1941



6. Some of the leading members of the Thirty Comrades, during military training on H.M.O.M. Island, 1941. From left to right: Bo Let Ya, Bo Set Kya, Bo Aung San, Thakin Tun Oke.



7. Bo Yan Naing, victor of the 1942 Battle of Shwedaung, Tokyo, 1942.



8. U Nu, one of the leaders of the Freedom Bloc, wartime Foreign Minister, postwar Prime Minister. Photograph taken about 1948.



9. Thakin Than Tun, one of the leaders of the Freedom Bloc, wartime cabinet minister, present head of the Burma Communist Party. Photograph taken about 1949.



The Provisional Administrative Committee after its appointment by Lt. Gen. Iida, Maymyo, June 4, 1942. Seated, left to right: Thakin Mya, Maj. Gen. Isayama (Chief-of-Staff), Di. Ba Maw (Head of the Provisional Committee), Lt. Gen. Iida (Commander-in-Chief), Thakin Kodaw Hmaing, Maj. Gen. Nasu (Deputy Chief-of-Staff), U Tun Aung. Second row: U Nu (third from left), Bandoola U Sein (fifth from left), Col. Hiraoka (chief liaison officer; sixth from left), U Ba Win (fifth from right), Thakin Tun Oke (fourth from right). Third row: Thakin Ba Sein (third from left), U Ba Thein (fourth from left), U Hla Pe (fourth from right), Bo Aung San (second from right).



11. Dr. Ba Maw, head of the new Burmese government; Lt. Gen. Shojiro Iida, Commander-in-Chief of the Japanese Armed Forces in Burma; Mr. Hyogoro Sakurai, Chief Civilian Adviser to the Commander-in-Chief. Pictured just after the inauguration ceremony, August 1, 1942.



12. The first Burmese delegation to Japan immediately after their decoration and just before their audience with the Emperor, Tokyo, March 1943. *Left to right:* Dr. Ba Maw, Thakin Mya, Dr. Thein Maung, Bo Aung San.



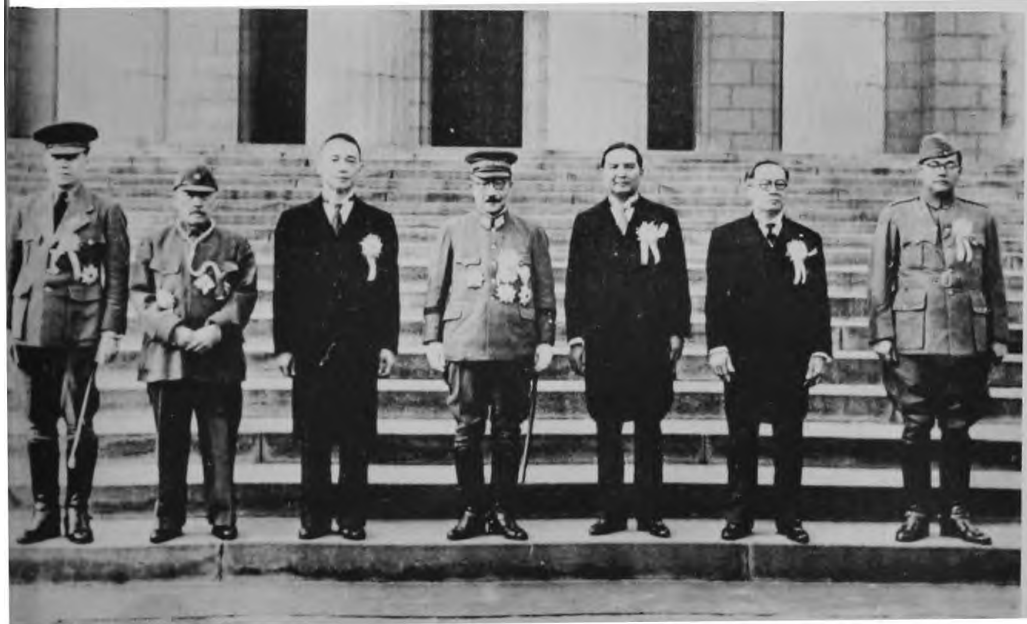
13. General Hideki Tojo, Prime Minister of Japan, Tokyo, 1943.



14 Dr. Ba Maw and some of his family on the steps of their private residence after his return from Japan, May 1943. *Left to right: Binnya Maw, Theda Maw, Daw Kinmama Maw.*



Prime Minister Tojo delivering the opening address at the Greater East Asia Conference, Nov. 5, 1943. Burmese delegation in left foreground behind Dr. Ba Maw, seated at end of table; Indian delegation right foreground behind Netaji Bose, seated at end of table.



The heads of the Greater East Asia nations attending the conference, Nov. 6, 1943. *Left to right:* padi Dr. Ba Maw of Burma, Prime Minister Chang Chung-hui of Manchukuo, President Wang ng-wei of China, Prime Minister Hideki Tojo of Japan, Prince Wan Waihayakon of Thailand, Presit José P. Laurel of the Philippines, Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, Head of the Free India Government.



17. Dr. Ba Maw and Netaji Bose (with U Kyaw Nyein at left), Tokyo, Nov. 6, 1943.



18. Dr. Ba Maw and his son Zali Maw (in student's uniform), Tokyo, Nov. 1943.

ဗမာ့လွတ်လပ်ရေး ကျေညာစာတမ်း။

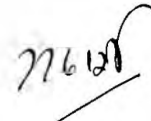
ဗမာ့နိုင်ငံတော်သည် အင်္ဂလိပ်တို့၏ အဓမ္မဆိမ်း ဖိုက်ထားခြင်း၊
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 အထက်မပြတ် လွတ်လပ်သော နိုင်ငံတော်အဖြစ်ဖြင့် ကမ္ဘာတလွှာ၌
 မား မား မြင့်မြင့် ပြား ပြား ဝင့်ခွဲလေသည်။ ဗမာ့နိုင်ငံ၏
 ဂုဏ်ရောင်သည်လည်း ထိုအခါက အဓိကအရင်းကောင်းကင်ပြင်
 ဝယ် နေသွင် လွန်လွန်းလွန်းဖြင့် ဗမာ့လက်နက်နိုင်ငံတော်
 ကြီးသည်လည်း အရှေ့အနောက် တောင် မြောက်ဝဲယာ လေ၊ မှတ်
 ခွာပတ်ပတ် တောင်အထပ်ထပ်ကို ဖြတ်ကျော်နယ်ပြန် နိုင်ငံတော်
 ပြန်ခဲ့လေသည်။ ဗမာ့နိုင်ငံတော်သည် ဂုဏ်ရောင်တက်ပြီး ဤ
 တန်ခိုးကြီး မား သော သား ကောင်း ရတနာတို့ ထွန်းကား
 ပေါ်ပေါက်ရာ နိုင်ငံတော်လည်း ဖြစ်ခဲ့လေသည်။ ရဲမက်အင်အား
 လွန်ပြီး မား ၍ ဖိုက်လုအများ ဖိုသေခန့်ညားခြင်း ခံခဲ့ရသော
 နိုင်ငံတော်လည်း ဖြစ်ခဲ့လေသည်။ ဗမာ့နိုင်ငံတော်သည် လူစပ်
 သိမ်း တိုင်း တိုင်း တက်ရာတိုင်း တက်ကြွောင်း ကိုလည်း ထပ်လောင်း
 ဖြည့်စွက် ဆောင်ရွက် ဆောင်မြင်ခဲ့လေသည်။ ပုဂံပြည်ဟို၊ နှင့်
 တကွ လှပတင့်တယ် ၍ ချော့ချော့ဖြစ်သော ဂူ ကျောင်း ပုထိုး
 ဗမာ့လက်စွမ်း အမျိုးမျိုးသည် ထိုအခါ တိုင်း တက်ရာ တိုင်း တက်ကြွောင်း
 ၍ အထွတ်အထိပ်ဖြစ်သည်မှာ ယခုတိုင် အထင်အရှား ဖြစ်လေသည်။
 အင်္ဂလိပ်တို့ ကျူးကျော်စေကာမူ ဖြစ် မပြု မိ ကာလရှည်ကြာ
 ရှိကပင် ထင်ရှား ခဲ့သော ဗမာ့တို့၏ ရာဇဝင်နှင့်သမိုင်းတွင်
 ဗမာ့တို့သည် အဆက်မပြတ် တိုက်ခိုက်သမျှသော စစ်ပွဲတို့၌ ရန်သူ
 ဟူသမျှကို မဆုတ်မချိုင်း ရုတ်တိုင်း မျိုး နှိမ်နင်း မိမိတို့၏ လွတ်လပ်ရေး
 ကို ထိန်းသိမ်း စောင့်ရှောက်ခဲ့သောကြောင့် တား အထင်အရှား
 ရှိပေသည်။

လွန်ခဲ့သော နှစ်ပေါင်း ၅၀ ကျော်က ဗမာ့နှင့်အင်္ဂလိပ်တို့
 စစ်ကြီး ၃ ကြိမ်ဖြစ်ပွားပြီး သည်၏အဆုံး၌ ဗမာ့နိုင်ငံတော်သည် မိမိ
 ၍ လွတ်လပ်ရေးကို မဆုံးရှုံး စေဘူး ဆုံး ရှုံး ခဲ့ရလေသည်။ အာရှ
 တိုက်တွင် သူမိုး ဥဇာန် ထား ပြဉာဏ်ကို အစဉ်လက်ဆုံး ပြုသော
 အင်္ဂလိပ်တို့သည် အထက်ပါ စစ်ပွဲများကို ဆင်နွှဲကြစဉ်အခါက အာရှ
 တိုက်ကြီး မှာ စည်းလုံးညီညွတ်ခြင်း မရှိသည့်အပြင် ခုခံတိုက်ခိုက်ရန်

အာရှတိုက် လုံခြုံရေးလုပ်ငန်းလည်း မပြီးဆုံးသေးချေ။
ဗမာ့တို့အတွက် အကျိုးဖြစ်စေသော ဥပဒေများ၊ ဖွဲ့စည်းပုံ
ကို အောင်မြင်စွာ လွှတ်ပြန်ပြီး မြောက်ပိုင်းပေးမည်။ ထို့ကြောင့်
ဗမာ့တို့သည် ခြိမ်းခြောက်မှုကို အောင်မြင်စေရန် မိမိတို့ကိုယ်တိုင် ဝ
အပ်ကြောင်း ပူဇော်ကြလေသည်။

နိဂုံး၊ ချစ်လိုသည်မှာ ဗမာ့နိုင်ငံတော်သစ်ကို အတည်ဖြစ်
လျက်ရှိနေသော ခိုင်ခံ့စေရန်၊ ဥပဒေများ၊ ဖွဲ့စည်းပုံချုပ်ချုပ်ရေး၊
ဥပဒေများ၊ နေရာတစ်နေရာတစ်နေရာ၊ စီမံကွပ်ကဲမှု၊ နေရာတစ်နေရာ
သည်။ ဤမျှစီမံကွပ်ကဲမှုဖြင့် ဗမာ့နိုင်ငံတော်အတွင်း ရှိလျ
အပေါင်း၊ ထိုသည်ကောင်း၊ မွန်သော အုပ်ချုပ်မှု၊ ကျေးဇူးပြုရမည်။
မည်။ တရားလမ်း၊ မှန်ကန်မှု၊ ကျေးဇူးပြုရမည်။
တရား၊ သဖြင့် ရသင့်ရထိုက်သော အခွင့်အရေး၊ အားလုံး ကိုလည်း
ကော်မစ်တီ ဖွဲ့ရမည်။

ဗမာ့တို့သည် မိမိတို့ကိုယ်တိုင် ဖြစ်သော အုပ်ချုပ်မှု၊ စီမံရေး
အဖွဲ့မှတစ်ဆင့် ဗမာ့လွတ်လပ်ရေး၊ ခွင့် ဗမာ့နိုင်ငံတော်သစ်ကို
တည်ထောင်ရန် အခြေခံမည်။ မျှော်၊ များ ကို ခြံနေရုံသာ
သမ္မတပြန်လှူ၍ ကျေးဇူးတင်သည်။ ဤကျေးဇူးတင်ချက်သည် ဗမာ့
မျိုးလုံး ဖန်တီးဖြစ်ရကား ဤကျေးဇူးတင်ချက်ကို တစ်သွေးတစ်
လိုက်နာဆောင်ရွက်မည်။ ဗမာ့အပေါင်း၊ ထိုသည် ဤကျေးဇူးတင်
အတိုင်း ထပ်ပြန်အောင်မြင်သည်အထိ အစွမ်းကုန်ဆောင်ရွက်
မည်ဟု သစ္စာပြုလိုက်သည်။ ဥပဒေများ၊ ဖွဲ့စည်းပုံ ကျေးဇူးတင်
အတွက် နတ်လူအပေါင်း၊ ထိုသည် သက်သေအဖြစ်တည်ပြုပါစေရန်
သတင်း။



ဥက္ကဋ္ဌ။

ဗမာ့အုပ်ချုပ်မှု၊ စီမံရေး၊ အဖွဲ့။

ရန်ကုန်နေပြည်တော်။
၁၉၄၃ ခု ဇူလိုင်လ ၁ ရက်။



to Bo Yan Naing and his wife, Daw Tinnu Mau Naing, Rangoon, 1947

My luck remained wonderful in other ways too. The government in Rangoon was too busy keeping up with the violent turn events were taking to bother about me in particular; the local authorities in Mogok just sat tight waiting for instructions from Rangoon which never came; left to themselves most of the jail staff were either too demoralised or unsure of themselves to do anything on their own. In fact, almost all the old Burmese jail hands were only too willing to join me in any adventure which promised to give them a chance to save themselves from the fate that was clearly overtaking the British administration. The same sense of adventure, mixed with the racial emotions that began to stir even Mogok in those seismic months, enabled me to get the funds as well as the men I needed to carry out my plans.

By then also Kinmama was deep in the plot. Like many women in a crisis, she displayed an intuitive understanding of it. She has a quick, cat-like mind; and she was helped by Dr. Thein Pe, the jail medical assistant, and U Myint, a senior jailor. Without the un-failing loyalty of these two men I could have done very little; with them what seemed to be impossible in the conditions existing then became possible. Thein Pe would visit me daily to enquire about my health, U Myint would usually be there as the jailor on duty, and Kinmama, always outwardly calm and only anxious about my health, managed somehow to be there too on most of those occasions. We would then work our secret plans for my escape.

✓The stars continued to be kind and my luck held on. Even a disaster like the two savage attacks on Rangoon by the Japanese air force in December 1941, which gave the Burmese their first real taste of the war, brought something good for me by giving Kinmama and the family a plausible reason for fleeing from the city with thousands of others. Thus Kinmama was able to come and live near me in Mogok during a critical period; and with her arrival my plans began to move forward tangibly.

✓But there were awful days also when everything seemed about to crumble in our hands. For instance, there were those leaders of the Freedom Bloc who were negotiating with the British and the Chinese nationalist camps to go over to them. I have mentioned this fact before. I heard that the Chinese were carrying on the talks very earnestly. It meant that a certain faction among us was ready to betray us as well as the Burmese struggle against British rule, to

betray all it stood for historically, to betray the new Burmese army which was being recruited around the thirty comrades and was now on the point of going into action against the British forces. Our entire anticolonial cause threatened to become a monstrous mockery, and this was happening at the very hour when colonialism in all Southeast Asia was crashing. The very thought of it froze me.

✓ It was also during this period that I got a secret message from U Nu urging me to do what I could to get him and a certain Thai spy who was detained with him transferred to Mogok jail. He said he had the most important matters to talk over with me. I at once guessed what they were. But much more important for me at that juncture than his important matters was the fact that the presence of these two men, one a known foreign spy, in the same jail with me would have turned the place into a regular detention camp. The jail vigilance would have been at once tightened up, and so all my hopes of escape would have vanished. In fact, the government was actually thinking at that very moment of turning this out-of-the-way little jail into such a camp by transferring to it a hundred or more of the top political prisoners. The superintendent had been asked whether the local conditions would permit such a large increase in the prison population. Thein Pe, U Myint, and I worked fantastically to convince him that the few buildings did not have either the living space or the facilities to take in so many inmates. There was also a very serious breakdown of local communications and supplies as a result of the general debacle which further made the proposal impracticable. Before anything more could happen the whole government was on the run, Mogok and I were forgotten, and most of the political prisoners were hurriedly herded together in the jails lying along the route of the British retreat.

Meanwhile, my plans proceeded. Much, of course, still depended upon the course that events would take.



It was now April 1942, and events were racing headlong in Burma. The Japanese armies had overrun the whole of South and

Central Burma and were driving towards the north. For me it meant that the hour of my final gamble had arrived. It had to be now or not at all, for the wildest rumours were already spreading among my party members in Upper Burma that I would be arriving soon in Mandalay, some said by river and some by road, some said I would come alone and some were certain it would be with the Japanese forces. It was just my luck that the British were too busy then battling for their lives to think of anything so small and irrelevant as the possible escape of a prisoner or so.

The government was clearly in a panic, and that sent me into a panic of my own, for there was still the danger of my being put under closer vigilance before being taken away to India. Kinmama decided to find out by going to Maymyo, the northern hill station to which the government had now removed. Ostensibly, she went there to draw the arrears in the allowance that my family was receiving from the government during my detention. Actually, she was there to discover what the British intended to do with me. She discovered a good deal. She was in Maymyo just in time to hear of a move which would have scuttled all my plans. It was an outcome of the negotiations which I have mentioned as going on at that time between some of our Freedom Bloc leaders and the British and Chinese to change the whole direction of our national struggle by turning it against the enemies of the British instead of the British themselves. U Kyaw, an old and true friend, who was then a secretary of the government, informed Kinmama that General Wang, the commander of the Seventh Chinese Army and Chiang Kai-shek's personal representative in Burma then, had just obtained the consent of the governor to take me and my family to Chungking in order that I should cooperate freely with the Chinese in the war. Wang, my wife was told, would come to Mogok immediately after the Thingyan water-throwing festival, the three-day celebration which ushers in the Burmese new year in the middle of April, to persuade me to leave with him for China. This gave me less than a week to get away before his arrival. I decided that I must escape during the Thingyan holidays, when the jail staff as well as the police would also be in a holiday mood. It became a race against time.

I might mention here that I received a letter from Wang after my escape into the hills, in which he requested me and my family

to accompany him to Chungking, promising me the utmost status and hospitality that Nationalist China could offer. It was a poignant letter, which revealed the agony of a people passing through their blackest hour, but I had to think of the agony of my own people and their fight for freedom before that of others. I could not possibly go over to the Chinese as long as they were fighting on the side of Britain, who was opposing our freedom.

✓ The British and Chinese armies were now in full retreat and the Japanese were pursuing them into the Shan States in the north. Lashio, the great northern gateway on the Burma Road which held together the last defences, was about to fall and with that the battle for those states was nearing its end. The Chinese forces, completely routed, made their way as best they could towards China, and the British started a general withdrawal towards India. Mogok lies close to these northern states so reports of the battles raging there reached it increasingly. Yet to most of its inhabitants the war still seemed far away, till one day two young men appeared suddenly in the town right from the front line, so to say. They were Kyaw Nyein, of whom I have already spoken, and another member of the Burma Independence Army, which was now actively in the war. They had come on a secret errand to see me.

It happened a day or two before the water festival. Kinmama had just returned from Maymyo with the precious information she had gathered there, and I was all ready to make a get-away during the festival. Then suddenly one night Kyaw Nyein walked into my quarters. It was as if the war had walked right in with him. It all became startlingly real.

Kyaw Nyein had been smuggled into the jail by U Myint, who was on duty that night. We discussed everything that mattered from every angle we could think of, or more correctly, Kyaw Nyein talked and I listened, quite happy to hear all the things he was able to tell me. He began very self-importantly, an attitude I quite understood as he had come on a dangerous errand, almost from the very thick of the fight. Straightening his shoulders, he told me that he had been ordered by the Supreme Command of the Burma Independence Army to rescue me from jail so that I could join them in tackling the tasks ahead, which, he said, were getting fearfully complicated and even desperate. He was not

worried too much about the British, who, for him, were finished for good in Burma. It was the new problem posed by the Japanese conquerors, who were already beginning to push the Burmese around here and there, so much so that some in the Burmese army saw their part of the victory over the British slipping out of their hands. It almost seemed to them that they had driven the British out only to let the Japanese in.

At any rate, Kyaw Nyein wanted to do something to put the situation right. The top command in the Burmese army also knew that the Japanese, who were finding their relations with the Burmese difficult, were eager to rescue me in order that I should help them to restore effective administration in the country and so end the widespread chaos. With all this in mind Kyaw Nyein asked me to find a way to get out of the jail and join them within the next few days. He and his comrade would take me across the fighting lines. They were armed, he said proudly, and they would, if necessary, shoot their way through.

"What arms have you got?" I asked with a smile.

"We have a revolver each," he replied.

"And how many guns have the British?" I continued, my smile increasing.

"Oh, no," he replied, seeing my point. "We won't need guns, because we shall try to keep clear of the British as much as possible. People along the way will also help us."

It was all very quixotic, like something out of the more sensational war films, but there was also something heartening in it. It revealed a new spirit of confidence in one's self as well as one's people. The effect of the swift collapse of the British before the Japanese and Burmese forces advancing together was beginning to show.

I was, of course, not going to abandon my own plans which had been so carefully worked out and put my fate in the hands of two young men who had dropped out of the blue. In fact, their sudden appearance at such a moment created an alarming problem for me, for it would certainly cause a stir in the little town, there would be all sorts of speculations and rumours, the authorities would come to hear of them, and that could ruin all my schemes and hopes. It was therefore imperative that I should make a countermove against such a likely catastrophe. So I told Kyaw

Nyein that the state of my health compelled me to remain where I was and just watch events take their course. He argued frenziedly against such weakness on my part, such lack of guts, he almost implied, at a time when the boys in the Burmese army were showing so much of them, but the more he went on the more I was convinced that I was making my moves in the game correctly. At last, thoroughly disgusted and almost reeling with the brandy he had drunk copiously, he left me when it was well past midnight, telling me that in spite of my refusal he would remain in town to give me time to change my mind. Later, when I met him in Maymyo after my escape and contact with the Japanese, he told me that he had always been sure I would escape, but on my own.

My intuition proved to be right. I quickly learnt that rumours were already floating around about Kyaw Nyein's presence in the town and the business which had brought him there. Fortunately, the failure of the business was also known: U Myint and Thein Pe saw to that discreetly, taking care also to mention my rheumatic attacks. I could see the effect of these rumours in the behaviour of the chief jailor, who looked more relaxed and even expressed his concern for the state of my health. Things evidently were going very well.

It was clear that I could no longer delay my get-away. So I decided to take the plunge on April 13, which fell in the middle of the water festival. I picked the 13th for the rather whimsical reason that since the number was popularly believed among the British to be unlucky, it should on that very account prove to be lucky for me. Those in the conspiracy with me were delighted at the choice, for they believed in such things, in the luck, either good or bad, which days and numbers can bring, and they were sure we had chosen a lucky day.

The final preparations began immediately. Kinmama arranged for a car to wait for me on a small hill at the edge of the town where the jail is situated. She also had ready a Shan turban which I was to use to disguise my face as soon as I had got into the car. For herself, she had a shawl to cover her head and neck. The idea was that my wife should travel as a high-ranking Shan lady returning to her own state while I posed as her escort. U Aung Ba, the chief of Maing-lon State, who had once studied under me when I was on

the English staff of Rangoon College, would receive me in his state, which lies a short distance away from Mogok, and he would take me to a hideout within his territory. Lu Maung, a most devoted and resourceful follower, took charge of the journey as well as my general security and comfort while I remained in hiding. His wide knowledge of the locality and its people made him just the right man for the job.

✓ On April 12 we made our last moves within the jail itself. On the next day most Buddhists would leave their homes to keep the sabbath at a monastery on a religious retreat and return only in the evening. To get the chief jailor out of the way Thein Pe and U Myint persuaded him to join them in keeping the sabbath on this new year's eve in a distant monastery. The chief jailor agreed, but at the last moment he declined to leave the jail. He was that kind of fellow, jumpy, suspicious, and completely incapable of understanding the way the world was changing outside the tiny jail. It looked like a bad set-back for my plans, but I could not now give up without giving up everything that lay in the future for me. So I told Thein Pe and U Myint to go ahead with their intention to keep the sabbath elsewhere and to leave me to deal with the non-sabbath-keeping Karen jailor.

✓ As I have already related, I had closely studied this man's habits. I was fairly sure therefore that, not keeping the sabbath, he would act exactly as he always did, or even more so, as it was a really big holiday, which must have its effect even on him: that is, he would drink like a sot after mid-day and sleep well into the evening to make up for his loss of sleep during his long nightly watches. But I had to make quite sure of it before I acted. So after the mid-day meal I told my cook, who was in our plot, to roast a lot of chillies in the kitchen, which was close to my compound. The stench it gave out was devastating. Very indignantly I called out to a warder to go and tell the chief jailor, who had retired to his apartment, to do something to stop the nuisance which was making my condition worse. As I had expected, the warder returned to tell me that the jailor was fast asleep. Thereupon I told him that I must get away from the smell by going into the jail garden just outside and remaining there till the roasting stopped and the last fumes had blown away.

✓ With all the appearance of being badly shaken, I ordered him to

I open the jail gate and limped out into the garden carrying a book in my hand to convince the warders around that I intended to rest outside for some time reading undisturbed and alone. I strolled about until I succeeded in getting close to a small wicket opening into the main road. There I lay down on a grass plot nearby. After a reasonable lapse of time I told the warder to leave me alone as I wanted to rest for a while. Reassured by the sight of my dragging foot and the book in which I was engrossed, the warder obeyed and soon he had joined some other warders who were relaxing on that holiday. I was hidden from them by a clump of trees. As soon as I felt it safe to do so I walked to the wicket, unlocked it with a key I had been given beforehand, walked out calmly, and was soon on the road which led to the top of the hill where Kinmama was waiting with a car.

It seemed that the climb up that low hill would never end, and my heart was pounding so violently that I had to rest several times on the way. Most fortunately, the road was empty on that sabbath day and no one noticed me. The sabbath saved me. When I reached the hilltop I found the car waiting, with Lu Maung busily putting on a show of repairing some breakdown in it. Kinmama came out from a bush nearby; I wrapped the Shan turban round my head, she had the shawl thrown over hers, and within a few minutes we were heading for the next state where U Aung Ba was expecting me. At last I was free again; free, that is, as long as I was not recaptured or shot down.



I can still recall that drive vividly. After a walled-in existence of nearly two years and the prospect of many more to follow, the sheer thrill of succeeding to break free, of being suddenly a free man speeding freely along an open road through open fields and villages as free as the people I passed on the way was overwhelming. As I sped on I could not think of anything beyond the actual moment and its sensations. It was like seeing everything I passed for the first time, the hills and valleys and the distant villages shining like little painted pictures in the soft northern sun, and the people coming and going and the children playing happily

everywhere. It was a sheer ecstasy which blotted out all past and future, which was even sharpened by a certain awareness that I was just living the first moments in an adventure that had only begun and could end tragically. I was gambling with fate to the last limit, and at least for the moment I had won.

✓ Within an hour or so I had reached Maing-lon. We stopped in a wood just outside the town and sent word secretly to Aung Ba, who came at once and took charge of the situation. Very early the next morning we were taken to Pan-san, a small village on the highway where it runs close to the foot of the hills inhabited by the Palaungs in Maing-lon State. The Palaungs are a very shy, primitive hill people whose main occupation is tea-growing. Their villages are always situated on hilltops, for this allows them to cultivate their tea plants on the hillsides all around; at the same time those peaks are so steep, rugged, and out of the way that the tribe is able to live their lives in complete isolation and security from the more pushing Burmese and Shans on the plains. It was in Pan-lon, one of these little villages nestling on a remote hill, that I was to lie low till the first hue and cry over my escape had died down.

Before I left Pan-san for the hills a small incident occurred which warned me that the long British arm could still reach me. I happened to walk into a roadside teashop close to the village to buy a few necessities. Idly I looked around and saw a calendar on a wall from which a face looked out that seemed familiar. I went cold upon discovering that it was mine as the prime minister of Burma, and below the picture there was my name clearly printed; and it hung in a place where no passerby could miss seeing it. Approaching Aung Ba quietly I told him to get that calendar somehow after I had left the shop. It was only when he returned with that wretched portrait that I was able to breathe freely again. But all the euphoria of the first free hours was now mostly gone. That calendar, however, was to get me out of a bad fix one day, as I will relate later.

Pan-lon was a typical Palaung village, consisting of a cluster of low, shaky bamboo-and-leaf huts built rudely at the edge of a tiger-infested jungle which had been cleared in places for tea-growing. In it one stepped right back into a world where life continued to be aboriginal, where, for instance, there were no schools or books,

or even a rudimentary form of writing, in fact, hardly anything beyond the most basic human necessities. I found a single monastery of a sort, where a monk pursued his lonely way. A woman in the village was held in honour as the monk's wife, but the relationship between the two was merely a ritual one. Instead of approaching the monk directly, the villagers would go to this woman with various offerings to obtain through her intercession the monk's prayers and incantations for their security or well-being or anything they needed. The monk himself remained out of their daily lives and its relations, in solitary communion with the spirits.

✓As for their religious faith, if it could be called that, it was a product of their environment, a deep encrustation of beliefs slowly evolved out of the mystery and menace of the jungle and passed on from one generation to another over the centuries in the usual form of tribal lore and fetishes and taboos and, needless to say, a large assortment of magic. However, the jungle had taught them other things as well of greater practical value, such as various arts and devices to protect the tribe against its enemies, both man and beast. Thus the village had a stout fence of pointed bamboos erected round it as well as in cunningly selected places to keep intruders out. None could therefore enter the village after dark without the knowledge of the villagers, many of whom worked late into the night sorting and steaming the tea leaves gathered during the day. Soon after they had retired others would wake up to start the early morning work of picking fresh leaves in the clearings on the hillsides so that again no one could approach the village in the day without alerting it. Also, there were little hidden paths by which one could slip in and out of the village and, if necessary, vanish into the hills and bushes. As far as I was concerned, these defences were just what I needed.

But all was far from being as well as it might appear from what I have just said. The fact remained that I was a hunted man trying to hide right in the middle of a sprawling battle zone in which several armies were already crumbling and large numbers of their troops wandered in the country around so that no place in it was really safe for a conspicuous fugitive like me. I had started by making the gravest mistake possible, which would have proved dis-

astrous if conditions had been different; if, for instance, the British had not been in such a hurry to get out or had not decided to leave my fate in the hands of the Chinese.

My mistake was in choosing such an outlandish hide-out; it made me and my wife so conspicuous that instead of being hidden and lost in it we stood out glaringly and almost became the focus of all eyes there. Wherever we passed we would see groups of people watching us furtively and whispering to one another. They were friendly, but a single one among them who was not could have ended everything for me by merely reporting my presence to the nearest headman in the plains below. That such a betrayal did not occur was, I am sure, due to the strong bonds which bound the tribe to their chief U Aung Ba, who had in effect entrusted me to their keeping. They were told to leave me alone and see that nothing happened to me, and they did so. It was this tribal virtue more than anything else I can think of which saved me.

The general situation also did. The government had sent out an order to the police in several districts that I was to be captured dead or alive, but it proved to be no more than a routine order, for, as I have already explained, the administration had broken down so completely in most areas that its orders ceased to have any force or even meaning; most of the administrative officers were too busy trying to escape capture themselves to think of capturing anyone else. However, I took the precaution to leave the village at times and keep out of the path of the retreating troops as they streamed past.

With each day that passed, the situation grew worse. Chinese remnants fleeing from the Japanese turned into open bandits. I have mentioned earlier the comment of J. F. Cady on the Chinese behaviour at that time: "The panic-stricken Chinese forces became an undisciplined rabble." It was even worse, as I know personally. The Chinese soldiers simply ran loose, looting and burning nearly every house or village on their way, often going out of their way for more loot, and leaving utter desolation behind. It was like the old Tartar hordes back in Burma again.

As for the Indian troops, I happen to know of one brief incident in which some of them were involved. They were evidently stragglers who had lost their way. They approached our village

and a few tried to seize some of the Palaung girls working in the clearings, but when the girls shouted and the villagers rushed out they quickly disappeared.

The plight of the Shan villages along the main road was, however, the worst of all. The villagers tried to organise their own defences, but as was to be expected, it was all very poorly done; nothing they could improvise could stem that armed, tidal fury. As the Chinese debacle increased so did the forces in headlong retreat, and so did their lust and brutality. It seemed that they were wreaking their vengeance on the local people for their disasters in Burma.

With every day that went by the anarchy and panic all around me spread and deepened, the fleeing troops filled the roads and lanes, and the cold-blooded destruction also spread. I could not look on idly; so I helped to plan the defence of some villages and gave my own men and guns to be used, but our efforts were not very successful as it turned out, for the odds against us were far too much. I myself narrowly escaped these stragglers and bandits, who soon learnt to waylay people fleeing with their belongings at night.

All this mass terror and flight had its meaning for me, for it was a sure sign that the Japanese forces were drawing close, which meant that I had to find a way to meet them. I had also to think of rescuing my family, whom I had left behind in Mogok; it had to be done before the British could discover that I had joined the Japanese. I turned at once to both these tasks.

✓ But even before I could begin to carry them out something occurred which did a good part of the tasks for me. Late one evening a bullock cart creaking most noisily approached one of the gates of our village and a voice which sounded friendly called out from it that they had brought important information for the security of the village. I told the headman to keep on talking to them without letting them in while I and a group of armed men listened from the neighbouring shadows. Suddenly, I recognised the voice that spoke most: it was Bo Hla Aung, or Bo Lyaung as he was known in the political circles of those days, and one whom I could trust completely then. He had the presence of mind to make his voice clear and recognisable so that I should know it and so know that friends had come to help me. I was desperately in need

of any information that would tell me where the Japanese field command of the area was, for I could deal safely only with the men there and none else; I had heard that both sides were shooting people upon the slightest suspicion that they were spies or saboteurs. At this point I intervened in the talk going on and, disguising my voice, I asked for the name of the speaker from the cart.

"Bo Lyaung," came the clear answer.

"How many of you are there?"

"Just me and a companion and the cartman."

"What weapons are you carrying?"

"Just a gun and a revolver."

"Pass them over the gate to us."

They promptly did so. I asked my men to take them and meanwhile switched the light of an electric torch on the cart to make sure the men were not holding any weapons, and then on Bo Lyaung's face. Sure enough, it was he.

I took him to my hut. My very first question to him was how he had come to find out my whereabouts. It was from my driver, he said, who after accompanying me when I first came to the hills had been allowed to return to his sick wife in Mandalay. So it was a Burmese who had thoughtlessly let out a secret which the Palaungs had so staunchly kept. It was not a reassuring thought.

Bo Lyaung brought vital information. First of all, he gave me a letter from General Wang. I have already mentioned that letter earlier, which was written very shortly after Wang had heard of my disappearance from Mogok jail. As I have said, it appealed for my cooperation with Nationalist China in the war. "Please join us in saving China," the letter ended poignantly. "You will find us eternally grateful." Together with the letter Wang sent his card, on which was written in Chinese as well as English an order to all military units in the area to let me and my family pass safely and even to provide any aid or protection that I should need along the way. Ironically, as I will soon relate, this order proved most costly to me in the swift chaos which followed the Japanese breakthrough in that region.

Wang also sent me with his letter an order of the government of Burma offering me a full pardon for all my past offences against the state "if you will cooperate with the government of Nationalist China in the successful prosecution of the war." It was a round-

about way of getting me to cooperate with the British, a strategy they employed so successfully in fomenting the subsequent anti-Japanese resistance in Burma. Bo Lyaung told me that those documents had been entrusted to him by U Ba Dun, an old friend of mine, who during that period was living at Naung-cho in the Northern Shan States. My brother, Dr. Ba Han, and his family also had evacuated to that town. Upon failing to meet me in Mogok, Wang had gone to see Dr. Ba Han to find out where I was. He offered him a large sum of money to meet the expense of searching for me, but it was declined. Bo Lyaung discovered from Dr. Ba Han that the documents had been left with U Ba Dun, and so he promptly went and got them and brought them to me at a crucial moment.

Having thus obtained all the necessary information, I came to a decision that night. Bo Lyaung was to leave for Mogok the next morning armed with Wang's safe-pass and protection order; from there he was at once to take my family with everything they were carrying to my brother's camp at Naung-cho, where they were to wait for me. My wife Kinmama would remain in Pan-lon till she was rescued later, while I would make my way across the battle lines to find the Japanese field headquarters as soon as I was informed of my family's safe arrival in Naung-cho. Bo Lyaung would send me the information.

Soon the reports came. The cars which took my family, consisting of women and children, had succeeded in passing safely through, but the car which followed later with their belongings had run into a band of Chinese soldiers. When Lu Maung, who was driving the car, showed them Wang's card containing the safe-pass order some of the soldiers, swearing fearfully, snatched it and tore it to bits. Lu Maung was pushed against a post to be shot instantly. Just then a young Chinese officer happened to pass by. Lu Maung rushed to him and desperately tried to explain the situation, at the same time picking up Wang's torn card and showing it to the officer. Fortunately, the young officer knew some English; he also read Wang's order and then spoke a few words to the soldiers, with the result that Lu Maung was released, but everything he carried in the car was lost and the car itself was burnt. This was how things were on the roads during that period.

With my family now safe in Naung-cho I decided to leave for

Kyaukme, the nearest large town on the main road. I calculated that at least some section of the Japanese field command would be there. Conditions being what they were, it was out of the question' for me to travel on any of the open roads either by day or by night, for almost anyone would have recognised me. So I decided to cut across the hills and jungles and get down to the main road only when it looked safe. I would travel at night and lie low during the day. This plan in theory was sound, but when actually carried out it proved to be an incredible blunder which nearly cost me my life.

FREEDOM

And so the last stage of my flight to freedom began. I left Pansan by cart that night accompanied by three men, all armed and trustworthy. Following our plan, we kept to the hills and jungles, thinking only of escaping the Chinese bandits on the roads. While we were jogging along across the bare uplands it might have been any other kind of journey that is made in those remote, sparsely inhabited regions. It was only when the night advanced and grew darker that it dawned on me that it was not going to be the usual kind of journey. Soon we were deep in the jungles which stretch along the hill slopes and down into the valleys; the absolutely pitch-black darkness now swallowed everything except a tiny patch of the cart-track which the small, swinging lantern on the cart lit fitfully as we lurched and rolled along. I began to have a feeling that I was travelling backward in time, to a long-past, nocturnal age in which our ancestors once roamed these very forests. It was an eerie sort of feeling which I, with my racial heritage, can only explain by saying that some deep, aboriginal part of me was waking to the call of the aboriginal forces which still lurk in those ancient places. At any rate, something really called and something within me really answered in the jungle that night.

Through most of that journey I lived in a fantasy. I also came to understand those tribal communities which live perpetually in an environment which makes such fantasies real, in fact, makes them the only reality, and so turns all reality as others know it into fantasies. It was a vindication of jungle faith. All the gods and spirits which the tribes dwelling within the shadows of a jungle have seen almost daily for generations can still be seen there. The

whole jungle is alive at night, and stirs, breathes, speaks to you with a hundred voices, watches you with as many eyes, clutches you with as many hands. All these hands and voices lead you back into the vast, primordial womb which swallows you again and leaves you with only the consciousness that the womb alone is fundamentally real and the truths born in it alone are true. In the fantasy of that night I could have fallen down in utter surrender and worship before the old tribal gods whose reality only a futile fellow who has never known the brooding power of trees and hills and silent, lonely places would deny. I do not know a single person who has wandered in a forest at night and come out of it without meeting some of its gods, at least, without being secretly convinced that they were there. A state of emotional tension or exaltation increases the conviction. I found that the Palaungs as well as others around those forests live constantly in such a state of tension.

Suddenly I was jolted back to reality by one of my men, who hissed into my ear that he heard the sound of human feet approaching us from different directions. "Shan dacoits, Shan dacoits," he repeated breathlessly. "They are trying to surround us. They have guns." He was a Palaung who knew every sound and scent in a jungle. He also knew the ways of these dacoit gangs. He therefore suggested that we should pose as British army men marching at night, and fire a few shots to prove it to them. I decided to do as he said. Fortunately, I had on a khaki shirt; I am also somewhat tall and light-skinned, and have a voice which can pass off as a drill sergeant's; and I knew the chorus of "Tipperary," which everyone in Burma associates with the British army. We had to act before the dacoits did. So we stopped at the first boulder which would cover our flank and took up positions behind the cart, while the cartman kept the torchlight full on my khaki shirt and the guns. One of us fired a shot, whose sound, shattering enough in itself, was followed by a rush of echoes that were like all the jungle beasts howling together. Then in the roughest army voice I could assume and using the bloodiest-sounding army language, I shouted out to the dacoits to come if they dared, and that we were army men. Quickly, the sounds in the undergrowth receded and then stopped, and a group of faces caught in the light

of the torch vanished into the darkness. We fired another shot at this psychological moment. To my great relief I did not find it necessary to sing "Tipperary."

It was a close business, and after it was over we did need something to drink, especially my men, who had proved themselves to be so wonderful. We finished a whole bottle of brandy, but we remembered to pour the first drink on the ground as a grateful offering to the gods who had preserved us from a great peril. And then, fortified by the brandy and the favour of the jungle spirits, I did sing "Tipperary" most lustily till I remembered that some Japanese troops in the vicinity might hear me and recognise the tune, and that would have been catastrophic for me. Our perils were not yet over, for throughout the journey we repeatedly heard the same blood-chilling sounds of feet pursuing or waylaying us, and we had to extricate ourselves by firing shot after shot. It was a perfect nightmare all the way.

Early next morning we reached a Shan monastery just outside a hillside village, completely dazed and drained out. It was the narrowest escape I had had so far; in fact I would not have escaped if that most faithful Palaung had not kept his wits and shown me the way to do it. I decided never again to travel through an unknown jungle or any such territory at night in the conditions existing then. So from then on we would rest during the night either in a village monastery or some sheltered place and travel during the day. It took us six days to get down to a safe part of the road leading to Kyaukme, which was our destination.

It was a daily ordeal. For safety we had to keep to a track which passed from one village to another, and, as the villages in that region are always built on the highest and steepest summits, we climbed and descended continuously from one summit to another, and between them there were narrow, gorge-like valleys often blocked by boulders and rushing streams; at the most we could negotiate three or four such hills a day. It was only on the fifth day, when we could at last see from a distance the road to Kyaukme, that we noticed that the situation had changed dramatically for us. We suddenly found the traditional tokens of welcome at the entrance of several villages we passed—a few bamboo lattice screens decked with red buntings, behind which would be a rough table laden with flowers and fruits and always a

jug of water. I would find the village headman and a few others waiting to receive me. By cautious probing I discovered that word had gone from village to village along the route that a big Japanese officer was travelling along it and every village had guessed the day and time of his arrival and so got out the usual signs of welcome and hospitality. To my utter surprise I found that this legendary Japanese officer was no other than me. Again, sheer luck had saved me. If the Japanese victory had not completely swept away every remnant of the British and Chinese forces in that area the rumour that I was an important Japanese officer travelling on a secret mission would have been my complete undoing. It just happened, however, that this rumour was one of the things which helped to protect me during my fantastic trek.

There was every indication now that my long adventure which had begun with my escape from Mogok jail, ages ago as it seemed, was at last about to end happily. To make sure, however, I sent one of my men to watch the movements on the road. He returned to tell me that all seemed safe and clear except for a few armoured cars flying a white flag with a large red ball on it which were passing now and then. I knew the flag to be Japanese. So early next morning we descended to that road and were on the way to Kyaukme.

JOURNEY'S END

We were three grotesque-looking figures come straight out of the jungle lairs, each with a gun slung across his shoulder and a dirty bundle swinging behind. I had no notion of what we really looked like till someone we passed just as we were approaching the town shouted out to us, "Hey, you Chinese, don't you know the Japanese are in the town? Do you want to lose your heads? Get away before they see you." We stopped dead, and for the first time I thought of our actual appearance and how we could be mistaken for the most desperate type of Chinese, whom the Japanese would unhesitatingly shoot on sight. I was unshaven and unwashed for days, my clothes were in absolute tatters with all the stains and smells of remote tribal haunts on them, my canvas shoes were so completely in pieces that they had to be held together with creepers tied around them, my hat might have been picked from a garbage

dump; worst of all, we wore loose Chinese or Shan trousers which made us look indubitably Chinese.

✓ All that had to be changed at once. Besides, I really had to look a bit more what I claimed to be before any Japanese saw me. So we skirted the town till we reached the house of a friend of I Sing, the Shan member of our group. I Sing met his friend, explained to him who I was and my purpose in coming, and we were given the free use of his house. Within a very short time I had gulped down a whole heap of bread and butter and cup after cup of hot, sweet tea, and then fallen into perhaps the heaviest sleep of my life.

I woke up late in the afternoon, had a haircut and a shave, got out of my rags, bathed luxuriously at a well, and finally got into my usual Burmese dress and *dama* cap. I was nearly my old self again, ready to meet my party men and friends, who had by now heard of my arrival and had flocked to the house. I collected all the information they could give me. Late in the evening I went out with some of the men to see the town. Japanese troops were wandering about everywhere, almost all frontline fighting men who were neither interested in nor capable of understanding anything beyond their immediate duties.

We went to the compound of the commanding officer and, not knowing what to say, I shouted out "Banzai" several times and waved my arms wildly to show that I meant it. After a long wait the officer appeared on the veranda, glared at us, barked out something to some soldiers below, and disappeared. When I found that the soldiers also glared at us similarly and one of them became interested in the Shan bag I was carrying, I thought it safest to return home and see only the highest officer stationed in the town.

✓ I found him the next morning. He was a colonel in charge of communications among other things and was having telegraph poles and wires and things like that fixed in the area. To establish my identity I took with me the calendar carrying my picture which, as I have related, I found at a roadside shop in Pan-san. The colonel, a scholarly type of gentleman who spoke a little English, received me courteously. I showed him the picture on the calendar, assured him that it was me when I was the premier of Burma under the British, told him that I had escaped from a

British prison in Mogok in order to join the Japanese in the war. He stared at the picture, then at me, and seemed at last to be convinced that I was not lying. Saying "Very glad, very glad," he smiled and sent for tea and cakes. While we ate and talked happily he told me that he had heard my name mentioned by the Japanese Kempetai, who were searching for me in that area. It was my first real meeting with the Japanese forces in battle conditions, and it proved to be pleasant and auspicious.

Before I left I informed the colonel that my wife was still stranded on a hill miles away and it was necessary to rescue her immediately, and to do this I needed help from the Japanese army. Without the slightest hesitation he told me to come in the evening, when a Japanese motorised unit would accompany me on my mission. Just before sunset the Japanese unit and I left Kyaukme. But we had only gone a short way when we met three cars carrying my wife, some of my party men from Mandalay, and a Kempetai unit under Captain Mori. It turned out that the Kempetai had been taken to my wife's hideaway by the Mandalay party members. They had found her that very day and had brought her back to Kyaukme. The army unit accompanying me duly handed me over to the Kempetai, and from then on my wife and I were in their charge and keeping. It was all like something out of an old folktale.

We spent that evening feasting riotously. My party members prepared a great meal for Captain Mori and his men in one house, and in another I, Kinmama, my two faithful comrades in flight, and the party leaders ate and talked and laughed and sang late into the night; we had so much to tell one another and to laugh over. !

✓ Early next morning I wished my two comrades good-bye, my heart also breaking. I told them to keep their guns, gave them all the money I could borrow from the people around at that moment, and as much food as they could carry back to their village. They accepted the gifts most reluctantly. Then we left with Captain Mori and the other Kempetai for Naung-cho, to pick up my family there. Travelling now with good cars and roads we soon reached the place, met my brother Dr. Ba Han and his family, found all my children well and happy, talked for hours, and finally left for Maymyo on our way to Mandalay.

It was in Maymyo that I had what might be called my first moment of truth as a free man again. The news that I was passing through the town that day had already reached it, and a crowd that had collected on the main road shouted out my name when they saw our cars go by. At this the Kempetai accompanying me looked nervous, and as soon as I got down from the car they surrounded me and rushed me into the restaurant where we were to have our meal. Surprised at this, I asked Captain Mori, the principal Japanese officer, the reason for it. He gave it very solemnly. They were now responsible, he explained, for my safety, and conditions were too chaotic and dangerous to trust anyone at such a time. I might be assassinated, he said.

"By whom?" I asked.

"By the B.I.A. or by British agents and army stragglers," was the unhesitating reply.

I was staggered. "But why should the B.I.A. kill me when we were fighting for the same things? I have worked together with their leaders. Why should they kill me for that?"

Mori smiled and proceeded to explain further. Some B.I.A. leaders might be good and high-minded, he said, his voice rising as he went on, but most of their men and especially the people hanging round them were definitely not. The real shock came with his next words, so much so that I noted them down in my diary as accurately as I remembered them.

"Plenty thieves and bad men in B.I.A.," Mori said, "They rob, kill, do everything bad. Burmese rob Burmese not good. B.I.A. men want money and power. They kill you to get power. We cannot allow it. We now stopping them everywhere." Mori's words left me speechless. I who a while ago had thought that there was nothing more that could surprise me very much found the biggest surprise of all in the words I was hearing. It was plain that Mori believed every word he spoke; and his mention of Japanese action against the B.I.A. showed how critical the situation was at that moment.

A little later, while we were having our meal, the door flew open and Kyaw Nyein, the young man who had tried to take me away from Mogok jail, rushed in and greeted me volubly. It was too late for anyone to stop him, and I too insisted on speaking to him after telling Mori that very probably he had some important

information of a personal value for me. Soon we got to the subject of the B.I.A. and its activities. Kyaw Nyein looked at the Kempetai men seated at the table and, edging away from them and lowering his voice, told me how the Japanese were trying to break up the Burmese army. "If they go too far," he said finally, "we will fight back. We have thirty thousand men now, and many more will join us if necessary." I listened in silence. In spite of all I had gone through and every kind of contingency I had visualised in the past three years I found myself quite unprepared for this one.

"Is it as bad as that?" was all I could say to Kyaw Nyein when he had finished. I forgot his reply. He left me after that, and soon we were driving towards Mandalay.

In Mandalay I had my first sight of the horrors of a total war. A good part of the city had been wantonly bombed and burnt and sacked. The old Burmese palace with its priceless treasures and memories was nearly gone, most of the landmarks had similarly disappeared, and whole areas within the city were now a mass of charred posts and ruins. As for the people, they looked plainly bewildered by the events which had overtaken them with such fury. However, one could see that they were taking it fatalistically in the way the Burmese have learnt to do always. They spoke eagerly of the new Burmese era, as it was called then, which they saw dawning with the British gone. Most of them were far from being subdued by the destruction round them. They did not believe that it was the end of everything, as similar catastrophes used to be in the past, but the beginning.



My work in Mandalay commenced as soon as I arrived there. I was at once flooded with complaints and requests of every conceivable sort, but most of all with accounts of the brutal doings of the various armies operating in the area, such as the destruction by the British of steamboats and industrial installations as well as a whole range of other properties which had nothing to do with the war, but were wantonly destroyed in anger and retaliation against

the Burmese; arrests, seizures, and slappings by the Japanese; widespread banditry by the Chinese troops; the enormities committed by many in the B.I.A. and their local administrations nearly everywhere; and always they would end with stories of the growing friction between the Japanese Kempetai and the Burmese army.

One B.I.A. outrage in Madaya was so revolting that I got Bo Mogyo and Bo Let Ya to do something about it. Completely agreeing with me, they took action at once, and it had a remarkable effect in the locality. Aung San also acted promptly in one or two cases I brought to his attention. I soon realised, however, that I could not go on intervening like that in every individual case reported to me. The problem was too deep and universal to be met in that piecemeal kind of way. Besides, if done too often, it would have looked very much like meddling on my part. So I decided to take up the matter as a whole with Aung San. To my surprise, I discovered that he was even more eager than I to talk about it. He had felt for some time that this problem could only be solved by direct negotiation with the Japanese High Command, and for this purpose the B.I.A. would need the help of someone who enjoyed the confidence of that supreme military authority. It had become more or less certain by then that the Japanese would request me to be the head of the Burmese side of the new administration, and this evidently made Bo Mogyo and Aung San conclude that I might be useful to them.

I have already mentioned Aung San's visits to me in Mandalay during those critical days and the steps we took together to set right the relations between the B.I.A. and the Japanese. Those relations were rapidly creating a tension which in its turn was spawning various other tensions, many of them interracial, all over the country, and already the people, thoroughly confused and embittered by the brutalities committed by both the armies, were beginning to take sides, backing one side or the other according to their personal or party grievances and leanings. I have related how these currents were eventually stemmed in the nick of time by disbanding the B.I.A. and creating the B.D.A. around the best elements in the old army. That was the only way out of a conflict which would have destroyed the Burmese armed forces altogether.

and left the people divided, torn and weakened, and completely helpless in the face of their enemies throughout the whole of the war.

For a fortnight or so my family and I were kept under close protective guard; whatever its purpose was, it was a form of confinement which fettered me to such an extent that I spoke to Captain Mori very strongly about it. Perhaps that made things move a bit faster, for I was soon taken to Maymyo to meet some of the top staff officers of the Japanese Army Headquarters.

We met at a conference presided over by General Nasu. U Ba Pe and Dr. Thein Maung, veteran political leaders whom the British had kept in detention, were also there. I also met Bo Mogyo for the first time. I found him friendly, relaxed in a smouldering sort of way, and realistic enough to be eager to cooperate with me as well as the other leaders who would take charge of the Burmese side of the new civil administration. He even went to the extent of following me up to Mandalay in order that we should know each other better. One of its results, as I have related, was Bo Mogyo's much-needed help in quelling the racial conflagration in Myaungmya District. The discussion at the meeting was very general and no decisions were reached; it was evident that the Japanese merely wanted to take soundings among us before going further.

A few days after my return to Mandalay I was informed that I would be asked to form a Burmese preparatory committee to get ready the ground for setting up a proper Burmese civil government and administration that would work together with the Japanese army command. On June 4, 1942, the newly formed committee met in Maymyo and were duly installed as the Provisional Committee of Civil Administration under General Shojiro Iida, the Supreme Japanese military commander. The relations between the committee and the Japanese authorities were defined in a footnote to the order announcing its appointment. "It is desirable," the footnote stated, "that the committee should cooperate with the Japanese Military Authorities in all spheres."

On the same day General Iida gave formal assent to the dissolution of the B.I.A. and the creation in its place of the B.D.A. with Colonel Aung San as its commander-in-chief. The next day Aung San issued his first order disbanding the B.I.A. and informing its

members that with the formation of the Provisional Administrative Committee all civil administration had passed into the hands of that committee and the B.I.A. local administrations had ceased altogether to function. "We are no longer responsible for the mode of government," the order announced.

Those were happy days for us. With only one moderate political leader, U Ba Pe, questioning the practical wisdom of our action, we who had led the wartime national struggle had, with the sanction of the Japanese army, succeeded in bringing into existence a preparatory body possessing the power as well as the means to stop the drift in the country towards complete chaos and to organise a new era and administration later. We had also settled, at least for the time being, the smouldering B.I.A. question. That night we talked in ecstasy of the days ahead and the things we would do together for our land and people. Our words glowed in the still night, but already a shadow fell across them whenever the Japanese were mentioned. However, that was only for a few moments now and then; our happiness continued, and we went on ardently dreaming and talking of the brave new world we were stepping into.

In order to start work at once we decided to rush back to Rangoon. But before doing so I went to Mogok to rescue some of the people there to whom I owed so much, particularly Dr. Thein Pe, U Myint, and their families. I could hardly recognise the town, once so peaceful and happy and unconcerned with outside events, and now completely terrified by those events. The old administration was gone and in its place a few gunmen were running most things, while the townspeople, thoroughly cowed and bewildered, remained as much as possible behind locked doors, or else moved away to safer areas. While U Nu and I were there Bo Let Ya, one of the highest B.I.A. officers, arrived to restore a little more order and security. I learnt from him that the condition of Mogok was typical of what was going on in nearly all the little out-of-way towns and villages throughout the land. The perfectly chilling account he gave me of this universal breakdown made me realise for the first time how enormous the mere task of putting the broken pieces together was going to be.

Soon after our return to Mandalay I and my family, accompanied by U Nu, left for Rangoon. We travelled by road and were

consequently able to see for ourselves the actual state of the country on a wider scale. All that Bo Let Ya told me was true; we witnessed what could only be described as a mass uprooting along the whole road from Mandalay to Rangoon. For miles the roads were choked by masses of people fleeing with their possessions from one place to another, in particular to the larger towns for greater security, and the noise and confusion were often almost unbelievable.

But there was also a Burmese touch in it at times, for, strangely enough, we heard quite a lot of laughter too, and sometimes even a sudden outburst of singing would reach us across the darkness. The people as a whole remained Burmese by keeping their sense of humour and making the best of their lot more or less fatalistically. But we also heard or saw a good deal that was searing. In certain places the situation looked so much out of control, with a lot of armed men making it worse with their orders and demands, that my Kempetai guards had the time of their lives trying to protect us from any likely peril. It was only when we got to Toungoo to spend the night there that it began to look tolerably safe and orderly.

In Rangoon we got to work straightaway. Our immediate task was to restore some kind of working government in the whole country by first of all setting up a new, unified, centrally controlled administrative structure in place of the little local bodies whose arbitrary antics had brought the country to the state it was now in. We had to do this from the very first bricks.

And so the miracle of creating a new era upon the ruins of the old began, for, weighing everything, it was really a new era, and it was achieved basically by the strength and resilience of the Burmese spirit which neither the vicissitudes of all the past long centuries of native misrule and foreign conquest nor the onslaughts of six armies which had overrun the land during the war could destroy.

We took a bold, new step into the future, seeing or knowing little of what lay there, but believing a lot in the stars that were leading us on.



PART II

CHAPTER 8

The Burmese Era

ORGANISATION OF THE GOVERNMENT

A new era began in Burma on August 1, 1942, with the coming into force of a Japanese military order called "The Organisation of the Government." The order set up a Burmese government to function within the wider framework of a military administration. Two other orders were issued at the same time appointing the ministers and secretaries in the new government. From then on the first order became a sort of working constitution under which Burma was to be governed till the next step forward was taken.

As the head of that government I at once got together a strong team within the cabinet as well as outside—the best there was to be had politically, although not quite so in other ways. I knew I could not expect to get a combination of the best in everything at a time like that, and, anyway, I had selected enough of the kind of brains and guts likely to be most able to stand up to the wartime tasks. A good number of the ministers had proved themselves in many past crises, and there was consequently every promise that they would do the same in the future too.

Working closely with us outside the government were many political veterans who began to organise a new countrywide Thakshana Sinyetha Party, which would weld together all the political as well as communal segments in the country into a single national fighting front. There were also close relations between some of us and those in command of the Burma Defence Army. It was as wide and monolithic a structure as we could devise to carry on the Burmese struggle unitedly to the end. We were looking well ahead.

Before I say more, I will give the essential portions of the military order which had created this new era, for that order was the starting point of all that was to follow till we reached the next stage a year later in August 1943, when Burma was declared an independent state and the Japanese military administration was withdrawn. Most of my story concerning that first year will be linked with this military order and the way it worked.

1. The government shall carry out the same executive functions as under the British. . . .
2. Parliament shall be abolished. . . .
3. The Commander-in-Chief shall have over-all control of the administration. . . . He shall exercise the right of legislation. . . .
4. The Prime Minister shall be responsible to the Commander-in-Chief in directing and controlling the affairs of all the ministries and departments of the government. . . . The ministries and departments shall be responsible to the Prime Minister and shall discharge their respective functions under his direct control and supervision. . . .
5. Advisers shall be appointed to assist the various ministries and departments and they shall take part in carrying out all important functions and duties of the ministries and departments concerned.

These clauses formed the hard core of the military order. The other parts were merely amplifications which rounded it out.

The constitution, as I have called it, was without any pretense a soldier's handiwork, short, sharp, tremendously authoritative, and final, and focussed on the war, which was really all it appeared to have in view. During the talks that preceded it some officers from the Japanese staff explained to me the need, as they saw it, for the first stage of administration in a newly occupied country that had become a crucial frontline area. "An army of occupation could do no less," one of them told me bluntly.

I seized upon his words and asked, "But are you occupying our country or are we fighting a common war together?" The officer took some moments to recover and then barked out, "Militarily, we are occupying Burma. We refuse to take risks."

Another officer, who saw me almost wince, intervened. "There has got to be a beginning," he explained genially, changing the tone of the talk, "and in this case it has to be a term of military administration during which our Supreme Military Commander here will exercise final power and control. That is what is always done in a war. But we are going as far as we safely can to satisfy you by putting the rest of the power, the actual day-to-day part of it, in your hands to be used by the Burmese. Some of us even think that the power we are giving you is too much and consequently too dangerous, but we have decided to give it. How the military order will work will depend upon the extent to which you win the personal trust of the Commander-in-Chief. Win that trust and you will have won everything. Personal relations count more than anything else with us Japanese."

Seeing my face relax a little he smiled and continued, "Will not that give you a far wider scope than you had under the old rigid, British-made constitutions which tied you up with words, ignoring persons and changing conditions? And the military administration will last only as long as the war conditions make it absolutely necessary." The other officers present at the time remained silent and some even nodded in approval, including the nasty little fellow who had barked at me; and, of course, even this attempt to explain an action of theirs to the Burmese was a most unusual gesture for the Japanese militarists to make.

It was the first big lesson I learnt from the Japanese army, that for it and perhaps for all exercising military power anywhere, a constitution is fundamentally a matter of personal relationships, which is almost to say that the way to work it successfully is to get around to your side the right people. Putting it more seriously, situations and relationships determine the actual meaning of a constitution and not the other way around. For the Japanese in those days, administration was personal, pragmatic, feudal. The British way of turning everything into a machine and sanctifying it made no sense to them. They had to see power as a person. We simply had to take that fact into account; it left us no choice but to be pragmatic ourselves and go along with the idea as long as we profited by it.

In the hard conditions of a war which was uprooting almost everything as it raged from day to day, the absence of something

impersonal and rooted and objective, something having the force of an absolute, of a rule of law instead of persons, proved in the long run disastrous to both the Burmese and the Japanese. As was to be expected, it turned into a devastating game in which both sides often did away with all rules and exploited individual weaknesses and played off one side against the other and this group or person against that to gain what they wanted—generally the basest advantages for themselves. What was even more devastating was that the game soon sank to the lowest depths of false reports and rumours, backbitings, backstabbing, and in course of time plain unmitigated treachery. Both sides suffered fearfully, but the Japanese got far the worst of it, as the final scores proved. As for me it nearly cost me my life and turned the last year of the war into a hell.

Things, however, did not go bad all at once, at any rate not in places and affairs over which we could keep a close look-out. There we mostly had our own way and were able to brush aside any attempt at interference. It is true, as even the British intelligence reported, that all the day-to-day power within our own jurisdiction was actually made over to us. This as well as other bright spots in the picture gave me a new idea and hope. There was a reason for that hope.

Fortunately, my relations with General Shojiro Iida, the Commander-in-Chief, had become close and warm. I had found him to be a unique type of Japanese soldier, human, fatherly, and very understanding, a militarist on the surface, but not altogether so deeper down; at least he always tried to see things your way too, which was what made him different from the other militarists. It gave him a good deal of inner perception, particularly of the fact that a war can be won or lost in many ways and for many reasons, one of the surest ways to lose it being to rouse the hostility and resistance of a whole people. The general was a samurai in his almost mystical devotion to his emperor, his warrior caste and code, and his country, but this very devotion which consumed him made him understand the devotion of others to their own gods. It was this rare, very unmilitaristic quality which made him great in our eyes.

I always had the feeling that the understanding was at most

times there, although there were times when for military reasons it could not show itself clearly. Iida displayed it in many ways, often to the confusion of many around him for whom the Burmese as a conquered people only had rights that the Japanese army as conquerors gave them. I recall in particular one instance when he showed the stuff he was made of unforgettably for me. Without trying to hide my feelings, I had reported to him the behaviour of the Japanese in the districts who had slapped or assaulted our people at random. I told him that slapping for any reason whatsoever was regarded in Burma as an unspeakable outrage and that such a practice, if it was not stopped at once, could very seriously damage the administration as well as the Burmese war effort, for which I was responsible to him.

Iida saw the point at once. He showed it sharply, even going to the extent of saying, "Why don't your people slap these fellows back? They would deserve it." I could hardly believe his words, knowing as I was beginning to do the ways of the Japanese militarists, but his face as well as his voice showed that he was really outraged and meant what he said. A few days later I was informed that he had issued an order prohibiting the Japanese from slapping people or doing anything that violated native sensibilities or customs. This stopped the abominable practice generally, although there were still instances here and there of people being slapped on the quiet, but that sort of brutality occurs in every army brutalised by a war, especially in a foreign country it has overrun. There are such brutes in every army. What is important is that their vicious acts should be condemned and punished as much as practicable in the conditions of war. That was what I tried to get done. As far as I know, General Nasu, the deputy chief-of-staff under General Iida and one of the finest Japanese officers I dealt with, openly condemned these barbarous practices, and so did Colonel Hiraoka, the liaison officer working with us, who proved to be such an unfailing friend and champion of our rights at all times. They fought hard to stop all slapping. Nasu even told me that many in the Japanese army still needed to be put into proper shape, and their behaviour often was as much a worry for the Japanese command as it was for the Burmese.

The luck we struck in those early days by having men like

General Iida and General Nasu in command of the Japanese forces in Burma helped us enormously to get over our first difficulties in working under military control. But, as it turned out, this luck was fragile; it was too tied to personalities, and when personal relationships were changed with the coming of new men in place of the old or for some even more personal reason, attitudes also changed, giving rise to new strains and setbacks, until a true sense of comradeship between the two peoples which was so necessary to see both of them through those desperate years weakened and at last became largely a hollow, hypocritical pretence on both sides.

As I have said, many of my hopes then were kept alive by my own good relations with some of the highest officers in the Japanese army and the Kempetai and by the contacts I had succeeded in building up to some extent between them and the Burmese side of the administration. These hopes further mounted when Takano came to work with us, as the chief Japanese civilian adviser to the Burmese government and in control of the large crowd of other advisers dumped upon us. There was also Hyogoro Sakurai, a member of a former Japanese government and a man with a true love for Buddhist art and culture. There were of course others also who were good and helpful to us, many unusually so, and that together with our own growing faith in ourselves and our cause kept our spirits very high.



And so our work began, almost out of an empty hat, as the British would say. Every government office had been stripped bare of whatever could be carried away and sold, and the whole administration had virtually disappeared. With a hurried collection of chairs, tables, and typewriters and any other office equipment we could salvage from the new roadside stalls which were briskly peddling the plundered goods, we started, in Malraux' visionary phrase, to organise the apocalypse. Meanwhile, just as it happens in most revolutions in the first flush of victory, a great many among us spoke ardently of aims and ideals and things like that, but very little about the actual means of achieving them, and these

aims hit the skies. However, we went to work with a hypnotic faith in what lay ahead. In order to arouse all the pent-up racial forces in the country and rally them around us we proclaimed the beginning of a new Burmese era which would restore Burma completely to the Burmese. This is obviously the first step to take in a national revolution. The utter collapse of the British institutions had cleared a vast field for us to build upon newly and at will, and our will to do so was compulsive and overwhelming. We wanted to change everything, at times merely for the sake of change and the cathartic feeling it brought that we were destroying the colonial past and all its works.

The Japanese were delighted to find that British memories were being quickly wiped out, but as time passed and the full meaning of our actions showed itself, the racists among them sensed that they were being forgotten as much as the British were; the recent Japanese victories that drove the British out of Burma and so made the Burmese era possible were fading together with the British memories. Soon it dawned upon them that our notions of liberty and nationalism were altogether different from theirs, which was something that would fit into their plan for creating a Greater East Asia Sphere to be dominated by Japan. But it was still too early for them to do anything about it. They were still at the stage of pacifying the country, so in the meantime it was necessary for them to move slowly in such matters. Besides, owing to the decisive contribution the Burmese had made to the recent Japanese victory, a fact which was openly recognised by General Iida and the Japanese general staff in Burma, we still had many good and grateful friends on their staff and were therefore able to go on pursuing more or less freely the Burmese dream, even if it remained mostly a dream in many ways.

Almost the first thing we did as the new civilian power was to reorganise the higher civil services in the various departments of the government. It was done through an Appointments Board acting in consultation with the heads of the departments concerned. There was a great rush for the posts, far more than there were posts to be filled, so that the sifting and picking became a prodigious job, which immediately led to the first serious frictions among the three main parties composing the new government, as every one of them was out to get for itself as big a share as possible.

of the spoils. My final selection for the top appointments in the executive, judicial, and police services nearly broke up our unity, for I had rejected most of the Thakin candidates, owing to a deep foreboding that in a crisis their loyalty would be very doubtful, or at most split between the government, their party, and in many cases the army. Besides, a large number of them had been associated with the local bodies which had only recently obtained civil power and turned it into a curse for the entire locality, and I could never forget that.

That my forebodings were right was proved by later events, and particularly by the fact that in the general collapse that followed the final British military successes most of the Thakins changed sides without a qualm, while the public civil services as a whole stood staunchly by their posts till the very end. But I must admit that I was also wrong in a way, for by the rigid and seemingly partisan stand I took, with nothing tangible to show at the time in support of my fears, I offered an opportunity to our numerous enemies to drive a wedge into our war unity and effort, and they made the utmost use of it—the British secret agents, the Japanese militarists, the Burmese army men and their followers who had lost their power, other people working against us with all sorts of personal as well as party motives. On the whole, however, I believe I was more right than wrong, especially after having witnessed what the country went through under the Thakin administration during the years following the end of the war, when there was an almost total collapse politically, economically, and morally, which opened the way for a military take-over and even made it inevitable.

This reminds me that there was yet another side to the conflict over the appointments which was of great future importance because it marked the emergence of a crucial issue in Burma in later years, that of the relationship between the civil and the military powers within the state. The issue was made terribly real and ominous by the militarist example of the Japanese during the period when the relationship was taking shape among us. I must deal with this matter fully.

The way the Japanese militarists tried to meddle with our civil affairs just as they did in their homeland soon filled me with a growing fear of anything even remotely connected with a military

force gaining a foothold in civil matters. In spite of its immense national role the new Burmese army was still an army, and to recognise its claim to fill, either directly or indirectly, various important civil posts would have definitely amounted to giving it a foothold within the civil administration. There was the example of the militarisation of the Japanese government before me. An even more disturbing fact was that this Japanese-trained, Japanese-type army was quickly picking up the paranoia bred by prewar Japanese militarism, one symptom of it being a contempt for all civilian authority, in accordance with the claim of the Japanese samurai that he was nearest to his emperor and therefore ranked next to him within the state.

✓ Aung San, for example, actually tried to follow this pernicious tradition by demanding the right to deal directly with me as the head of the state, thus ignoring the ministers of the government altogether, after the manner of the Japanese. He even persuaded the constituent assembly which met in 1943 to put this procedure into the constitution. I also remember an occasion when Aung San came fuming into my office and showed me a summons he had just received from a small township court in Tharrawaddy directing him to appear before it as a witness in a case. He regarded the summons as an act of contempt of the Burmese army and demanded that the judge be punished for it. I waited till he had subsided somewhat, knowing what a bundle of nerves he was and how he needed an outlet for them before he could calm down and face facts. When his first outburst was over I quietly asked him if it was true that he was studying law at the outbreak of the war. He replied that he was, and even recalled with a smile that he had done very well in one examination paper; I believe it was Roman law. "In that case," I said, smiling back, "you will know much more law than me because I never did very well in any of my law examinations." That made him laugh. Having thus put him in the right mood for a talk I told him a few elementary things about the supremacy of law and justice, and therefore of the courts administering them, over everyone within the state.

✓ And if we don't respect our own courts, even the smallest of them, the Japanese won't do so either. As it is, we are having a pretty hectic time getting them to respect anything belonging to us." Those words had an effect which I could see, and so I pressed

further. "The whole trouble, Maung Aung San, is that the war and our own armed struggle have put you too completely in the hands of the Japanese in their most militarist hour. You see their militarism winning phenomenally, and so you believe that a similar militarism will make us win too. Don't let such thoughts make you too Japanese in the wrong things. Remember that the army belongs to the state and not the state to the army." These last words must have sunk deeply into his mind, for when after the war he left the army and returned to his old political life, Aung San often repeated them. But they went unheeded, and we are seeing the results of it now. ✓

There was an even more ominous incident, in which some members of the Japanese and Burmese armies got together and assaulted in open court the township judge of Bogale in Pyapon District merely because he had passed an order which went against one of their friends. This was just one of a large number of similar incidents which left us almost helpless, for behind them all there were always the Japanese militarists and their policy of trying to protect the soldier as against the civilian.

✓ It was in such an atmosphere that I decided to keep out of our highest posts in the civil services those whose only claim to them was the backing they got from either the Japanese or the Burmese army. There were also other facts I could not possibly ignore. Reports kept coming in from all quarters about the havoc worked by the local administrative bodies appointed by the Burma Independence Army. A Karen delegation from the southern delta region sent by Sir San C. Po, the most respected of all the Karen leaders, implored me not to send to their districts any official with a B.I.A. or Thakin past and in return promised me the utmost Karen cooperation with the new administration. U Nu, a Thakin himself in those days, mentions in his book *Burma under the Japanese* this Karen hostility towards the Thakins. It was nearly the same story from Central and Upper Burma. In fact, the B.I.A. and its local administrative bodies had been disbanded with the approval of Bo Mogyo and Aung San because they had gone completely out of control, and most of the army-backed candidates for the new posts came from those groups.

This matter of a relatively few appointments, about 120 in all, out of a total running into thousands, should be of small impor-

tance in our vast wartime story. But as it so often happens in history, the things which have resulted from it, the hidden divisive forces it released, the rifts it created in our national unity, the new alignments and conflicts which followed these rifts and divided the people further and brought the country close to the abyss and, looking at it from another side, the unmistakable portent it contained of one of the most fateful problems which was to emerge in Burma many years later, that is, the role of the armed forces within the state, these things have turned it into a decisive landmark in the whole of this story.

TENSIONS

With a central civilian administration and its machinery now more or less reconstituted we got down deeper into our work. We had no ready-made policy or plan of action. As things were then, it would have been unrealistic to think of anything prepared beforehand, for we did not yet know how much power we possessed to act on our own or how far conditions and means would permit us to do so. We just had to feel our way, keeping close to events, picking out the jobs we had the power as well as the means to undertake, and then acting on the policy of first things first, of doing the possible now and the impossible a little later.

There were roughly five such tasks to start with. The first arose out of the transfer of the administration from the local military units and their men to the new civilian power. This take-over, from the Japanese in particular, turned out to be the toughest of our immediate problems owing largely to the fact that any civilian concern can be regarded as having a military aspect during a war and can therefore be claimed to be also a military concern, and the hidebound militarists exploited this fact in order to set themselves up as watchdogs over the new administration, their usual tactics being to control in the name of military necessity the actions of the Burmese civilian officers of the local administration, especially in faraway places.

The second task was to make our administration effective enough to protect all, to restore law and government, and to hasten the return to normal life and activities. Third came the welfare of the people, for which the first need was to keep up the supply of the essential goods and services under all contingencies.

It called for a lot of planned work, such as building up stocks for the future, unimpeded distribution, a ceaseless watch to prevent hoarding and profiteering, putting the right men in the right places, and similar things.

Fourth was a political job—to convince the people that the promised Burmese era had actually arrived. To do this everything within the state had to be made Burmese again as visually as possible, and a national organisation had to be set up to provide the new era with the necessary mass base and strength.

The last of the tasks on my list was the most tormenting of all, for it required the Burmese to meet and cooperate with the Japanese warlords by supplying them with the resources we possessed that they needed for the war in return for what we needed that they could give us. This continual meeting between the two to demand and haggle and then take anyhow what each wanted and could get from the other was one of the beginnings of perhaps our worst wartime problem, the daily maintenance of the right relations between the occupying army and the people. I want to deal with this underlying problem before I proceed to the others. After that it may not be even necessary to say more about the others.

The military campaign that had just ended had not spared us in the least. The six armies which had taken part in it, British, American, Chinese, Indian, Japanese, and Burmese, had reduced an enormous portion of the country to ruins. The British started it with their scorched-earth policy, the Chinese followed with their large-scale banditry, the Indian troops in many places were not much better, the Japanese unleashed a total war, and the little ragtag Burmese army, which was not more than an armed mob at that time, often behaved like one. It was from these shambles that we had to pull the country out, and we were doing it in the middle of a war which daily threatened to reduce everything to shambles again. We were also doing it with very little means to carry out our work, and so we had to rely on those who had the power as well as the means, and they were the Japanese occupying the country.

In this dilemma my immediate policy was to get the Burmese and the Japanese to work together as the first step towards restor-

ing Burma administratively as well as economically; such a joint effort was even more necessary militarily, especially in creating a Burmese armed force. From every point of view that was the only way to ensure the survival of our people who had already suffered so cruelly and were, by all the signs one could see, doomed to suffer even more in a war which had put them right in the fighting front. We needed Japanese cooperation as much as they needed ours, and we had to look at it practically and get ready to live and work with them on a give-and-take basis till such time as we would be able to survive without them. To bring this about was almost an acrobatic feat, like an endless balancing act, for during that early period every community in the land, Japanese, Burmese, and all our national minorities, were being swept off their feet by their own racial fantasies and claims. It created an emotional problem which often got out of hand.

It was apparent that the Japanese would have to provide us with almost all the goods and services we were already running dangerously short of. They had begun to give them in a somewhat heavy-handed military fashion and to take back an awful lot from us in exchange, but the fact remained that they alone would be able to give us the things we needed. For instance, only their army could put an end to the lawlessness raging everywhere by suppressing with their full military might the armed gangs that were still active under various labels and disguises and by seizing the vast amount of firearms that had got into all sorts of hands.

Similarly, the Japanese alone could supply us over a long period with such primary needs as, to begin with, money to run the country, as the British had completely destroyed our currency and emptied our treasuries before leaving. Next, we needed clothing, transport and fuels, medical supplies, particularly for the prevention of wartime epidemics, machinery of all sorts, replacements, and repairs and technicians to undertake them, and so on endlessly. Nearly all these supplies and services had to be brought from across the seas at a time when American sea and air power was strangling Japanese transportation, and yet it was done. With the two sides depending upon each other to the extent that neither of them could really have done without the other, the only sensible course for the Burmese to take was to keep the scores even by getting as much out of the Japanese as they got out of us. That

was how I looked at the situation and decided to meet it. It was a painful business at times, at most times I should say, but there was no choice. Racial feelings flared so easily whenever the two peoples confronted each other and, added to that, the language barrier between the two made communication so difficult that most Burmese were completely confused.

Speaking in a general way, each side expected too much from the other and in consequence thought that it was obtaining too little. Also, the Japanese wanted the Burmese to put victory in the larger world war before their own limited political objectives in Burma, whereas the Burmese wanted to gain those objectives first and at once. Thus a basic contradiction which already existed when our administration was formed now began to harden and divide the two peoples.

My final view about this matter is that the blame lay with both sides, but much more with the Japanese. They were a far more mature people, and yet they proved to be so devoid of judgment in their dealings with others, so domineering and blinded by delusions of their own racial grandeur and Asian destiny when it was most clearly in their interest to move with history by getting rid of all such racial nonsense. They could have achieved so much more if they had only shown a spirit of true Asian fellowship and equality with the other peoples in Asia instead of claiming, in defiance of the clear world trends, to be "more equal" than the others. It is simply unbelievable that a people whose sensibilities are so well known should have been blind to such an extent to the sensibilities of another people, especially one which had just helped them to win a great victory and could help them more. But this actually happened not only in Burma but all over Southeast Asia.

As for the Burmese, I have already declared my view that they also were to blame. The root of the trouble was the different ways in which the two looked at the world conflict. In appearance the Burmese and the Japanese were fighting together to win the war, but actually it was not so, for each was in the fight for its own reasons, which often collided directly with those of the other. For the Japanese the war was global and was everything, and its political implications were just an extension of its military goal, only the subsequent gain to be reaped after a complete military

victory. But for the Burmese it was the reverse, their political goal in Burma was everything, and the war was an extension of their politics. In other words, the Japanese regarded the war militarily and on a world scale, while the Burmese saw it on the local scale of their own political goals and never accepted the conflict the Japanese had brought to Burma as being globally theirs, but only as a situation they would utilise if it profited them and to the extent it profited them.

✓ In consequence, the whole Japanese aim was to fight and win the war with all the means they could lay their hands on, convinced that everything done to reach this end, whether right or wrong according to peacetime norms, was justified in a war of survival. The Burmese in general were, however, fighting for their various beliefs and ambitions, and they were interested in winning that part of the war which would help them to win those ambitions, so for them nothing was justified which impinged for any reason whatsoever on their political rights. This was the situation at the very start and it became worse as time passed.

Rightly or wrongly, the Burmese obsession with their own political aims was total, and it often distorted their vision by making them see only the side of a truth that fitted into the obsession. To give a few examples, they were aware all the time of the Japanese military stake in the whole of the war, but hardly ever of their own, and even behaved as if they were not in the wider war or could keep out of it. They saw what the Japanese were taking from them to carry on the combat, but not what they were getting back from the Japanese in return, or if they thought of that at all, it was of the blundering, bullying way in which the things were given more than of the things themselves, and furthermore they did not remember that the British as well as all the other armies which had fought in Burma had taken from the country whatever they needed militarily just as the Japanese did. They were very conscious of the rough-handed measures the Japanese took, but not of the situation or the offence which often made the measures necessary. Our political obsession certainly had its good side, but it had a bad one as well, and for various reasons many of us failed or refused to understand this fact.

✓ I have sometimes heard it said that the Burmese, not having waged a war for a long time, were not mature or realistic enough

to understand that when the right of national survival is at stake that right comes before all other human rights, and those other rights must, if necessary, be sacrificed like everything else in defence of the basic right to survive as a free and independent people. That is true when viewed coldly, but it is most difficult to know what must be sacrificed and what must not while passions are mounting, for instance while your people are being slapped or beaten or tortured by foreign troops who have come as friends and liberators. The Burmese may be blamed for having been too obsessed with their political objectives, but they were right in never losing sight of them, and one of them was certainly to defend at all costs their national dignity. Their error was in insisting upon every peacetime freedom and right regardless of the wider and more fundamental freedoms and rights at stake in the war. This made them often lose their sense of reality.

▼ There were also those who for their own ends magnified the evil or, to use a word so brilliantly exploited by the Western Allies, the fascist side of the Japanese, and ignored whatever was good in them and their achievements. These people were responsible for much of the mischief. Of course, the situation was further aggravated by the usual things that follow in the train of a head-on global collision, the machinations of the enemy's agents and partisans, the mischief caused by those playing off one side against the other, the slow war fatigue, the corrosive effect of years of hardship and danger, then the certainty of defeat bringing a subconscious wish to escape it by being on the winning side, and many similar factors which at last pushed the differences to a breaking point.

Most of the causes of the tensions in question can be explained more or less rationally, but there is one to which nothing can give even the appearance of being rational. I am referring to the arrogance and brutality of the Japanese soldier. It is hard to explain this brutality, so senseless and self-defeating in the long run, except by seeing something deeply compulsive in it, old predatory urges carefully nurtured in a long warrior tradition and at the same time kept pent up by an over-disciplined, over-refined, over-gentle national culture, with the result that these urges restlessly sought an outlet and at last found it in the foreign lands their armies occupied, and used it there to the limit. That was how I

saw it. I also saw it as one of the many contradictions which have created the tensions lying at the root of so much that is good and brilliant and also so much that is dark in the Japanese character.

And yet I often wonder whether that is the whole truth. Do such lurid streaks belong racially to a very remarkable Asian people, or are they just the outer accretions derived from a long militaristic conditioning; and now that they have discarded their militarism, can such a people ever again believe in brutality and overlordship as a national policy? I do not believe so, after the searing lesson the Japanese have now learnt. They are among the most pragmatic people in the world, and the whole story of their rise and evolution shows that they learn their lessons quickly and deeply, and remember them always.

✓The Japanese militarists indulged in their excesses largely in areas where our civilian government was still weak and where the local army units had wider emergency powers to protect the population before the government was strong enough to do it. These units gave protection and restored law and order, but in doing this they tried to fight terror with terror, as I have already pointed out, and their terror was turned against the people indiscriminately. There were also many local Japanese commanders who used all sorts of subterfuge to retain their hold on the total power they wielded before the new administration took over. The outcome was the continuance of the Japanese terror here and there in varying forms and for varying periods.

✓Our government was able to stop the evil in its open form in most areas by bringing pressure upon the higher military authorities. In this matter, as the Kempetai were mostly the culprits during those days, I had to deal mostly with General Matsuoka, their chief. In appearance this general was a perfect image of a Japanese militarist, and he had a way of glowering at you as if he were going to eat you up. But actually he was a very decent fellow if you knew how to get along with him. He liked to hear both sides of a case and was willing to change his mind, if necessary, and that was just what I wanted. There were many occasions when he acted against his own men or got rid of them somehow. Also, unlike most militarists, this leathery, tough-grained soldier had a sense of humour, which enabled him to see what was wrong and ridiculous in his own men as much as he saw it in others. Very few Japanese

whom I met in Southeast Asia during the war were able to do this; in fact they seemed to regard it a patriotic duty to assume that a Japanese soldier could do no wrong. As I found out, however, a Japanese soldier, being bound by so many feudal taboos, could never really laugh at himself or see himself as others saw him.

I recall some incidents which were so appalling that I personally had to report them to Matsuoka. One was in Toungoo, in Central Burma, where the Kempetai captain tried to enforce his own notion of the law by imprisoning, torturing, and even beheading people at will. Matsuoka heard our complaints and acted swiftly; he at once stopped all further doings of this man and sent him away from the town, and we never heard of him again. A similar, in fact worse, terror occurred in Sagaing, and Matsuoka acted in the same manner. There were some incidents over which we disagreed. In such cases he would often send the officer concerned to explain his conduct personally to me, and if I still insisted to Matsuoka that a whole local population could not be lying he would shake with laughter and take the officer away from the locality.

An incident in Henzada, in Southern Burma, involved a senior army officer, a terror in the area, and it led to the Burmese district commissioner, a high-ranking lawyer before the war, throwing up his job, saying that he had had enough of it. I took the matter up with the regional commander and learnt later that this army man had stopped his high-handed ways. I might mention that quite a number of people in the government services wanted similarly to quit, but they stayed on because Japanese harassment and suspicion proved to be much worse outside than within the services, and the government naturally gave greater protection to those who were doing its work than to others.

I recall the case of another civil servant, who did not have the luck to escape unscathed. He was Po Khine, the district superintendent of police in Arakan, which is next-door to India. As the highest police officer in that strategic spot he continually ran afoul of British secret agents operating around there, and one of them informed a Japanese officer that I was really an American spy who was using Po Khine to send secret messages to the British in India. It was a most crazy story right through, but not too crazy for a rabid Japanese militarist who believed in acting first and then

asking questions. This procedure was followed against Po Khine; he was arrested, kept in confinement, starved, tortured, and interrogated for days. One way of torturing him was to pass a series of electric currents through his limbs till he howled with pain. They released him in the end, but he was a deeply scarred man, both physically and mentally, from then on.

In yet another incident I was unable to act in time to save a young man's life. This fine youth, whom I had sent to Bassein, Ba Mya by name, happened to tangle in a quarrel with a Japanese officer at a public bar, in the course of which they came to blows. Refusing to let the matter end there, the Japanese returned with some soldiers, assaulted Ba Mya brutally, and then took him away and shot him dead and threw his body on the foreshore within the town as a lesson to the townspeople. It was a most revolting crime, but all I could do was to report it to the military powers in Rangoon. When I heard nothing further from them I kept on bringing it up with those powers till at last I had the dubious satisfaction of being told that such an atrocity would never be allowed again. It was nothing less than a downright lynching, as I told the Japanese. These few incidents chosen at random will give you a picture of those times.

TOTAL ORGANISATION

We now had a fair amount of civil power. To acquire more would depend on how well we played our hand and used our opportunities as the war intensified and the Japanese needed more of our cooperation. We had foreseen some of those opportunities and planned accordingly.

Meanwhile, the power we already possessed had to be consolidated, and for this we also had to have enough political strength of our own. This led us to the task of creating nationwide mass organisations which would serve as bases for future operations. There was already a military base, the newly formed Burma Defence Army, but that was completely under Japanese control. We needed a political mass base which we could control, as well as other civilian bases organised on functional lines. And so a national political organisation, the Dobama Sinyetha Asiayone, came into existence in the middle of 1942. Two years later this organisation expanded into the Mahabama Party. In describing it

I have called it "a common melting pot for the native races of Burma from which will arise the Greater Burma nation. Our past tribal history has closed, tribal accounts are settled, and a new nation and history now begins. In the past, parties overshadowed peoples. Now we are unifying from the right end, from the people."

Thus a single national front and leadership was created. In accordance with our political belief at the time, the power structure of the party was a dictatorship based upon the leadership principle of "One blood, One voice, One leader." Like the other Axis nations—and in fact even some of their enemies had also gone totalitarian, to fight totalitarianism, as they very carefully explained—the Japanese believed in the leadership principle and would only deal with us on that basis. That is, all the civil power they transferred to the Burmese was entrusted to me personally and also all the responsibility accompanying it, and the responsibility proved to be far more real and extensive than the power. Within the party I was the leader, or *Anashin*, but actually U Nu, working with a strong political team, ran it, for the "eighteen thousand problems," as the Burmese say, which a perpetually shifting situation created almost from day to day kept me too occupied to do much else.

Actually, the formation of a single national party was the beginning of total mobilisation. The task was completed by following it up with functional associations. So, acting upon the totalitarian principle we had accepted, we tried to organise our wartime national life totally.

Most of the story of these organisations belongs too much to their time to be worth repeating after the passage of so many years. But they still have a relevance historically, for they have left behind an example that has since been eagerly followed. The concept and technique of total organisation in every area, which was the product of these war years, has remained a permanent factor in our postwar political development and has very definitely shaped its course. In the same way, the principle of leadership upon which totalitarianism rests, although often disavowed to fit into the postwar doctrinal patterns, has now emerged again in Burma in a more thoroughgoing form.

All the organisations that tried to mobilise the total man-power

of the country were based upon the fact that in a national struggle the fundamental factor is the nation or people themselves and the fundamental strength is the people's labour and endurance. I placed the greatest stress on this fact in the New Order Plan. "We must substantiate our independence," the Plan declares:

This can be done only by action; and we who have got the power must act. Even action is not enough, for there must be quick results as well. In these breakneck days when, speaking quite plainly, a world revolution is taking place and everything is in the melting pot, only action and its results matter, revolutionary action to suit revolutionary times. . . . And behind the revolutionary action there must always be the revolutionary will as the driving force. Our old world has gone to pieces and no political magic root or spell exists which can put it together again or get us safely out of it. Only action will do it, our action. A revolutionary period, as someone has said, has no use for witch doctors. . . .

We have therefore accepted today a revolutionary task rather than an office. That is the right way of looking at ourselves in the service of a state which has not only won its independence out of a war but is also fighting a war to save that independence from the fires of a world conflagration. . . .

All planning is concentration: of power and control, of action, of means and ends. Looking at it as a structure, a plan just follows this theory logically to the end, and by doing so generates its own power. The ground elements in planning are really concentration in one form or another, mass organisations, national unity, mobilisation of wealth and labour, collective action, leadership and so on. . . .

The basic unit is human energy, human labour and its values. . . . A real plan, that is a revolutionary plan nowadays, must be built upon labour value. . . .

Coming now to ourselves, the practical lesson we must learn from this theory before we can get any further with a plan or with anything else is that human labour is the basic unit, labour looked at from all sides, as will and effort, as work, sacrifice, achievement, and every other form it may

assume. Our people have never really understood this fact and that has been the inner reason for our past decline and fall as it has been of many others. Labour will have to come before anything else in our national stock-taking, before our oil, grain, teak, and other material wealth. We have drugged ourselves enough with the thought of all our material wealth. It has made us passive and even parasitical to our environment to our complete undoing in the past. It has all been upside down, with the human values, especially the human will, debased and their dynamism turned to dust. We really lost our dynamism that way somewhere in our history. We can prevent it from happening again by making our labour our primary wealth, the primary unit and value in all our calculations. Recently a beginning has been made by means of a popular war slogan about blood and sweat. We must now go very much further and make blood, sweat, and guts, man's will and work and sacrifice, quite literally the basis of an all-time national plan.

Thus we laid an altogether new foundation for the independent state and nation we were creating. This foundation still stands today.

THE ASIAN MOOD CONTINUES

Because of the increasing importance of the interrelations between the Burmese and the Japanese throughout the war, I have said much about them and the way they began to go bad. But perhaps by doing so I may have given the impression that everything went bad suddenly and completely and spectacularly. That was not so, as I hope I have already made clear. What was rampant was the overbearing behaviour of many in the Japanese army and their perpetual meddling with our affairs. As for the scare stories which went around in the latter days a good number of them were only too true: torture methods were often employed by the Japanese military police in uncovering spies and saboteurs. But it was also true that a lot of these stories grew out of rumours and the incessant whispering campaign kept up by enemy agents and partisans, in which individual cases were multiplied to look like a whole fixed pattern of racial behaviour. As the Japanese defeat

drew nearer the stories likewise became more lurid and numerous; the propaganda line was that Japan was a fascist power and all fascists were fiends and so all Japanese were unmitigatedly fiendish. It was a crude but effective form of war propaganda, and most Burmese were not in a state of mind then or even now to look into it too critically. There were even those who subconsciously wanted to hear just such stories.

The truth is that during the months before the Burmese civilian administration emerged, terrorism was rampant but as that administration became more effective and things settled down somewhat the terrorism in its open form also diminished, particularly in Rangoon and the main towns and areas within our reach. There were of course cases here and there which occurred without the knowledge of the Burmese government up till the end.

I will now go back to the period in the narrative where we are chronologically, that is, the one following the formation of the central Burmese administration in the middle of 1942. Our early euphoria continued during that period for a lot of reasons. We were still in the Asian mood created by the dazzling Japanese victories which made millions of Asians turn to Japan for a time. Besides that, the rabid militarists and racists from Singapore, the Korea men as I have called them because of the overbearing ways they had acquired in Korea and their other colonies, had not yet arrived in force and we were able to work and dream freely. The memory of the victory won together over the British was still fresh on both sides, we believed in an ultimate Axis victory which would wipe out the Western empires in Asia forever, General Iida and his staff were friendly and understanding, and the vision of a new, free Burma within an Asia liberated by the Asians themselves, still gripped us. Again, even from a very material point of view, we realised that we would need each other for the many things each had and could give the other while the war was on and even later.

✓ In spite of the jolts it got at times, this Asian mood showed strongly among the people, and all of us within the administration shared it and worked hard to spread it. It lasted for several months, during which the leaders of the various political and communal groups went out to the districts in mixed teams on a "trust Japan" campaign and also to restore communal harmony with the Karens. The message they conveyed to the people was

direct and emphatic: Japan would win the war, she would give us our independence, she would lead us to future prosperity and greatness. The Japanese on their part reciprocated by giving the central government as much "independence" as their notions of independence would allow, and also by supplying us with most of the essential commodities and services we lacked and needed. This was the Asian relationship between the two sides in the first months of our administration.

Looking through the newspapers and documents of the time again, one discovers that these tours and the work done during them were among our principal activities. One ministerial team followed another to keep up the work, while young recruits crowded into the Burmese army, which was under complete Japanese control. All the political leaders on tour spoke explicitly. "I have never been so happy during my long life as now," declared Kodaw Hmaing, the father figure of the Thakins, when he visited several districts in November 1942. "It makes me happy beyond words to know that the British have been driven out of our country and a great Asian people have come to liberate another Asian people and given us back our ancient heritage, our land and freedom and religion and culture. I have often wept with joy to see this happy day before my death."

Than Tun, the communist leader, was equally explicit. "Japan will certainly give us independence," he assured all who came to hear him. "Anyone who denies this is a British agent spreading enemy propaganda." He went to the extent of saying that "even if we are left to ourselves we must ask the Japanese to remain with us till our independence is firmly rooted and we are able to defend it against our enemies." The gist of all the statements was that Japan must win the war before the enslaved peoples of Asia could regain their independence and, what is more, be able to defend it.

As for the Burmese army, its ties with the Japanese being stronger, it went a step further by agreeing to the use of the Japanese language as its medium of military instruction and communication. "Why did you allow such a thing to happen," I almost shouted at Aung San, "when I had flatly refused to do it in our schools and offices? Have you weighed all that this is going to mean for your army?" From the way he hesitated and squirmed I concluded that he had weighed the consequences and thoroughly

disliked them. However, instead of saying so he replied, "I don't think it will make all that difference since the Japanese must go on training our army for a long time, and they can do it best in their own language." These statements by the various leaders roughly reflect the Burmese mood at the time.

The mood found one of its clearest voices in an article written by U Nu, the first Burmese prime minister after the war's end, and published in September 1944, in *Burma*, the organ of our wartime Foreign Affairs Association. After dwelling at length on the theory that all history is the story of race struggles he writes:

Japan, as the champion and exponent of Mongolian racial resurgence, has succeeded in destroying the domination and influence of the Anglo-Saxon powers in the East. . . . It is the duty of all Asiatics . . . to participate in the destruction of the Anglo-Saxon influence in the East and in the maintenance of a united front against attempts to re-encroach on Asiatic soil by anti-Asiatic races. . . . This unity of East Asiatic countries, so glaringly a historical necessity and so sensible and sane from a practical point of view, has not been lightly achieved, nor can it be light-heartedly maintained. . . . If Japanese hegemony in the Co-Prosperity Sphere means, and from what we have seen of her actions we fully believe it to mean, that the nations of East Asia shall get a fair deal in economic, political, and social fields, then we shall and do welcome such leadership with hope and trust and faith, whatever the detractors may say. . . . And in the building of this Co-Prosperity Sphere, the thousand million people of East Asia can count themselves extremely fortunate in having such far-sighted, brilliant, and absolutely trustworthy leaders as General Tojo.

After reading the article I happened to ask him if he did not think that he had overdone it a bit in exalting the Japanese. U Nu just smiled. But our public declarations of faith in the Japanese in the early part of the Pacific war when they were victorious everywhere did really mean that our Asian mood was genuine and we did have faith in Japan then, though there were times when we nearly lost it.

All of us in the government and party decided that our best

policy was to stake our future on a final Japanese victory because we were convinced that she would win and thus much of that future would depend on her, and we spoke and acted in accordance with this policy on every occasion. I am stressing this point because those Thakins who engineered the anti-Japanese resistance when it became clear that it was the other side that was going to win have tried to alter the facts by explaining that those earlier professions of trust in Japan were just double-talk to conceal their true intentions, which, to say the least, is downright nonsense. It is this later explanation and not the earlier statements that is really double-talk, for, leaving other considerations aside, no party would be foolish enough to try to fool a few by fooling all, including themselves, for years as they claim they did. This view is confirmed by Thein Pe Myint, the political acrobat then working with the British, who has revealed that in attempting to persuade Than Tun and others to switch over to the Allies he met with long resistance from Than Tun, who continued to believe in a final Axis victory. As Thein Pe Myint has told the story, it was only during the later phase of the war that he succeeded in winning them over by convincing them that the Axis powers were already beaten. To confirm this story there is Aung San's reply to Field Marshal Lord Slim's retort to him that he and his followers were joining the British forces simply because a British victory was certain. Aung San virtually admitted it.

It was not that there were no racial tensions during this period. The early hypnotic days went on, but so did the tensions, and we were unable to get rid of them, for in spite of the general harmony prevailing between the two peoples the Japanese racial complexes and cruelty persisted, especially in out-of-the-way places; people continued to be slapped and tortured there behind locked doors, and the harshest measures were taken on the slightest suspicion of collaboration with the enemy. It was only our conviction that the top-level echelons were doing their utmost to put a stop to such brutalities that kept alive our faith in the Japanese.

I personally had my first real brush-up with them quite soon. It was over the question of appointments, which kept plaguing me for a long time. Those seeking jobs who had been rejected would often go to some petty Japanese officers and get them to approach me on their behalf, and those officers, to show off their power,

would ask for a really big job for such men, and I would refuse to compromise the service standards that were guiding us and would send them away to deal with our Public Services Tribunal, after which I would promptly report their interference to their superior officers. With such cases mounting fast I had created a whole gang of enemies both among the Japanese and the Burmese, and they soon banded together against me. Feeling that they had suffered a serious loss of face the Japanese officers sought for revenge; they fed their secret intelligence service with the vilest stories about me, my family, and in fact everyone around me and took care that these slanderous accusations reached the highest military quarters regularly, while I, on my part, was unable to refute them because I was not supposed to know them, nor could I betray those who had told me in confidence about them. So the first cracks appeared in my relations with the Japanese and the ground was prepared for the later conflicts.

✓As time passed, a campaign was started accusing me of being anti-Japanese and even of being, of all things, an American secret agent, while whatever I did or said was twisted to fit into their charges. The first charge was, of course, that I would not accept people with Japanese recommendations, but preferred to employ the old British-trained hands. As our work got under way and differences between the Burmese government and the Japanese military administration inevitably multiplied, the charges became dirtier and more deadly, and this went on till the end of the war.

I would never have survived this smear campaign if General Iida and others in the Japanese Supreme Military Command had not continued to show their confidence in me and my administration. They did so unequivocally, and so did many others at the top. Takano, the chief Japanese adviser attached to our government, and Colonel Hiraoka, the chief liaison officer, stood by me with great firmness and courage. That was how I got over the first real crisis in my relations with the Japanese.

THE BURMA DEFENCE ARMY

The year 1942 also saw our first real war work, which was naturally carried out in cooperation with the Japanese. But I have already explained the nature and extent of this war cooperation,

the conviction with which we gave it as well as the reasons, the gains we derived in return, the way we made every act of cooperation serve our national interests. It was our first joint effort with the Japanese.

✓ The next was the recruitment for the Burmese army. That too was undertaken fundamentally in our own interest, for a national army was most clearly one of our first needs. We worked with a will to make this army a reality in every sense, but we met with setbacks too, for the Japanese were giving us what we wanted on their own terms; they kept a tight hand on every vital part and function of that army, they made it as Japanese as possible right down to the spirit animating it, which was essentially that of Japanese militarism with its assumption that the armed forces are the masters and not the servants of a people. In the heady atmosphere created by the fact that the Burmese were witnessing for the first time in many generations an army of their own coming into being, it was almost impossible for them to foresee the threat that such a spirit might pose to their future, and with the Japanese fostering that spirit to the utmost any warning against its dangers would have been futile and would even have been regarded as unpatriotic.

In those days the Burmese, even the sanest among them, were so enthralled by the memory of the ragtag little Burmese force that had recently played a part in driving the British and Chinese armies out of Burma that they were ready to allow that force to grow to any size and take any shape, regardless of the future. There was also Aung San's aura, which helped immensely to bring about such a situation. Furthermore, it was a political army because, being born out of a national struggle, it was mainly composed of young men seized by a political vision of some sort or other. So an explosive mixture came to be created, of restless political dreams and ambitions and a pernicious militarism, and such a dangerous mixture had to blow up some day. It first exploded against the Japanese themselves in a last-minute resistance which proved so profitable that it made a later explosion inevitable.

I remember a talk I had with Aung San in August 1946. I had just returned to Burma from Sugamo Prison and Aung San came to see me. I told him that I was out of politics for good, and for

that reason perhaps we were able to talk freely about many things. One of them was the future of the Burmese armed forces, for we were none too sure then that, since the British had regained the country, such a military force had a future at all. Aung San had returned to civilian life and was already deep in power politics, and so I concluded that he would be inclined to look at the army and the problems it created a little more closely and objectively. After expressing my extreme eagerness to see a true Burmese army always in existence, I repeated what I had often hinted to him before, that what was good and necessary today in the conditions of an all-out national struggle might not be so after victory, for the good might, for want of the right political orientation, be dialectically turned into an evil when the struggle was over and yet the spirit of the struggle might continue within the army. "And then," I pressed the point, "the struggle would not be for independence, since Burma would with luck already have achieved it by then, but for power within the new independent state."

I mentioned the example of Japan and how it became a militarist state because the militarists proved to be the most privileged and best-organised force in the country. "This will be one of our big problems after independence," I warned him. Like most people driven by their obsessions, Aung San never bothered to see that far. As usual, he was living in his obsessions of the moment, still talking facetiously of fascism as he did at mass gatherings, although fascism had now been smashed as a political force by the war and only existed as a bogey to be exploited politically. Perhaps he kept on attacking fascism because it paid him politically to do so, but by doing that he missed seeing the true nature of the Japanese evil in Burma, which was not the fascism played up by Western propaganda, but militarism, a scourge that knows no boundaries and can exist under any political system and among any people.

THE THAI-BURMA RAILWAY

Our next joint undertaking was the construction of the Thai-Burma railway, in which we helped by supplying labour to build the Burma section of it. This project, and particularly the way some of the labour employed in it was obtained, has become one of the most controversial wartime actions of the Japanese in South-

East Asia, largely as a result of enemy propaganda, which promptly called it the "death railway" because so many labourers, including war prisoners in the hands of the Japanese who were put to work at it, died of sheer hunger, disease, and exhaustion. For years the British painted it as almost the foulest crime of the war in Asia of a foul-hearted people, the Asian counterpart of the Nazi butcheries in Europe. There is nothing I can say with regard to this charge. I do not know all the facts, but only those relating to the Burmese side of the matter. I will narrate fully what I know.

✓ Late in 1942 Colonel Sasaki, who subsequently became the chief of the project, discussed with me a proposal to build a railway line across the border between Burma and Thailand as a section of a wider communication system linking together the Far Eastern countries. Sasaki was a deeply dedicated man. He spoke with an intense faith in a more dynamic concept of Asian unity, in the need to act up to it by building roads and railways which would bring the neighbouring countries physically closer to each other, and consequently, coming to the point, to build a railroad between Burma and Thailand. His words gave me a glimpse of the Asian future we were fighting for. More than that, the railway would wipe out a past deep historical wrong, for these two countries had been kept isolated from each other by the European imperialist powers in the region as one way of preserving their spheres of interest. I was immediately captured by Sasaki's scheme, which seemed to fulfill something I had dreamt of for long. Looking at it more tangibly, the railway would be a means of procuring our wartime necessities quickly and safely. So looking at it from all aspects it was a great undertaking.

All the members of the government were won over by it. By participating in the project the Burmese would really be doing something that would widen their future, and so we agreed at once to supply the labour for the Burmese part of it. We were so carried away by the very thought of such a doorway being opened towards the east and the rich promises it held out to the Burmese that I am afraid we did not think enough of some of the hard realities; for example, of the prodigious difficulties we would meet when actually raising and caring for a vast labour force to be employed in a totally new form of manual labour for the Burmese, in one of the wildest and most pestilential jungles in Burma and with the

enemy continually attacking from the air. But perhaps, taking a long view, it was better that we did not think too much of all that.

Thakin Ba Sein, the labour minister, took charge of our part of the job. He got together a large team to recruit, organise, transport, and settle in the border jungles the labour contingents, which he called the *Let-yone*, or strong-arm, force after the name of the political volunteer organisation the Thakin Party had formed before the war. The name was later changed into *Chwe-tat*, or sweat army, to bring it into line with the regular military force, which we called *Thwe-tat*, or blood army. We were at last doing something that promised to be big and futuristic, which would also add to our weight in our other dealings with the Japanese.

√ Sasaki asked for 26,000 men for the first year, and we gave him as many as we could recruit and he could accommodate and use. In return we put up certain conditions, that the families of the labourers should be allowed to join them after a period, that before leaving their homes for the camps the labourers should be paid an advance out of their future wages as well as a travelling allowance, that they should be provided with all essential commodities as well as care during the period of their employment. Sasaki willingly accepted these conditions. Other measures also were taken to see that all went well: a strong labour bureau and service were set up, our political organisation, the Dobama Sinyetha Asiayone, took an active part in the drive for recruits, permanent inspectors as well as periodic inspection teams composed of high Burmese officers, including ministers of the government, visited the construction area and also the recruiting grounds from time to time and reported the conditions. For instance, at the end of 1942 Thakin Mya, the deputy prime minister, and Thakin Ba Sein visited Thanbyuzayat, where the new railroad started, saw 10,000 men of the sweat army at work under proper conditions, and reported to me accordingly.

√ Meanwhile, other inspection squads composed of ministers, secretaries of the government, permanent labour officers, and leading politicians like Ba Hein, a frontline communist, toured Pegu and Insein districts to whip up recruitment. The atmosphere of complete harmony and understanding in which everything was

proceeding was reflected at a banquet held on January 11, 1943, to celebrate the success of the initial stage of the project. It was attended in full force by representatives of our government including Thakin Mya, Bandoola U Sein, U Ba Win, Thakin Ba Sein, Kyaw Nyein, the cabinet secretary, and many important party men. Thus the Burmese paid a high tribute to Colonel Sasaki and his Japanese team; in his speech Thakin Mya described Sasaki as a "great, good, and generous man" who was breaking down an age-old barrier dividing two Asian peoples.

The first period was rich in dreams as well as in actual work done, but the price the Burmese were paying for it was staggering. Upon their arrival the men were at once swallowed up by a scrubby, steamy, malaria-infested land inhabited only by a few wandering jungle-dwellers, and there they had to rebuild their lives and homes in an aboriginal emptiness. At the end of the first stage of the project a good part of the jungle had been cleared and tamed, but more than half of the labourers had disappeared, having either fled or been killed off like flies by black-water fever, the deadliest form of malaria, and other jungle-camp epidemics. When the true history of the war is written, as it will be one day, these labourers, who knew they were doomed to die and yet carried on to the very end, will most certainly be accorded their place among the truest heroes Burma produced in that world-wide conflict, although they are now unknown, unhonoured, and unsung, and even unburied in fitting graves. Not even a solitary post stands to this day to tell later generations where their bones lie.

✓ We went into this shocking tragedy very thoroughly and were able to discover most of the truth behind it. A large part of it was certainly due to the nature and magnitude of the undertaking, the war conditions in which it had to be carried out, and the race with time in completing it. Sasaki and the other top Japanese officers working in the project really did their best for the men, but in those first months a whole primordial wilderness had to be penetrated and conquered, materials and supplies were still on the way, very much remained to be organised, and there were endless other problems to be coped with by men who were doing it all for the first time.

✓ Sasaki gave us facts to prove that conditions would get much better soon. "It is clearly necessary for the Japanese to keep the

workers fit and strong and content in order to get the full amount of work needed from them," he added. His explanation seemed reasonable. As he promised, conditions got better gradually, the jungle yielded, the railroad moved in steadily, tidy little stopping stations began to appear alongside it, and at the same time permanent settlements sprang up in the clearings nearby, all clean and orderly in a typical Japanese way, and soon small dispensaries with medical men in charge followed and even a few white little pagodas gleamed here and there. There were electric lights in some of the large settlements, an unheard-of amenity in a Burmese village before. To prevent water pollution with the resultant spread of disease the utmost care was taken in these settlements to obtain a continual supply of fresh running water and to dispose of the refuse in a proper sanitary way.

Along with this transformation adequate supplies of textiles, foodstuffs, and medicines, particularly quinine, quickly flowed in, with the result that the usual jungle fevers and epidemics were brought under control in several areas and the death rate often dropped even below that prevailing in the adjoining districts, where people went without such necessities or else had to obtain them at a terrible price. According to the figures we kept, the total number of labourers sent to the construction area was roughly 65,000, out of which at least half must have reached and worked in the wide stretch of dense jungle, so it was inevitable that the problems which were created should be new and formidable.

There were great improvements in many settlements, but there were also numerous small out-of-way camps where conditions continued to be most primitive and even brutal. These small labour camps lay within the deep jungle and were inaccessible to our labour officers and the visiting inspection teams. The Japanese superintendents in those unvisited spots were in many cases war-brutalised men who drove the workers like slaves, seized whatever they needed for their work from the neighbourhood often without giving sufficient compensation, and behaved thoroughly like slave-drivers. As a result the construction camps presented a double picture; the large and more accessible settlements were well cared for, and the Japanese officers posted there conducted themselves properly, whereas many camps out of reach of the inspection teams were run like slave-camps by men who thought only of the work

and not of the workers. The villain was the superintendent on the spot. The only good thing that might be said of him is that he lived in exactly the same conditions as any worker in the camp and worked as hard and often much harder. He was a dedicated slave-driver who drove himself as hard as he drove the workers under him.

✓ There is yet another side to the picture, an even more brutal one for the Burmese workers and their families in general. For them it was a total exile from their life-long homes, from which they were suddenly uprooted and hurled into an utterly unknown region. That was cruel enough, but the way it was done to a large number of them was so foul that it became one of the most abominable crimes committed on the people during the war. The worst part of it was that the principal criminals were some of the Burmese themselves. The central government had enforced a system which gave the whole power of recruitment to the local Burmese administration, while the Japanese labour officers would merely stand by, fix the number of labourers needed, help when asked, and take them to their destination.

✓ Out of this system, which was really intended to protect the Burmese, there grew a colossal racket, particularly in areas remote from central control. Thus a Japanese officer would ask for a certain number of labourers from a locality. If the local Burmese officer who received the request happened to be corrupt, he would make up a list for each town and village under him, taking care to enter into it all his enemies and also some of the wealthiest inhabitants, who could be squeezed to pay the largest bribes. The list would contain more people than the required number in order to give a wider range for blackmail. Then these people would be told of their fate. There would be a mad rush to get out of the list, and in the end those who had bribed most would succeed in doing so. If as a result the total number of labourers needed was not obtained the bums and tramps in town would be rounded up, appeased with a small payment, and packed off with secret instructions to take the first chance to run away before reaching the construction camp. One labour officer told me that three-quarters of the recruits did not arrive at the camp.

✓ Even press gang methods were employed by both Burmese and Japanese recruiting officers in the neighbouring districts to waylay

people and drag them away by force. The racket reached its peak in the latter part of the war when the number of recruits arriving at the destination in a fit condition for work was kept permanently low by the recruiting officers so that the lucrative game might be kept going. For various reasons we could not wholly stop it; the central administration was never strong enough to impose its authority completely in the remote areas, the more so when the Japanese would for their own reasons often come in the way. Thus we very seldom knew the full truth in time, and even when we did the fast-crumbling war situation prevented us from acting really effectively, and, of course, there was always the final argument of "war necessity" to intimidate our local officers. All that most of the Japanese labour officers bothered about was to get the right number of workers; they did not care how it was done, particularly when the Burmese themselves were doing it.

✓ So the racket went on in one form or another throughout 1944 and has left behind the most indelible memories among the people. It was remembered so searingly by so many in the country that the political parties which had actively taken part in the recruitment tried to scuttle out by laying the whole blame on me personally as being at the head of affairs at the time. I have refused to deny my guilt, for I was indeed guilty according to the constitution, although in no other way. I have accepted the accusation and abuse as an act of expiation for my inability to prevent such an appalling mass crime.

✓ The great day arrived about a year later when the two tracks approaching each other from Burma and Thailand at last met and the railroad was formally opened. The original plan was that I from the Burma side and Prime Minister Pibul Songgram from Thailand should ride the first trains leaving from opposite ends to greet each other dramatically at the border. I looked forward with the greatest excitement to that meeting, but when the time came I was advised not to keep the rendezvous, because information had been received that there would be a fierce British air attack on the train on that day.

It was in June 1945 that I actually saw the railway for the first time when I visited Thanbyzayat, the Burma terminus, and only in August of that year that I travelled on it when, after the Japanese surrender, I fled by that railway to Thailand on my way to

Japan. With a remnant of the Burmese government, I had joined in the Japanese retreat from Rangoon in April, and so reached Mudon, in Moulmein District, some miles from Thanbyuzayat. I learnt at Mudon many facts about the railway and its labourers. The men and women from some of the nearby, better-off settlements travelled regularly to Moulmein to sell various goods supplied to them by the Japanese. I was told that these sales were an important source of the textiles and medicines needed by the people of that district.

On August 15, 1945, I took this train to Thailand, and so was able to see for myself the railroad all the way. A long, wide stretch of jungle had been cleared and made fit for human habitation. As for the railway itself, it was in its way a marvel. The tracks, which had been laid by men labouring under the most dangerous possible conditions, kept firm and smooth throughout in spite of the violent kamikaze speed at which a badly battered engine was taking us, for the Japanese were racing against time at that juncture. The bridges were constructed of wood and bamboo, often held together by wire or ropes or even thongs in places. Some of the longer bridges skirting and in places precariously overhanging the gorges or steep river banks were simply breath-taking, and so were the sharp bends and climbs and loops that our train took most cheerfully and without even seeming to slow down. This journey will remain as one of the deepest experiences of my life.

We stopped for the night at a settlement near the border, the name of which I have forgotten. I decided to see it for myself. While walking down one of its little lanes I shouted out to all I passed that the war was over and they would be able to return to their old homes soon. I was laughing, but I noticed that hardly anyone else was. Surprised, I asked them if they were not happy at the thought of going back, upon which some scratched their heads and looked confused and seemingly unable to make up their minds about it. When I repeated my question one of them replied, "We have settled down here nicely, and the place has now become our own village. Our families as well as many friends have also joined us. It will mean a lot of hardship to go back." I then looked at the little village more closely. Only then did it strike me as a surprisingly well-built and well-organised group of huts, many of them with a small garden plot bright with monsoon flowers or

filled with rows of vegetables. The jungle around had gone, and there was a tiny pagoda, a school, and even a make-shift dispensary. I asked the obvious question about malaria and epidemics, and they replied that there was very little of them now. The men, women, and particularly the children looked healthy, well fed, and well clothed. These people living in that particular settlement plainly had their own view of the "death railway" and the new life it had brought them.

I have told the Burmese side of the story. None of us here really knew how the railway was being constructed in Thailand, or the nature of the labour employed there, or the labour conditions. Remembering our own experience in Burma it is easy to believe that there must have been an enormous toll in human life and suffering in many labour camps elsewhere too. But on the other side of the picture there was an enormous gain as well, the conquest of a vast jungle frontier which had kept two neighbouring peoples apart since time began, and this in the long reckoning of history might well be judged as outweighing everything else. If we take that historical view it will be seen that few enterprises during the whole war showed more essential vision than the construction of this railroad. But with the defeat of the Japanese it vanished forever and only the most lurid wartime memories and stories remain. The region is once again a wilderness, except for a few neatly kept graveyards where many British dead now sleep in peace and dignity. As for the Asians who died there, both Burmese and Japanese, their ashes lie scattered and lost and forgotten forever.

RURAL PROBLEMS

We next took up the rural problems. For the parties within the government they were basic, for most of us had declared ourselves in the past to be socialists of one kind or another who believed that the greatest victim of the existing order in Burma was the peasant. His plight was the worst in the country; the fact that he did not own the land he worked and enriched with his labour left him perpetually rootless, that he could never free himself from debt left him perpetually enslaved, that foreign monopolies controlled the disposal of his principal crops left him perpetually

impoverished, that the political system took little account of him left him perpetually impotent and neglected. Speaking for myself, my party had already pledged itself by its Sinyetha, or Poor Man's, Policy to restore all agricultural lands to the agricultural workers, to liquidate all agricultural indebtedness, and to start all changes from the village level upwards. In consequence, it was only natural that we should take up these matters without delay.

As it happened, events had moved faster than we had, for by the time we got to these rural questions they had largely vanished. The Chettyar money lenders, who had acquired nearly half the total agricultural lands in Lower Burma alone, had fled to India along with the British, leaving their lands in the possession of their tenants. As for the large Burmese landowners, disruptive wartime conditions prevented them from effectively controlling their lands and tenants. The Japanese also played a part in it by protecting the right of the agricultural workers to cultivate any vacant land in order to produce the full quantity of grains they, the Japanese, needed.

We at once utilized this situation by permitting the agriculturists to take over all such lands to the extent that they and their families themselves could work them. So at last the Burmese agriculturist came largely to own the fields he worked. Similarly, the flight of the Chettyars, to whom most of the debts were due, together with the great flood of cheap Japanese money which reached the people practically wiped out the problem of agricultural indebtedness.

Next, the foreign monopoly firms that ran the rice and other grain trades were gone, and the agriculturists no longer depended on the foreign market these monopolists controlled for the sale of their rice and other produce, for the Japanese were buying on the spot all the surplus available, and the government was seeing to it that prices were fair. Thus the war to a large extent solved the basic problems of the peasants, at any rate temporarily. It also prepared the ground for a more lasting solution. We worked upon a scheme to distribute all agricultural lands among the agriculturists in a fair and permanent way. We also tried to develop a system of rural autonomy which would turn the village areas into self-contained units administratively, economically, and socially. But the chaotic war conditions frustrated most of our efforts. Even

the cooperative movement, which we did our best to promote, stalled down almost to a stop.

On the whole, however, the peasant was not too badly hit by the war although, like all the rest of us, he had his tribulations, such as the frequent seizure of his crops and carts and cattle and even men for forced labour. We could not prevent these raids completely, but we kept their scale and number down by insisting that they should be resorted to only for the most imperative military reasons, that a liberal compensation should be paid for whatever was taken from the peasant, and that nothing should be taken that would effect his daily work or essential activities. As time passed, complaints that the Japanese acted contrary to these terms diminished. There was actually no active mass discontent among the peasants, which fact was proved when they did not join in the anti-Japanese resistance near the end of the war, but remained out of it together with the general mass of the civilian population.

Upon a final view it could be said that the war in Burma liberated the peasant more tangibly than it did any other segment of the population. It did so by freeing him from his two basic problems of not owning the lands he worked and his never-ending indebtedness. The war made it impossible for those two problems to exist in the same form again. It was the beginning of a new future for the Burmese peasant.

THE JAPANESE ADMINISTRATION

Whatever our illusions were, we had to accept the fact that we were under a military administration and our government was subject to its final authority. This was unmistakably brought home to us when Japanese advisers, or counsellors as they were called, were attached to all our ministries and departments in Rangoon. Behind these advisers was the political section of the military headquarters under the deputy chief-of-staff, in which there was a group of Japanese civilians who functioned as the military counterparts to the ministers in the Burmese government. Thus the seeds were sown for future friction between the Burmese and the Japanese segments of the administration. Nearly all the advisers assumed that their power to give advice carried with it the power to enforce the advice, while the Burmese, violently disagreeing, held to the plain meaning of the word, which contains no impli-

lication of power to do anything more than what it says, that is, to advise. The result was a daily tension and bickering which further undermined the racial relations. Complaints began to pour into my office about the attempt of some of these advisers to run the departments they were advising, and in one instance a minister was told to issue an order against his will. This brought me personally into the conflict.

√ It was a situation which required careful handling. I could not rush into it headlong and so give the advisers an opportunity to magnify the dispute and raise the dangerous question of the army's general rights and powers, for that would have immediately ranged the whole Japanese military command against me; even General Iida would have stood firmly by the advisers on any question of his military authority over us. I therefore decided to wait until a particularly flagrant act of interference disorganised our work and then to report it through Takano, the chief adviser, to General Iida personally, or to General Nasu as the head of the political section. I had learnt during my dealings with them that the Japanese militarists were flexible in their thinking only in specific cases in which there was no question of their general rights and powers. After reporting the interference and its subversive effects I would tell the Burmese officer to go ahead and carry out the decision of the department.

√ In most cases this manoeuvre succeeded, largely because Takano helped me, for he was convinced that the actual work of the Burmese administration could best be done by the Burmese themselves. I also persuaded Takano to stop those advisers who were trying to exchange roles by turning the Burmese executive officers into advisers while they acted as the real executive authority. At the same time I instructed the Burmese officers to refuse to surrender their executive powers under any circumstances without first reporting to me. In vital cases they could even say that they were acting under my personal orders and I alone could revoke those orders. This method generally proved successful, but again we found that when one trouble ended another followed, mostly, I must say, through the timidity of some of our own men, and so it went on in varying degrees till the whole batch of these advisers were packed off when Burma declared her independence on August 1, 1943.

Takano left with the rest of them, and I was really sorry to lose him. He was a boon to me, for he did what I had no authority to do myself, by keeping the advisers under him in line with our general policy and work. Always courteous, fair-minded, and unassuming, he won the respect and confidence of the Burmese he worked with, which proved that the uneasy relations existing between the Burmese executive officers and many Japanese advisers were not due to any racial prejudice or conceit on the part of the Burmese. Yet another proof of this is that a good many other Japanese also won Burmese confidence as Takano did, for similar reasons.

I really do not know how we could have coped with the problems created by this system of advisers if Takano had not been with us. In his own quiet, effective way he had also won the confidence of General Iida and his staff. He sat next to General Iida at many of the daily midday meals, and this gave him an excellent opportunity to explain our difficulties to the general and the need to help us overcome them. It was a clever piece of strategy, and I am sure we owed much to it.

As for the other advisers, they were a mixed lot, some genuinely good and cooperative, some indifferent, but the general run of them cocky, myopic, and brimming over with their newly acquired master-race notions. At the same time I wish to state my view, now that one can see a little more clearly, that the disagreeable behaviour of these men was really not deep or permanent; it was a wartime aberration, the effect of the recent amazing Japanese military successes, which turned their heads and convinced them of their new destiny as well as prerogatives in East Asia, one of which seemingly was the right to tell the other Asians what they were to do and how. Another fact was that these victories were achieved by a vast, soulless military machine and its machine-like men, and so most Japanese began to worship that machine servilely till they became slaves to it and learnt to act as it did, that is militaristically. How else can one explain the fact that a great people, gentle, sensitive, possessing a long and deep culture in their own homeland, came to lose all those values even for a period in their conquered territories? Yet these men turned into machines had certain practical uses for us. For example, they were good at dealing with other Japanese who wanted to meddle with our

'affairs. Also, knowing for themselves the shortages and other difficulties stalling our work, they were better able to obtain the remedies for them from their army.

In those days the leadership principle was so inherently a part of the Japanese way of life, particularly in their armed forces, that it had become almost a national instinct among them to accord due place and respect to a leader, the more so if he possessed total authority. This was among the first facts I learnt from the Japanese in Burma, and now the knowledge became useful in outwitting the advisers. To get the better of them I exploited without any qualm whatever my position as the authoritarian leader of both the Burmese government and our single nationwide political organisation. This led to quite an amusing game. In order to impose his authority upon the Burmese department he worked with, the Japanese adviser would claim to be speaking for the Supreme Military Commander. The trick worked for a while, but soon our ministers and their departments learnt to counter it by declaring that they also were speaking and acting under direct orders from me as the highest Burmese authority. I did not always know that my name was being used in this way, and I am sure General Iida did not know either about his own being exploited. This stratagem relieved many Burmese of a load of pressure and unpleasantness, but I came to be regarded by a group of Japanese as the cause of their frustrations. It created a fantastic tragicomedy.

✓ As far as I recollect now, my first clash with certain members of the Japanese political section came over a proposal to buy up the two leading Burmese daily newspapers, the *Sun* and the *New Light of Burma*, and turn them into a single state-owned organ. I refused to permit it. The project, I explained, ignored the stark fact that, as a hangover from our colonial past, all government vehicles of information were regarded with suspicion by the people, whereas any private publication won their trust. I told them that this complex still existed and could not be lightly treated. So I would allow those two papers to go on while the government brought out its own publications. Soon we started a daily newspaper, the *Bama Khit*, or *Burmese Era*, but allowed the other newspapers to continue. One result of this policy was that the two most widely read daily papers unwaveringly supported the Burmese administration up till the very end. Another result was

that some of the Japanese militarists began to regard me as a threat to their own plans.

The next clash was really serious, because it was over a basic Japanese policy in Southeast Asia, and a partial failure of the policy in Burma could cause a similar failure elsewhere in the region. It related to the language question. The Japanese wanted to put their language in place of English in our schools. A special team arrived from the headquarters of the Supreme Southeast Asia Command in Singapore to put pressure on me. After a great deal of argument which went on for some days I informed them of my decision to continue more or less as before and gave them the grounds for it, which I had carefully prepared point by point. The main point was based upon our nationalism and its imperatives. "We must find a substitute for English, but it must be our own language. Even this change must be accomplished step by step because English has become such an integral part of our official life and activities, and the first step to be taken will be to translate into Burmese the enormous number of books without which we could not carry on. Your proposal would not solve our problem. It would only create another."

My next point was a little more accommodating. "Owing so much as I do to a knowledge of two foreign languages I realize the importance for us of knowing one or even more. I therefore intend to encourage the teaching of as many of the worldwide languages as there are facilities in Burma for doing it. Meanwhile, English will remain with Burmese as the medium of instruction, but there will be optional French and Japanese classes which the students may attend if they so desire. You may even open special schools of your own to teach Japanese." The Japanese took my decision as a defeat of their policy. However, I stuck to my points and neither General Iida nor General Nasu said anything. This was my first big confrontation with the Japanese and I came out of it rather well, but I was to pay for it later almost with my life.

The Japanese militarists did not take the defeat quietly. They at once won over Aung San, and through him obtained in the Burmese army what they had failed to get from me in the schools, for a little later I learnt that Japanese had become the working language in the army and was being compulsorily taught there. They also started to create a counterbalancing force against me by

setting up mass organisations directly under their control and guidance. Thus two such organisations appeared, the East Asia Youth League and the Kai Butai, or Civil Defence Corps, both of which quickly became rallying points for all enemies of the Burmese administration and secretly of the Japanese themselves. As for the Burma Defence Army, it was completely in the hands of the Japanese and so, like the two civilian organisations, it was riddled with Japanese militarist partisans, and its hostility towards the civilian power was intense.

Little did the Japanese militarists realize that in their desire to reduce the Burmese government to a shadow they were stepping into a snare which would close round them at a time chosen by their enemies, for their fear and suspicion of us was so apparent that all that the anti-Japanese elements had to do to gain the support of a large group within the Japanese army was to carry to it tales against us. From that shelter the anti-Japanese group conducted their secret work freely. They kept driving a wedge between me in particular and the Japanese, and at the same time increased the Japanese confidence in them by spreading the most grotesque stories about me, that I was a half-Jew, a Christian, and, of all things, an American spy. These people were playing a double game. While to the Japanese they accused me of working for the Jews and Americans, they told the Burmese that I was a stooge who served the Japanese most servilely. The game was so manifest, and yet the militarists, blinded by their lopsided knowledge of the Burmese and their ways did not see it, with the result, as I have just said, that they paid staggeringly for their blindness when these very people they had fed and sheltered were in the forefront of the subsequent resistance against them.

Our next big confrontation was more fundamental because it brought the Burmese up against the military constitution itself for the first time. In November every year we celebrate our National Day by flying various political flags, bringing out in full force our political armies, and generally demonstrating our national spirit and will. In 1942 we had planned to observe the day on a scale in keeping with the new surge of nationalism, but the Japanese peremptorily banned it. They said that they could not permit any flag other than their own to fly in public, for theirs was the only one recognised by the military administration. They had similar

objections to the display of private armies. As their military constitution supported these contentions we could say nothing, but we found a way of getting round the ban to some extent. Since the ban was on a public observance we decided to observe the day privately. We did it in a private hall; we gathered together there, solemnly raised our national flag and saluted it, and delivered the most violently nationalist speeches. The incident had its compensations, for it made us see the future war years and their tasks and perils more grimly.

✓ I must now mention a smaller incident, which however had its significance. It was a brush-up with an adviser and even had a comical element in it. This adviser, an earnest fellow but a bit too much so, was attached to the police administration in Rangoon. One day he issued an order to the whole police force in the city requiring them to assemble each morning to salute the Japanese flag and bow very deeply, in awe and trepidation as the Japanese invariably put it, towards the Imperial Palace in Tokyo, which direction would be carefully marked lest anyone should make the horrible mistake of bowing in a wrong direction and consequently to a wrong person who, for all one knew, might be a chewing-gum manufacturer in America; for this adviser such an error would have been the ultimate calamity.

Aghast at the man's folly, the Burmese police chief reported it to me. Takano and I sent for the adviser and told him to cancel his order straightway and stop issuing further orders. I remember that Takano spoke to him sternly. This was, of course, an extreme case, but it is a good example of the rabid master-race mentality which was really at the bottom of all this idiocy.

As 1942 ended and in the early days of the next year we began to hear of the first Axis reverses, of the naval battle of the Solomons in the Pacific, of mass bombings of German towns and the slowing down of the German invasion in Russia, and of the landing of the American and British forces in North Africa. They were the first portents for us that the war was not going too well for the Axis powers. Then in February 1943 news trickled in of the incredible German debacle at Stalingrad, which had wiped out whole invading armies, and then we really began to wonder and doubt. In Burma itself enemy bombings increased, and so did the war strains and hardships and the racial tensions and the activities

of the enemy agents, and all this began to have its effect upon the morale of the people. There was yet no marked turn in the situation, but the signs were growing ominous.

At this juncture something occurred which made us forget all signs and portents and return to our own dreams, for it appeared that they were at last going to become true. On January 28, 1943, Premier Tojo announced before the Japanese Diet that Burma would be recognised as an independent state within the year. He was also magnanimous enough to express his approval and even admiration of my leadership and work. I mention this because the strained relations between me and the militarists in Burma gave it a special relevance. Through Tojo the Japanese government in Tokyo had openly declared its support of me. On the same day in Burma the promise of independence was repeated in the name of the Supreme Commander of the Japanese Armed Forces.

It was an indescribably happy day, for apart from other angles, Burma would be the first subject country to achieve independence during the war. It really was going to be the dawn of a new era altogether for us. The Burmese have a way of getting the most out of life by living from event to event, and now they forgot everything except the present magical moment which they lived in the pure joy of hearing of independence again and knowing that it would shortly be theirs.

*Free! Free! Our land will now be free!
With thabye leaves we'll march to victory.*

So the people sang everywhere, their hearts beating wildly. A committee representing all the communities was formed to celebrate the occasion on a nationwide scale. Day after day crowds visited the pagodas to burn candles and offer flowers, monks were fed in the towns, there were continuous entertainments, huge mass meetings passed resolutions expressing the deepest gratitude to Japan, while people shouted "Banzai." At the same time messages of happiness and gratitude were sent to Premier Tojo and the Japanese government. Having done all this the Burmese looked forward to the actual day when they and their dreams would at last be free.

CHAPTER 9

Visit to Japan's Leaders

Early in March 1943, the Japanese government invited a Burmese delegation to Japan. I was to be accompanied by Thakin Mya and Dr. Thein Maung, the two senior members of the government, General Aung San, the commander-in-chief of the Burma Defence Army, and the usual staff of secretaries and interpreters. The delegation would be led by Colonel Isomura, the deputy chief-of-staff, who had taken General Nasu's place and was now in charge of the political section at the Japanese military headquarters in Rangoon. Thus on the very eve of our independence the man who was to prove to be one of the most sinister shadows to fall across our lives during the war made his appearance in a position of temporary authority over us. Isomura was, of course, not able to use that authority in a big way, but he succeeded in making himself a nuisance to many of us.

We stopped at Singapore on our way, "to pay our respects," as Isomura put it, to Field Marshal Count Terauchi, the Supreme Commander of all the Japanese military forces in Southeast Asia, and his staff. They were seeing to it that the field army command was not left out of the picture, but shared it equally with the civil government in Tokyo. I took the arrangement as part of our lot then; in fact, I too wanted to meet the militarists in their stronghold in Singapore to learn for myself what they were really like and what they thought of the offer of independence to Burma. As I had expected, they were mostly a set of cold, machine-like men who were very conscious of their victory and power and kept talking of more victory and more power for Japan. They did not have a word to say about the coming Burmese independence and its tremendous implications for the other territories conquered by

them. Instead, they spoke of their plans to build a Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, which they presumably regarded as an effective method of undoing the mischief caused by all the new-fangled talk of independence for the smaller nations lying within their long reach.

I met Count Terauchi. I was told that he was the most powerful man in the whole military world of Japan and, for a lot of reasons I could not fathom, almost a divinity to the Japanese people. As a person I found him to be really remarkable, a handsome, princely figure out of a long and mellow feudal past and yet belonging very much to the present in Japan and likely to belong to the future there too. I had a good indication of this from the way he listened to the talk by others about Japan's manifest destiny and all that, and yet remembered to speak of the destiny of others as well. I had thought that as the chief of all the conquering Japanese armies he would most incarnate the dizzy reflexes of the conquests, but I was completely wrong. He was of course every inch a feudal warlord, and he had his haughty moments when his eyes would suddenly flash and his voice grow sharp and peremptory, but there were other qualities in him too. It may have been because I had least expected to find it in him, but the quality which struck me particularly was his essential humanity, if I may put it that way. Unlike most other militarists, this consummate warlord was not afraid to show that he was also human, and precisely because of this he understood us better than many around him. There was no press-bu-~~ton~~ talk or pose in him.

✓Another thing I noticed was the Count's sense of the fitting and memorable, even in small matters—a phrase which lingered in one's memory, a gesture, or even a meal. The dinner he gave us was such an instance. I am sure he meant it to be remembered and I have done so. One of his staff members told me that his thoughtfulness of us made the great man see personally to the table arrangements so that everything should be right, with even the right flowers arranged in the most striking Japanese way. The result was a very memorable occasion.

✓I recall another meal I had with Count Terauchi. It was a small, quiet one in Saigon in December 1944, which took place in a very different atmosphere, when the Axis resistance was visibly break-

ing down and Japan was facing defeat. The Count now looked like a sick man with the first signs beginning to show of the ailment which was to kill him within a year or so. You could see the tragedy, both personal and national, in his pale, sunken face. Yet the meal, much simpler now, was thoughtfully arranged, the flowers were fresh and bright, and the conversation as genial as before. That same evening Count Terauchi made one of his most memorable gestures. He actually called on me at my hotel, accompanied only by an interpreter, and talked for some time of several things, including his home. Then suddenly he turned away from me and said, "During this supreme crisis in Japan all our troops too must be thinking of their homes." My throat tightened at hearing those poignantly human words from him.

When he left I insisted on accompanying him to the lift, which was some distance away, and he insisted that I should not do so. But I went with him all the same, and he thanked me very courteously for this small show of good manners. I will always remember this final gesture of one whom I like to think of, rather romantically, as the last of the great, colourful, and courtly Japanese *daimyos*.

At last we were in Tokyo, as the guests of the Japanese government. After a whole year of military rule it was like a liberation. We were now living in the clouds. Suddenly we found ourselves in the very vortex of the whole Asian conflict, and saw how an entire people were carrying it on, fighting, working, sacrificing to the last limit for their god-emperor. The surge of patriotic feeling we witnessed all round us was too spontaneous and universal to be a put-on show. The Japanese really believed in what they were fighting for, and that was not altogether the same thing as what the militarists at the war fronts were out for, for it appeared to me as being more Asian and fraternal and without any of the master-race business in it. I began to grasp what made the difference; while the militarists in Burma regarded us in their hearts as a people they had conquered and so had the right to rule and use at will, the government and the masses we met in Japan saw us mostly as Asian comrades who had come from far away to join them in a common war for Asia, and we were the first such Asians to appear in their country since the war began. We thus created a

very emotional impact, which broke out wildly wherever we went. As usual, the press and radio did their best to increase the mass hysteria.

Everything was different from Burma from the moment we arrived in Tokyo. Even Premier Tojo and the ministers of the government received us differently and so changed the atmosphere altogether. The people we met were most warm-hearted and comradely. Without any fuss or fanfare Tojo mentioned the decision to grant us independence and gave me the official document containing the promise and the imperial assent to it. The document repeated the three points stressed by the Premier in his recent speech before the Diet, "that Burma would, through her own incentive and responsibility, speedily substantiate her status as a fully independent state," that she would "cooperate closely with Nippon . . . as a member of Dai Toa Kyo-eiken (Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere)," and that "Nippon expects New Burma to speedily complete her national structure in consonance with the requirements of a successful prosecution of the war," to which was added a little lower down that Nippon likewise "desires the administration of the state to be made simple and effective." After Tojo had made a few remarks about the way to make our independence real and effective, the official business ended and the talk became completely free and easy and there was a lot of laughter.

I met Premier Tojo and the ministers on several occasions after the first formal one, and always it was on an Asian basis, that is, as two Asian peoples who were waging an Asian war together and never in the militarist relations of conqueror and conquered. Tojo even visited me alone on two occasions, the second a surprise, when he arrived while we were at dinner. He at once sent word that we were to finish our meal at leisure and he would wait; and he actually did wait, and later arranged a musical evening for us at which he sat till the end. This was quite a new experience for us, and it definitely left its mark. For instance, Aung San was completely won over; I noticed that Tojo took care to laugh at his jokes when few others did.

Count Terauchi embodied the tradition and culture of a past period, which is not wholly past, for nothing it seems is ever wholly past in Japan, and it is in this sense that he belonged to the

present and was a force in it. He was quintessentially Japanese. On the other hand, Premier Tojo and many of the leading ministers in his government, like Marshal Sugiyama, Admiral Shimada, and Foreign Minister Shigemitsu, were products of the present exploding Asian age, dynamic, daring, full of the new Asian consciousness underlying the concept of the Greater East Asia Co-Prospcrity Sphere and the East Asia Conference of 1943. The wonder to me was the striking way in which each of them represented a facet of the new Japanese phenomenon: Sugiyama its military might, Shimada its moral strength, Shigemitsu its deep and realistic world-awareness, and then Tojo, embodying the will and force behind it all.

By any reckoning Tojo was a great force who completely dominated Japan during the first years of the war. His whole appearance—his small, compact body with its large head and mobile features, his restless movements, his keen, alert eyes, which did not miss anything—soon convinced me that he was really built on an unusual scale and that everything in him, both the good and the bad, would be equally unusual. For most of us in the Southeast Asian region the good outweighed all else.

Tojo never believed in half-measures. It was this uncompromising will of his which led to his early triumphs and then later, when Japan began to lose the war, to his downfall. There was also his astonishing farsightedness. It positively amounted to political vision when he decided to give independence to the Southeast Asian countries Japan had conquered and occupied, for he realized that Japan could never win a long war and the kind of peace that would follow it without the wholehearted support of those countries, and it was now certain that the conflict would be a long one. I believe this was the real reason for Tojo's decision at this critical juncture. He saw the need in such a war to give the conquered peoples something of their own to defend, something more than the vague, airy talk about Asian liberation and destiny which could mean nothing to them when they themselves remained unliberated and without a destiny; his Asian instincts told him that only such a visionary project as a Greater East Asia composed of truly free and independent nations could endure.

However, most of the Japanese military leaders were men without a truly Asian vision. They were too introverted, lived too

much within their own insular past and its legends to be able to learn anything new or different. The result was that they refused to give up their old notions of conquering weak lands and holding on in one way or another to what they conquered. Thus for them our independence was to be just a means to win the war, a show without substance. In the end Tojo won, or rather half-won; it was only half a victory, for while the Japanese government really changed its policy, the militarists on the spot who had to carry it out did not change theirs, but continued as before. For instance, they actually tried to warn me not to take our independence too seriously. When I told Tojo about this some months later he burst out laughing. I completely understood why he laughed. And so, by refusing to regard the newly independent nations as being really independent, these bone-deep militarists turned them into enemies at a time when they were critically needed as friends and allies. Eventually Tojo lost his post, the die-hards took over, the new states were increasingly alienated, and so the way was prepared for the anti-Japanese resistances with which the war ended.

One last word about Premier Tojo. He impressed Bose and me immensely, and in fact all the Southeast Asian leaders who met him. His genuine Asian sensibilities made him understand the problems of other Asians to the extent that he often acted in defiance of the militarists, whose sensibilities were limited to their own land and people. Although Tojo was a militarist himself, he could be very unmilitaristic when necessary, as the eventual revolt of the militarists against him proved.

When Bose and I paid our last wartime visit to Japan in November 1944, we called on Tojo, although he was then living under a cloud. It was an act of gratitude and remembrance which both of us felt we owed him. I could see that he was deeply touched. When in the course of our talk he heard that Burma was desperately in need of textiles he made a silent note of it, and two or three days later I was informed by the government that it was making a gift of one million yards of textiles to me for distribution in Burma. It was a priceless gift, a part of which duly arrived in Burma and was distributed before our final retreat from Rangoon.

On March 23, 1943, we were received in audience by the Tenno Heika, or Emperor. For the Japanese, this was the climax of our

visit; to us it revealed the tremendous reality of the emperor-worship in Japan. It was the highest honour they could bestow upon a visitor, but in our case it was mixed with something else, for it also became a demonstration of Burma's subjection to Japanese military rule. The Emperor could, according to their protocol, receive us only as his subjects. This fact gave Isomura and the military clique supporting him a chance to remind us that, in spite of all the hospitality the civil government was showing us, we were really subjects of the Japanese.

Before the day of the audience Isomura gave me a prepared list of questions, in French, which the Emperor would ask me, and my answers to them, which would also be in French. The audience would be over as soon as these few cut-and-dried questions had been asked and answered in the same cut-and-dried way. As for the other members of the delegation, they would accompany me but would remain silent. Further instructions were given us regarding the way we were to approach the imperial presence and bow profoundly several times and withdraw, always remembering never to turn our backs to the imperial presence. It would be proper, they told us, to spend the evening before the audience quietly and in "silent meditation," without specifying what we were to meditate on, to avoid all intoxicating drinks, and to retire early for the night. We thought it was getting ridiculous, but we could do nothing about it.

The next morning was a solemn one. Before leaving for the Imperial Palace we were duly decorated. I received the Order of the Rising Sun First Class, Thakin Mya and Dr. Thein Maung were given a lesser order and class, and General Aung San a military order. Isomura must have been upset by these decorations, for he had told us to expect much smaller ones. Although as the Prime Minister of Burma under the British I had declined to accept a knighthood from them, I now willingly accepted the Japanese decoration because I knew the aura it would possess in the eyes of the militarists in Burma; it would strengthen my hand in dealing with them, for none of them had a decoration anywhere approaching mine.

We were taken to the Imperial Palace across the principal bridge, which in itself was a great honour. As a building the palace was not impressive till you looked at it in a historical and imagina-

tive way, and then it became infinitely fascinating and evocative. Solemnly we walked in single file to the chamber where the Emperor would receive us. While the other members waited behind me for their turn I stood at the entrance of the chamber, bowed deeply to a small distant figure, then walked a few steps, stopped, bowed again, then walked till I was at last before the imperial presence; then I made my last and deepest bow. With a faint but friendly smile the Emperor allowed me to shake his hand lightly and respectfully, and the audience began. The Emperor put the set questions in a low voice and I gave him the set answers, taking care to keep my voice just as low. Then I walked backward, and stopped, and bowed the same number of times as before till I got back to the entrance. One by one the other members of the delegation went through the same ritual exactly as I had done. They were however not permitted to touch the Emperor's hand or to speak to him. And then the audience was over. In its own complicated and symbolic way the ceremony was most impressive, except that for a foreigner it was a little too complicated and exhausting. I felt that Isomura and the other militarists had had a hand in much of it being overdone, and so nearly succeeded in reducing the sublime to the ridiculous.

It was most agreeably different when I met the Emperor again, once in November 1943, on the occasion of the Greater East Asia Conference, and again in November 1944, when I visited Japan at the height of the war. Burma was independent then, I was the head of the state, and on the second occasion, the guest of the Emperor himself. Finally, there was no Isomura or people like him to play the fool with the elaborate protocol. I then found the Emperor to be a perfectly human god, as good and great and human as anyone could be in his awesome and exacting position. In fact, he appeared to me as a lonely, poignant figure, a prisoner of a jealously guarded racial myth, so much so that he himself had become a living myth and a mystique.

And yet in a crisis this man who had to live and act like a graven image could come down to his people and share their sorrows. Thus, at the critical moment he came out of his loneliness to tell his people to end a war which was already lost and to "bear the unbearable," a phrase which conveyed the whole tragedy of the Japanese in their defeat and also their united courage in facing it. There was also the heroic way the Emperor identified himself with

his people in their bleakest hour when he offered to be tried as a war criminal in expiation of the Japanese war crimes; and finally there was the singular realism with which he shed his divinity after the war and became human and democratic when he saw that the world was moving in that direction. It could even be said that the Emperor was the first democrat in postwar Japan.

With the imperial audience over, there followed a whole round of talks, with visits and receptions and social evenings, both grave and gay, in between. Premier Tojo's concern for the success of our visit was unwearied. He seemed to be just waiting for an occasion to do something or to help somehow. Incidentally, he presented me with a fine samurai sword and then a private airplane before I left, and when he saw that after all the hectic days and nights we needed a rest he sent us to Harihan, a little dream inn tucked away in the folds of the deep wooded country near Osaka. There in perfect peace and quiet we relaxed completely and dreamed of ways to remould Burma nearer to our hearts' desire. All of us had a great deal to say about the way in which we would change Burma into a land fit for the Burmese to live in and the Burmese into a people fit to live in Burma. And now, out of the four of us, three are dead.

Everything, of course, did not go well all the time. There were bumps and jolts too, mainly because of Isomura or another of the militarists. They kept reminding us in various ways that we were still under military authority and that Isomura represented that authority while we were in Japan. This occurred most often over public statements I made either in my speeches or at meetings with the press. The military people insisted on my obtaining their approval beforehand, and I went along with them up to a certain point, but whenever I suspected that they were exploiting that right, I acted independently of them.

This conflict came to a head over the speech I delivered at the big banquet given to the Burmese delegation by the Japanese government. It was an important occasion, and all waited to hear what I had to say, particularly about the war and how the Burmese were taking it. The draft of my speech had been seen by Isomura, but when I actually spoke I changed many parts to such an extent that it departed somewhat from the Japanese translation that had been prepared beforehand. There was a great ado over it: the

military thought I had abused my privilege, Premier Tojo, General Sugiyama, and several other ministers told me that I had improved the speech by giving it more appeal to the Japanese people, as the public reception of it proved, Isomura got hauled over the coals, and the incident ended there.

For the rest of the time it was a running fight between Isomura and me, and I used various surprise tactics to get the better of him, which of course was not quite fair because I was in an advantageous position as long as I was a guest in Japan. Actually, my action was not so much against him as against the military administration he represented. For instance, at the main press conference we held, Isomura planted his own men among the pressmen to ask me questions while he gave me the replies to be made to them. I refused to play this game. When he said that this military control would be over as soon as Burma became independent and asked me to have a little patience meanwhile, it sounded reasonable, and I decided to yield to a certain extent. So when those questions were put to me at the conference, I took out the written replies and read them one by one, but each time I turned to Isomura's man who sat near me and asked him if it was all right. At this the conference, which was observing me closely, froze. This embarrassed Isomura's man so much that he asked me not to use the written replies, but to answer the questions in my own way. I did so, and the conference stirred again and became quite lively.

Isomura however kept on at his game. One day he took us to meet General Kawabe, a very short man with a great pair of moustaches and an out-and-out militarist, who was to succeed General Iida in Burma, and to our utter surprise he put us through the drill-like motions employed by the military administration in Burma when a high military officer met the civilian population. I was so indignant that I refused to speak a word to Kawabe on that occasion.

But things went differently when we met General Iida, who had just returned from Burma. He sat among us without any protocol fuss, and after the party was over he quietly left it before we did and waited at the main entrance of the building till we got into our cars, and then he came out and saluted us solemnly. All of us almost choked with emotion to see this unexpected gesture, and we kept struggling with each other to bow to him in return again and again till we lost sight of him.

Upon our arrival in Singapore on our way back home, an incident occurred which I found to be a little disturbing at the time, but very much so later. Isomura showed me a letter the Japanese administration in Burma had received from a group of Burmese army officers in which they informed the Japanese that the Burmese army did not want independence for Burma, but preferred to remain under the Japanese. It was such a preposterous communication that I at once mentioned it to Thakin Mya and Aung San. Both of them were furious and saw in it a Japanese militarist plot against us, and so did I at the time. As the chief of that army I asked Aung San to see Isomura and repudiate that group of Burmese officers and their letter. Aung San did so, and Isomura, seeing that the game was up, dropped it altogether.

I did not realize the real significance of the incident till, some time later, I came to learn increasingly of the plots within the Burmese army to go over to the British if they were winning the war. I then saw the letter as a ruse used by some Burmese officers to mislead the Japanese in order to gain their complete confidence and so to be able to plot with greater freedom and security. The war was already beginning to go against the Japanese when that letter was written.

The subsequent knowledge came to me only some months later. But one thing disturbed me as soon as I heard of the letter and saw how it upset Aung San. It plainly indicated that all was not well within the Burmese army, or why should even a small group in it have taken such a grave step during Aung San's absence in Japan, at the very moment when he was showing his joy over the grant of independence and ardently joining us in planning to transform Burma after she became independent in the next months? It was certainly an ominous sign that there were factions in that army pulling in different directions. In the end Aung San closed the fissures by going along with the most powerful faction, which was for switching over to the British. As he practically admitted to Field Marshal Lord Slim, he did so when he anticipated a British victory. He adopted similar tactics to close a political rift in the postwar years when he really wanted to remain within the British Commonwealth and U Nu warned him of the political consequences to him of advocating such a cause. Again Aung San yielded and declared for outright independence and separation.

CHAPTER 10

Independence

✓ THE INDEPENDENCE PREPARATORY COMMISSION

The preparations for the inauguration of Burmese independence began as soon as we returned from Japan early in April 1943. Our first task was to form an Independence Preparatory Commission, which, in the words contained in the constitution eventually produced, "would be truly representative of the peoples of Burma and their opinions." It would be a working body doing an urgent wartime job, and so it was not made too unwieldy and slow-moving. As the constitution described itself, it would be "an interim one to govern Burma until such time as a permanent constitution comes into operation." Another provision in it stated that "a constituent body to frame the permanent constitution shall be convened by the Head of State, if war conditions permit, not later than one year after inauguration of Burmese independence, and in any case not later than one year after the termination of the war." Thus the entirely temporary, wartime character of the constitution to be prepared was made explicit at the very outset.

The formation of the Commission was announced on May 8, and it began its work soon after. It was composed of twenty-five members, the ten ministers of the government and fifteen other members. They included Sir Mya Bu, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, Sir U Thwin, later President of the Privy Council, Sir San C. Po, leader of the Karen community, U Chit Hlaing, former Speaker of the Legislative Council and a veteran political leader, Thakin Kodaw Hmaing, patron of the Thakins, U Thein Maung, former Advocate-General, U Set, former Auditor-General, Major General Aung San, Commander-in-Chief of the Burma

Defence Army, and many who had represented various parties in the legislature under British rule. Members from most of the national minorities could not be included because the question of their future position had not yet been decided. I was the chairman of the Commission.

It was as representative a body as could be formed then and broadly reflected the principal political views and sentiments in the country. At one end there were the monarchists represented by three Thakins, Thakin Kodaw Hmaing with his deep nostalgia for the days of the Burmese kings and their absolute rule, and Thakin Ba Sein and Thakin Tun Oke, who believed in monarchism largely because the Japanese believed in it. At the other end were Thakins represented by Thakin Than Tun, the Communist, who watched the proceedings warily but took little part in them.

Between these two extremes was, first of all, Aung San, who had a lot to say on the military provisions in the constitution; he tried his best to make them follow the Japanese pattern, and succeeded. Then there were those who believed in a totalitarian form of government, among whom were U Nu and myself, for very practical reasons, one of them being our conviction that Japanese military totalitarianism could be successfully countered only by our own form of totalitarianism. But the bulk of the members were moderate, tradition-bound men who believed in parliamentary democracy, chiefly because that was the form of government they knew under the British and they had never thought of any other form.

Such a composite body inevitably produced a composite constitution, which in actual working, however, proved to be remarkably able to stand up to the stresses of the war. Many defects may be found in it if one tries hard enough to find them. But the fact to remember is that it was a constitution improvised during a war for a similarly improvised state and it worked, which after all is what really matters in the end.

"For years we have vowed to free our people," I reminded the Commission in my opening speech, "and now the time has come to redeem that vow. The Burmese will very shortly be a free nation and state. We must redeem our vow by producing a constitution which shall be a worthy foundation for our new state." This was the spirit in which the Commission worked, in the worst

war conditions, and wrote the first constitution for an independent Burma. We were also the first among the colonial countries to produce a new independent constitution during the war.

As is to be expected, this hurriedly written constitution kept to the basic things. It began with two declarations which were intended to change the whole direction of our national development:

Burma shall be a fully independent and sovereign state. All powers of government and all authority, legislative, executive, and judicial, are derived from the people.

The Commission showed a lot of courage in accepting the second declaration, which went counter to the whole political concept and tradition of the Japanese. I and a group of socialist-minded members insisted on making it the very starting point of our fundamental law, and we succeeded in the end. The Japanese realised its significance only after our declaration of independence. They then tried to persuade some members of the Privy Council to move a resolution to amend it, but the Council remained firm. Thus a revolutionary concept entered into a Burmese constitution for the first time.

The next revolutionary change made by this constitution was the introduction of the leadership principle, or totalitarian rule, at any rate for the duration of the war:

Burma shall be ruled over by the *Naingandaw Adipadi*, or Head of State, who shall have full sovereign status and power. (provided Dr Ba Maw is the *Adipati*)

This attempt to put final power in the hands of a single person led to a long and furious debate followed by a close vote. Being a matter which was likely to become a personal one for me, I kept out of it. U Thein Maung, the jurist among us, opposed it the whole day, but his exact, prewar logic was defeated by the logic of wartime events and needs. He took the defeat gamely. Yet he won in part, for a closing clause was put into the constitution which limited its operation to the period of the war or a year after its termination. I am sure this limitation in time made the traditionalists breathe more easily. I might mention in passing that it was mostly the traditionalists who sought shelter behind my swift,

totalitarian powers whenever they were confronted by the military totalitarianism of the Japanese. The totalitarian principle was eventually embodied in our official slogan, "One Blood, One Voice, One Leader."

A crisis simmered over the provisions relating to the armed forces. This was Aung San's field, and behind him was the Burmese army, whose spell was almost irresistible even within the Commission. The result was that Aung San got what he wanted, which was a military power structure on the Japanese model. Needless to say, the Japanese wanted it too.

"There shall be a War Minister directly responsible to the Head of State"; in other words, the war minister was to be independent of the control of the civil executive represented by the cabinet of ministers, exactly as in Japan.

"All commissions in the Burma Armed Forces shall be granted by the Head of State on the recommendation of the War Minister," exactly as in Japan.

"The Supreme Commander [that is, the Head of State] shall be advised by the war cabinet in all military affairs," the war cabinet being composed entirely of military officers, exactly as in Japan.

"The War Minister shall always be chosen from among high military officers on the active list," exactly as in Japan.

Knowing that I would be against these Japanese ideas, Aung San and a group of Burmese officers had seen many members of the Commission and obtained their support beforehand so that when the matter came up for consideration I found myself almost alone. I remember the veiled warning I gave the Commission. "Please don't think only of the present, but also of the future," I told them. "Surely, we have a long and uncertain future to think of." But it was no use. The Burmese army was too hypnotic and I was completely outvoted.

So the first seeds of militarism in its most total form were sown in Burma, and our first constitution-making body, oblivious of the future, allowed it. After the war Aung San seems to have discarded his militarist notions. At least, they do not appear in the postwar constitution he helped to draft before his assassination. Probably he changed his mind because he was no longer in command of the Burmese army, or the utter defeat of Japanese militarism had disillusioned him about its virtues, or it was the British atmo-

sphere around him at the time which made him turn again to British concepts.

As for the rest of the provisions in the constitution, they followed more or less the usual democratic model as far as the war permitted. There could be no parliamentary body for the obvious reason that such a body could not be freely elected under war conditions, and so a privy council nominated by the Head of State after consultation with the cabinet of ministers had to function in the meantime. All the essential rights and obligations contained in a democratic constitution were adopted, the fundamental human rights, the independence of the judiciary, the independence of the audit and accounts services, a state services board responsible only to the Head of State, and so on. Lastly, as has already been mentioned, there was the clearest provision for convening a constituent assembly within a fixed time for the purpose of enacting a proper, permanent constitution in the proper manner. U Thein Maung in particular worked hard to include all these democratic provisions. Such was our war-born constitution, a document with many flaws by peacetime standards, but completely meeting the supreme pragmatic test of truth: it worked.

The Japanese authorities, represented as usual by Isomura, followed the proceedings of the Commission very closely. Isomura attended the earlier meetings almost daily, but he was unable to understand a word of what we were saying, being all in Burmese, and so he stopped coming. He was, however, active in other ways. For instance, while the Commission was sitting he held a number of meetings with me in order to get me to enter into an agreement with the Japanese Imperial Army, which would come into force after independence. Isomura's apparent game was to keep these meetings a secret between him and me, but precisely for this reason I brought U Thein Maung and Thakin Mya into them. Isomura made the most preposterous demands and I made equally preposterous counterdemands, to show up the preposterousness of the whole business. I knew perfectly well that Burma after independence could not be bound by such an agreement, especially when I, who was asked to enter into it, had no power as yet to do so. To give an example, Isomura asked for the most extensive rights and privileges for Japanese business in our new state, and I countered by proposing among other things that no foreigner

should be permitted to own more than 40 per cent of any business operation in Burma. (Incidentally, this was one of the three last laws I had passed before the final retreat from Rangoon.) Further, I asked that all enemy property seized by the Japanese army in Burma should be transferred to the Burmese government to be used as compensation for the war victims. I also demanded a whole lot of other things.

The next thing Isomura did was the most outrageous of all. One day, just before the Commission began its sitting, he brought me a communication supposed to be from a military source. After reading it myself I passed it round among the members. It raised a storm of indignation and protest. After a long rigmarole about the duties of the ruler of an independent state, the communication came to its real point. "If the head of the state is unjust and cruel and thereby causes misery to the people God will surely punish him. The Imperial Japanese Army also will not allow such misrule to go unpunished. It will intervene to save the people from such a ruler." The meaning was clear. Independence or not, the Japanese army claimed the right to intervene in Burmese affairs at any time, the right to judge by its own standards any person or situation in our country, and to carry out its judgment by force, even to the extent of deposing its elected ruler and setting up another in his place. For the Commission these words were a slap in the face of the Burmese. In one speech after another the members denounced this threat to our future independence. Isomura listened with a cold, set face, guessed the storm he had stirred, and left. He never mentioned the document again and the Commission ignored it completely.

✓ As the Commission was coming to the end of its work I was suddenly asked to proceed to Singapore to meet Premier Tojo, who was due to visit the city shortly. So I went there, accompanied by U Nu and Isomura, whom I could never shake off. Tojo arrived in Singapore on July 5, and was received like a conquering hero by a great array of the Japanese armed forces in the city. Subhas Chandra Bose, who had recently thrilled the entire East by his sensational arrival there in a German submarine, was there too. Upon seeing the two of us Tojo beamed and at once walked up to us without ceremony. He told me that he had good news for me and fixed a meeting for that very afternoon. When we met again I

was informed of the Japanese decision to make over to the new independent state of Burma the whole of the Shan States except the two easternmost territories of Kengtung and Mongpan, which would be ceded to Thailand. As for the Kachin States, the Japanese army would continue to administer them meanwhile because a British assault was expected there soon.

I received the information with mixed feelings, but my happiness certainly exceeded my disappointment, for, apart from everything else, the Japanese action solved for us a problem with the Shans which, if left to us alone, could even have led to communal conflict and violence. I thanked Tojo deeply, but at the same time told him that neither the Burmese nor the Shans would be completely happy about the dismemberment of the Shan territory and its people. Tojo replied that Japan had to keep the word she gave Thailand at the time that country came into the war on her side. "But we have come in with you too, and we have our claims too," I persisted. Tojo laughed, and said vaguely that the Burmese could seek compensation in another way. I did not understand what he meant, but it set me speculating a good deal. As for the Kachin States it was agreed that they would be restored to Burma after the military threat was over.

I also expressed at length my strong dissatisfaction with the policies and behaviour of the Japanese Army in Burma, and my desire to establish direct contact with the civil government in Tokyo. Premier Tojo accepted everything I said and promised that he personally would give strict instructions to the Japanese army in Burma in line with my suggestions. I also urged the need for stronger and friendlier relations between neighbouring countries, and Asian cooperation in general. The fact that I had established such good relations with Tojo meant that I could go over the heads of the Japanese militarists in Burma and oppose them more effectively by dealing directly with Tokyo. All this was of vital importance in saving Burma from total destruction by the Japanese army in the last days of the war.*

This visit to Singapore was also eventful in another way; I met

* See transcript of the International Military Tribunal for the Far East, pp. 17,912-61, the Trial of Premier Hideki Tojo, March 6, 1947, testimony of Kumaichi Yamamoto, Vice-Minister of the Greater East Asia Affairs Ministry, who accompanied Tojo to this meeting. [Note added by Theda Maw.]

Bose there for the first time and saw the beginning of the vast sweeping movement under his leadership which brought the whole Indian population in Southeast Asia actively into the war on our side. I will have much more to say about Netaji Bose and our close comradeship during the war.

On my return to Rangoon I reported to the cabinet of ministers and the Independence Preparatory Commission the decision of the Japanese government in regard to the Shan and Kachin States. There was general satisfaction with it.

At last the day arrived in the middle of July when the final draft of the constitution was completed and approved unanimously by the Commission. One last task remained before it adjourned till independence day: to elect the Head of State of Burma to be proclaimed on that day. Having reason to believe that I would be chosen, I stayed away from the election. The Commission was generous enough to elect me with a unanimous vote, for even the two monarchist members who wanted to oppose the choice were told by the Japanese not to split the vote needlessly.

The Commission had yet one more task to perform. It had to assemble again on the day of independence to declare Burma a sovereign and independent state and to promulgate her new constitution.

DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

August 1, 1943, was a fine bright day with a slight rain falling at times and just enough clouds floating in the skies to keep enemy planes away. The first ceremony of the day was held at 10 o'clock in the morning, when Lt. General Kawabe, the Supreme Commander of the Nippon Expeditionary Forces in Burma, issued an order announcing the withdrawal of the Japanese military administration. It took place at the Japanese army headquarters in the presence of a large gathering of Japanese staff officers and members of the Burmese government. After that the pageantry shifted to Government House, which was to become the official residence of the head of the new state.

At 11 A.M. the Independence Preparatory Commission held its final session. It did so now as the representatives of the people of Burma. At 11:20 A.M. it declared Burma to be an independent and sovereign state, promulgated the new constitution, and for-

mally announced my election as the Naingandaw Adipadi, or Head of State. After this last act the Commission dissolved itself.

Then followed the inauguration ceremony, which was held in the great hall before a large assembly of civilian and military officers, both Burmese and Japanese. Lt. General Kawabe, representing the Japanese military forces in Burma, was present throughout, and so was Subhas Chandra Bose, who was to play such a spectacular part in the war. Bose had come from Singapore as my special guest for the occasion.

The simple ceremony was conducted with dignity and emotion. The declarations made by the Independence Preparatory Commission were announced to the assembly, which applauded for a long time to signify their complete assent. Next Burma's formal declaration of independence was read out in full, a most solemn oath of office was administered to me, and I was duly installed as the Naingandaw Adipadi. With that the inauguration came to an end.

More ceremonies and other proceedings followed in the afternoon. At 1:30 P.M. the Japanese Military Command transferred to me as the Head of State and Supreme Commander of the Burmese Forces the command of the Burma Defence Army and other associated military organisations. My first act as Supreme Commander was to appoint Colonel Ne Win as the Commander-in-Chief of the Burmese Army in place of Major General Aung San, who was now the Minister of Defence.

At 2 P.M. the cabinet of ministers, the privy councillors, and judges of the Supreme Court were appointed and sworn in before me.

At 3:30 P.M. the Axis powers and other allied nations were notified of our independence. All of them immediately recognised Burma as an independent state.

At 4 P.M. Burma declared war on Britain and America.

At 4:30 P.M. a Treaty of Alliance between Nippon and Burma was signed by me, as the Burmese Head of State, and Renzo Sawada, the newly appointed Japanese ambassador to Burma. It was a brief and simple document consisting of just three operative clauses. It pledged the two countries to cooperate with each other in the prosecution of the war. It also pledged similar cooperation

“for the self-determined development of each country in Greater East Asia.” Lastly, it agreed that the details of the treaty “shall be decided through consultation.” That was all there was in it. There was no secret pact or understanding at all.

At 6 P.M. I held my first press conference as Head of State.

The day closed with a banquet attended by all the high dignitaries of the new state, Burmese and Japanese military officers, and Netaji Bose and his staff. It was a perfect and deeply evocative day and everything went exactly right.

We released all our pent-up feelings in our Declaration of Independence. The Commission had asked me to write it, and I did my best to put into words the memories and resonances of the past, the emotions of the present, and the hopes for the future which were stirring in the Burmese on the occasion. The declaration itself will convey to you how we felt on that first day of our new independence.

Today, after more than fifty years of British occupation, Burma resumes her rightful place among the free and sovereign nations of the world. She proudly occupied that place throughout a very long stretch of unbroken history, during which her glory shone like the sun and the moon in the heavens. Her empire once extended far beyond the hills and seas in the north, south, east, and west; many among her people were famous and mighty; the strength of her arms also was acknowledged to be great; and she contributed in her time worthily to the progress of mankind. Throughout all their long history before British aggression, the Burmese people maintained their independence unbrokenly after subduing every enemy sooner or later in numerous wars. . . .

Fifty years or so ago Burma lost her independence for the first time as a result of three Anglo-Burmese wars. Britain waged these wars . . . at a time when Asia was divided and unprepared, and the whole weight of sea power, superior war equipment, and the vast newly discovered resources of the industrial revolution were on the British side. . . . The result of this unequal contest was that most of the small Asian

nations were destroyed by British cunning and material superiority. It was Burma's tragedy to be among those small nations. . . .

The years of British occupation were indeed sorrowful for Burma. She entered into a long bondage. . . . The Burmese were slowly expropriated, losing as time went on most of their national substance, their vast material resources and opportunities, their culture, their language, and even their own way of living. . . .

However, the Burmese national spirit remained uncorrupted by the darkness of those years. The struggle against the aggressor continued in one form or another as opportunity allowed or weapons were available, while British greed and tyranny kept the fire in every Burmese heart raging. Periodically the people broke loose in their desperation, there were mass risings, slaughter, destruction, and then the most violent British reprisals followed. . . . But still the struggle went on, gaps were slowly filled, new patriots came forward to suffer, in a spirit of utter dedication, the same repressions, imprisonment, exile, torture, and often death itself. . . .

With the outbreak of the present war for the liberation of East Asia the Burmese struggle came at last to a turning point. . . . Today, the Burmese people will at last reap the harvest from seeds which were sown for many years with ceaseless struggle and sacrifice. . . .

The Burmese, therefore, by this solemn declaration now made in their name and in accordance with their national will by a constituent assembly representing them, publicly proclaim that from this day forever Burma is a fully independent and sovereign state. . . . Burma also declares herself to be a member of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. She enters into this free and equal partnership so that by the united resources, will, and work of East Asia as a whole a new Asiatic order and economy may be established as a part of a world order which will ensure justice, peace, and prosperity to all peoples.

Our independence moved several leaders to speak memorably. I began it with a radio broadcast to the whole nation on the follow-

ing evening. Speaking of our independence I told them that "it is born out of a war and consequently it carries all the marks of its war birth. It was created by war and it must survive by war. I need hardly say how inexpressibly great our joy is today. Many have wept to see this day of liberation which they had almost despaired of seeing within their lifetime. . . . But we know that there are not only dreams, there are also realities. . . . Now that independence has come to us out of this war we must defend it in this war. . . . Burma is definitely in the frontline in the present war. We are living in frontline conditions and every day facing frontline problems. It is clear we must adopt a frontline policy."

U Nu, now foreign minister, also spoke with passion. He emphasized Japan's place in history: "History has yet to witness a single instance in which a country, motivated by high idealism and nobility of purpose, has sacrificed its life and property solely for the liberation and welfare of oppressed peoples, and Nippon seems destined to that historic role for the first time in the chronicles of mankind."

Colonel Ne Win, the new commander-in-chief of the Burmese Army, spoke like a soldier. At a press conference held on August 6 he said, "We are determined to fight till victory is won, and we will not allow the enemy to enter into a single inch of our land. . . . With the close cooperation of the mighty Nippon forces we shall reach our goal soon."

Even the women spoke out. Kinmama Maw, as the President of the All-Burma National Women's League, told the Japanese press: "We have been the women of Burma so far. We must now begin to be the women of Asia."

Glowing messages of happiness and good will were received from several foreign nations. Premier Tojo and the Japanese government welcomed us as a free and equal partner in the new East Asia order. Netaji Bose also had a message for us in a broadcast speech he delivered the same evening. He said: "The independence of Burma in this momentous crisis in world history has a twofold significance for us. It shows in the first place what a nation can achieve if it knows how to seize an opportunity which history has offered. Secondly, just as the conquest of India supplied the British with a jumping-off ground for their attack on Burma in the nineteenth century, similarly the emancipation of Burma has

supplied the Indian independence movement in East Asia with a springboard for its attack on Britain's army of occupation in India during the twentieth century." It was not only a Burmese but an Asian day, the beginning of the liberation of all Asia, and all the words spoken then and all the messages received were full of Asian resonances.

And so the day and the occasion came to a close.

RUMBLINGS AND REORIENTATIONS

With independence our spirits soared again. The very word was an enchantment. The people rallied round the new state when they actually saw it with their eyes and displayed a genuine pride in it. However, I told them the truth about it on the very first day, reminding them that it was not yet complete or perfect, for it was born in the depths of a world war and so carried its birth scars, which would show more as the war intensified, but it was theirs, and they were the first to achieve such a thing during a universal conflict. There was general understanding of these plain facts except among those who had made up their minds against everything that had to do with Japan or with our independence, our administration, with all our people's effort and struggle during those long, up-hill years.

We really managed to accomplish a great amount in the first months after independence, and indeed right through 1944. I drew up two New Order Plans, which sought a basically new approach to all our problems. They were carried out as much as the war conditions would allow, with the full cooperation of the men and women in the state services and organisations who stood staunchly by the new state. The people's labour was declared to be "our primary wealth, the primary unit and value" in all our planning. It was in this period that we formed various boards to produce schemes for the work ahead; and in the middle of May 1944, we sent a strong economic team, the Burma Special Research Commission, headed by Dr. Ba Han, to visit several countries in East Asia and study their development on the spot. It was the only team of its kind touring with such a purpose in Southeast Asia during the war, and its work won praise and recognition in all the five countries it visited.

But the war situation was visibly deteriorating, with the result

that our progress was slowed down. Meanwhile, the Japanese demands increased, and so did ours from them, and now our main work was to get what we needed from the Japanese whenever we gave them what they needed from us. That was how we succeeded in keeping Burma as one of the least ravaged and despoiled parts of Southeast Asia.

The fact remained that ours was a war-born independence and thus much of its reality depended upon the way the war was going, and at that time it was going badly. With one Axis defeat following another the situation fluctuated more and more as 1943 advanced and we got into the next year, and loyalties fluctuated with it, and the chances for our survival also fluctuated with those loyalties. So again certain sections of the population began to get demoralised and the early tensions erupted, now more actively than before because the situation was worse. Even independence began to lose its magic and lustre for many.

On the Japanese side, many militarists went back to their old ways again. They could never remember for long that the Burmese were now a free people. I have already mentioned their charge against me that I took our independence too seriously. The cause of the mischief was that they wanted it both ways; they wanted the Burmese to fight the war as people defending their own independence and yet in other matters they were to behave as if they were not independent. The militarists merely changed their argument; previously they had tried to impose their will upon us in the name of military administration, and now it was in the name of military necessity without bothering to convince us that there was really any such necessity at all; and as the pressures increased they refused even to argue about the necessities, but treated them as Japanese imperatives which ruled out all argument. Knowing how critical the situation had become we tried to go along some of the way with them, but they wanted us to go the whole way, which was clearly impossible unless we were convinced of the need for doing so. Thereupon these little warlords accused me of trying to subvert their war effort; and so we drifted further apart.

While the old tensions were returning, new events were changing the situation in Burma radically. To mention some of them, Japan was clearly losing the war so there was a general feeling that

the British would soon be back; in consequence, the independence given us by Japan would not last long and would even get us into serious trouble with the British. This bred a desire among a certain group to leave the sinking Japanese boat; it also gave an opportunity to those ideologically opposed to the Axis Powers to work for their defeat. Active beneath it all was a mounting war fatigue and a weakening war morale which made many believe that all the hardship and deprivation they were suffering were meaningless since the war was as good as lost. And finally there were the Japanese militarists, who continued to behave, to use a British phrase, like a bull in a china shop.

Out of this welter there emerged a new orientation of forces. Roughly, the Burmese became divided into three main segments. The first took a long and objective view. They believed that however great the Japanese menace was, it was temporary, for the Japanese armies would soon be driven out and could then be persuaded to leave behind the arms to continue our struggle against the British. Consequently, that menace was less than that of a return of British imperialism to Burma, which would be for good. As this segment believed, the Burmese should never lose sight of the fact that British imperialism was their historical enemy, so their first historical task was to destroy it. That was the view held by me and in general by the services and organisations of the Burmese government, and incidentally of Netaji Bose and his Free India.

The second segment existed at the other extreme. For them it was vital that the Burmese, and particularly they, should be on the winning side. Also with an eye on the scramble for political power in the country which would follow the war, they believed in going along with the masses by echoing their immediate grievances, which were naturally against the Japanese then. Following in the footsteps of the Western powers, which were on the way to victory, they denounced the Japanese as fascists and called their movement an antifascist resistance. This segment was composed mainly of an influential group within the Burmese army, the East Asia Youth League, the Kai Butai, the socialist wing of the Thakin Party, and the secret Communists. Having the Burmese army on their side, they became the strongest force. Japanese shortsightedness saw to it that the anti-British elements had no arms or other means of organising their own resistance.

The last of the three segments consisted of the rest of the population, those who had their grievances against both the Japanese and the British and so abominated both. Their conflict with the Japanese had not reached the stage of overt antagonism, and so they could not make up their minds to fight for or against them. In consequence they remained out of it all.

The anti-Japanese segment, which eventually launched a resistance, began to organise themselves in earnest during this period. With every Axis defeat the Japanese became more desperate and demanding, and the secret British agents more active and successful, and the anti-Japanese movement more restless. Meanwhile, the Allied powers drove the Axis armies out of North Africa, Italy surrendered unconditionally, and the Americans were pushing the overextended Japanese lines back in the Pacific and getting closer to Japan. All these events had a radical effect in Burma. According to Thein Pe Myint, an important secret agent then, it was at about that time that he succeeded in persuading Than Tun to come over to the British.

From now on it becomes a long, tortuous story of the secret activities of the anti-Japanese groups. I have no personal knowledge of those activities except what I gleaned from some of their leaders who were in the government. They were willing to tell me, but for some deep moral reasons I entertained I was unwilling to compromise my integrity by listening to them.

However, late one night soon after the Italian surrender Than Tun, Ba Hein, and U Nu came to see me. Than Tun came to the point at once. He told me that they had decided to organise a resistance against the Japanese, and for this purpose he had established contact with the British command in India. I particularly noticed that he approached the matter ideologically, as a true communist should, and there was no rabid talk about Japanese fascist behaviour. This may have been because he knew that ideological talk would go down with me better. I listened to him without any surprise. Than Tun asked me to join them and I told him at once that that was out of the question. Then he said with a laugh that they would forcibly take my family away with them, and I told him that that too was out of the question. After all this banter I asked him directly what the British had promised him in return.

"We have asked for full civil liberties, for the right of free speech and writing and association and all that."

"But not for independence?"

"No."

"Not even that your heads should be spared?"

He laughed. "We expect that, of course," he replied without wincing. He was a cool realist.

"Most of you must certainly be expecting that at least," I said.

We all laughed. The three of them were very close to me in those days, so we were able to speak to each other openly. Perhaps it was for that reason that Than Tun and U Nu had decided to play a bold game by telling me of their most dangerous plans. They knew they would win, and they did. I, of course, declined to join them, but knowing that they were acting from deep conviction, I promised to do what I could to shield them and their comrades if ever their personal safety was in danger. I refused to go further as long as the war lasted. I saw that Than Tun was following a trail which would go on even after the war, for he was a compulsive revolutionist. At any rate, it was clear that he was not acting as he intended to do in order to save his head or anyone else's. I also remember telling him that I had given him my promise to do a thing which in a way was wrong because I considered him and his compulsions to be a "historical necessity."

Aung San took a longer time to have a similar talk with me. However, he must have known of the promise I had given Than Tun. The delay can only have been due to the fact that while Than Tun as a dialectical-minded communist had been quick to see a change in the situation and therefore the need to change with it, Aung San waited for events to take him along. Eventually he visited me, in the middle of 1944, a month or so after the Normandy landings in Europe. He came alone. As I always did with him, I waited for him to get to the real subject. He approached it in a different way from Than Tun, without any ideological complications and mainly from the humanitarian point of view. In the end he did not declare the course he intended to take, I am sure because he himself had not come to a final decision on it. He left it to me to draw my own conclusions.

"We must try to end this war somehow," he said abruptly. "People are suffering needlessly."

"But," I pointed out, "this is a war, and we cannot stop it as and when we like. How do you think we could do it?"

"Anyhow. We are sick of it. The Axis powers have already lost it."

I then guessed what was in his mind. "What about our independence and honour," I asked him, knowing that these words counted with him.

"This independence we now have is only a name," he replied bitterly. "It is only the Japanese version of home rule. We don't want our people to suffer so much for a mere name."

I kept up the argument as I used to do with him in the early days of our freedom struggle. I knew he loved such kind of abstract talk. "But it's a wartime independence which can't very well be perfect while the war is going on, no matter which side gives it to us," I continued. "The other side with all their loud talk have not given any country they have occupied even the kind of independence Japan has given us. Can you mention any colony to which they have granted a semblance of independence during the war or even a promise of it?"

Aung San evaded my question and went on: "The Japanese are insincere and overbearing. They are only using us."

"We all know that. You know they tried twice to kill me, so I have more reason to know it. But we must put our personal feelings aside and take a broader view. What you say is only a part of the truth. There are other parts too. If the Japanese use us, let us use them in turn. That is how nations even up the scores." And so the dialogue went on briskly for quite a while.

Aung San gave me the feeling that he was still trying to make up his mind; one could see him struggling with himself. Than Tun was different. Owing to his brand of communism and perhaps his moral make-up he could do anything without a qualm, if he was convinced that it was "historically necessary." Aung San's trouble was that he was not so single-minded. He thought of too many things before acting, and that often made him change his mind bewilderingly.

Less than a year later these two men were each leading a wing of the resistance against the Japanese forces in full flight from Burma.

CHAPTER 11

The Greater East Asia Conference

At about the end of 1943 a momentous Asian event brought several independent Asian nations together for the first time in history. It was the Assembly of the Greater East Asiatic Nations which was held in Tokyo on November 5 and 6, 1943. Six nations attended it, Japan, China, Thailand, Manchukuo, the Philippines, and Burma. Subhas Chandra Bose, the head of the government of Azad Hind, or Free India, was also present as an observer. It really made history.

I attended it as the Head of State of Burma, and was accompanied by U Tun Aung, minister of war cooperation, Dr. Thein Maung, Burmese ambassador in Tokyo, U Shwe Baw, U Nyun Han, and Bo Yan Naing, secretaries in the government.

Our journey by air to Tokyo nearly proved fatal. After stopping for a night in Saigon our plane took off for Taiwan the next morning. Before long we noticed that the plane was climbing with difficulty. At the same time a strong pungent smell that reminded me of chlorine filled the plane, and we began to roll and pitch slightly; soon we guessed that we were in for trouble. The plane was unable to clear the taller treetops and had to fly around them, but the pilot somehow kept it up, evidently trying to find a safe landing spot. This went on for some time and then the plane started to lose altitude near a group of thatch huts, and suddenly it dived down, one of its wings violently struck a tree nearby, which acted like a brake, and the whole plane swung around and crashed right on the huts, with its front portion totally smashed.

However, the body of the plane held together because the pliant huts had acted as a cushion and not only broken its fall but actually kept it cradled. Most extraordinary of all, it did not burst

into flames. The huts had saved our lives, but some of them were flattened completely. I found myself surrounded by a mass of twisted metal with one jagged piece in particular pointing straight at my throat. Shimazu, an officer from the Japanese embassy who was travelling with us, was thrown across the plane onto a pile of baggage at the back. Everyone of us received a fearful shaking, and Shwe Baw vowed that he would never get into a plane again. After two days of waiting at a place near Tourane we flew on to Taiwan, and then to Japan in a great rush in order to be in time for the opening of the Assembly. It was a reckless flight, but we made it.

The other representatives had already arrived and were at a reception held at Premier Tojo's residence. I was rushed to it to meet them. It turned out to be quite a sentimental meeting. I had never realized that such a brief evening spent together could stir so many wideranging thoughts and emotions in men who had just come from their nations at the far ends of the region, where they were compelled to put aside all their wider emotions and think only of the actual realities drawing closer with each day to their own country and people. And now they were filled with thoughts which went beyond those realities to those as wide as the whole of Asia itself.

Most of us were meeting for the first time, and yet we were behaving as if we had known each other all our lives, and had lost and now found one another again. Speaking for myself, I actually felt that it was no longer the Japan of my first visit; it was now Asia, and we were Asians rediscovering Asia. It was a fantastic, almost a melodramatic feeling, but I can tell you it was very real and poignant, and to judge from their behaviour that was the feeling of everyone present that evening.

▼ Premier Tojo dominated the scene without seeming to do so, beaming, observant, and tirelessly bringing us together. It was clear that he was fully aware of the historic moment and his part in it. In his characteristic way he came up to me, congratulated me on my miraculous escape in the plane crash, and promised me a safe plane and pilot for my return journey. Except for Tojo and Bose I did not yet know any of the others, but had already heard much about them.

▼ President Wang Ching-wei of China stood close to me, tall and

strikingly handsome, with a smile and a bow for everyone. He spoke little, but carefully chose his words, and his voice was soft and winning. You soon sensed the Chinese tragedy in his restrained demeanour and trailing words.

✓ Then there was Chang Chung-hui, Prime Minister of Manchukuo. He had the reputation of having once been a very successful bandit chief or war lord, but you would never have believed it from his appearance. He looked a genial, avuncular old man, greeting you with a deep friendliness in his eyes, but very few words, for he was unable to talk freely owing to the language barrier.

✓ Prince Wan Waithayakon of Thailand was the perfect aristocrat in the gathering. However, he could behave as democratically as anyone of us and displayed a great eagerness to mix freely with all. He told me that what he did not like about being a Thai prince was that he could not let himself go, but had to keep up the princely tradition of being calm, detached, and aloof in his manner and speech. But he showed his liking for the free and open-hearted way the rest of us behaved and spoke and slapped one another on the back.

✓ Dr. Laurel, the President of the Philippines, impressed me greatly as soon as I met him. He was a rare combination of head and heart, a great intellect and a deep emotional nature. The other leaders had for me a more or less exotic appeal, but with Laurel I felt closer, as I did with Bose, for all three of us were, if I may put it that way, a mixture of East and West, although our roots remained most deeply lodged in our own native earth; we were the products of a long and radical meeting between the East and the West in our countries. Laurel was more responsive, and consequently more moved by the drama of this first Asian gathering; at any rate he showed it more than most of us. The next time he and I met was in Sugamo Prison while we were locked up during the first half of 1946. I came to know him closely then, and my admiration for him increased very much with the knowledge.

Netaji Bose was also present at the reception that evening. As we already knew each other we soon got together again. I have promised to speak of Bose more fully later. There is much I have to say about him.

That very evening the true character of the Assembly emerged. It was completely dominated by the new Asian spirit. Bose was

right in calling it "a family party," for this fact became almost palpable as the evening advanced. We were getting together not so much as separate peoples but as members of a single historical family containing all those peoples. Never before had such an event taken place.

At 10 A.M. on November 5, 1943, the Assembly of the Greater East Asiatic Nations formally opened in the Imperial Diet Building in Tokyo. Forty-six representatives, associates, and observers from seven nations, representing one billion people in Greater East Asia, were present at the opening. Premier Tojo was elected chairman of the Assembly. Behind him sat several members of the Japanese government, among whom were Navy Minister Admiral Shimada and Foreign Minister Shigemitsu. The arrangements in the hall were simple and most impressive; the Japanese members sat in the centre, China, Manchukuo, and Burma sat on the right, and Thailand, the Philippines, and India on the left. Filling the entire hall was a hush and expectancy which could almost be felt.

From every point of view it was an event to remember. This great Assembly was the first visual manifestation of the new spirit stirring in Asia, the spirit of Bandung as it was called twelve years later when it was reincarnated at the Bandung Conference of the Afro-Asian Nations. That spirit had its first birth at the Tokyo Assembly in 1943. Even the Assembly's joint declaration consisting of the five basic principles of a new order in Asia foreshadowed the Pancha Shila, or Five Principles, of the Bandung nations.

One of the best ways to get a true picture of that Assembly and the forces simmering within it is by recalling the most meaningful words spoken there. Above all, these words will show how all of us spoke with a single, spontaneous voice of two things, the new concept of Asia as one and the other concept of an ampler Asian community, in which all the nations will be completely independent and equal.

Premier Tojo spoke first. It was a great speech, brief, clear, decisive, and completely to the point. With a firm grasp of the realities in East Asia he stated unequivocally the basic principles upon which the new order in that region would be founded:

It is an incontrovertible fact that the nations of Greater East Asia are bound in every respect by ties of an inseparable,

relationship. I firmly believe that such being the case, it is their common mission to secure the stability of Greater East Asia and to construct a new order of common prosperity and well-being. This new order is to rest upon the spirit of justice which is inherent in Greater East Asia. . . .

The nations of Greater East Asia, while mutually recognizing their autonomy and independence, must as a whole establish among themselves relations of brotherly amity. Such relations cannot be created if one country should utilize another as means to an end. I believe that they come into being only when there is mutual respect for one another's autonomy and independence, when one prospers through another's prosperity and all countries give expression to their true selves.

Tojo's words are a clearcut affirmation of the two basic concepts which I have said were most in our minds. Laurel even cited them in his speech to emphasise their importance for all of us. There may be a controversy over the conflict between words and deeds in Japanese policy towards the rest of East Asia, but Tojo's statement of principles still remains true for Asia, as the Bandung Conference of 1955 has borne witness.

President Wang Ching-wei came next. Speaking in a fine, lyrical voice he told us of the tragedy in China, of frustrations and shifts and betrayals and finally of hopes for the future which lay in the new Asian consciousness and brotherhood.

In the war of Greater East Asia we want victory, in the construction of Greater East Asia we want common prosperity. All the nations of East Asia should love their own countries, love their neighbors, and love East Asia. Our motto for China is resurgence of China and defence of East Asia. When China has regained independence and autonomy then can she shoulder her share in the responsibilities for the defence of East Asia; when the defence of East Asia has been secured then will China's independence and autonomy be guaranteed. Inasmuch as all the nations of East Asia have each its own unique character it is necessary to safeguard their independence and autonomy on the one hand and to respect one another's independence and autonomy on the other.

Prince Wan of Thailand gave a calm and balanced speech, which nevertheless showed the new Asian spirit unmistakably. "The principle which will keep this region in continued prosperity," he said, "is the promotion to the highest degree of the power of each country including material, moral, and spiritual power, through respect of each other's independence and sovereignty, through development of economic relations with one another on the basis of reciprocity and through cooperation and assistance with one another in conformity with the principles of righteousness and of justice so as to ensure peace, happiness, and prosperity of each country and of this region as a whole." There was also an appropriate Latin quotation: From the West, law, from the East, light.

Prime Minister Chang of Manchukuo was just as Asia-conscious and also conscious of his own nation and people as any one else. "The people of Manchuria," he told us in a voice that was low and clear, "are united for the single purpose of establishing an autonomous, ethical state which would truly seek the advancement of the people's welfare and the prosperity of the land. . . . It is our aim to convert Manchuria into a stabilising force of the entire East Asia as a strong and righteous nation founded upon the ethical tenets of the old Orient and awakened to the consciousness of a new East Asia."

President Laurel of the Philippines was the next speaker. His was a rousing speech, coming straight from his heart and brimming with the Asian anger and defiance of all who had enchained its peoples for centuries. Laurel's vision of the new Asia was the most emotional of all. He mentioned how he wept at the reception held the previous evening. "As I entered your reception room tears flowed from my eyes, and I felt strengthened and inspired and said, 'One billion Orientals, one billion people of Greater East Asia—how could they have been dominated, a great portion of them particularly by England and America?'" Again the same thought carried him away while he spoke before the Assembly, and his eyes became wet and his voice shook audibly.

The Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere is not being established for the benefit of any integral unit of that sphere. According to His Excellency [Premier Tojo], the starting

point of the establishment of the sphere is recognition and respect for the autonomy and independence of every integral unit, so that with that recognition of political independence and territorial integrity, each nation may develop in accordance with its own institutions, without any particular member monopolizing the resulting prosperity of any given country or nation. In other words, coexistence, cooperation, and co-prosperity, if I may be allowed to say so, are the three words, three magic words which underlie the sacred cause championed by the great empire of Japan and subscribed to by the other peoples and nations of the Greater East Asia Co-Prospcrity Sphere. . . .

United together one and all into a compact and solid organisation there can no longer be any power that can stop or delay the acquisition by the one billion Orientals of the free and untrammelled right and opportunity of shaping their own destiny. God in His infinite wisdom will not abandon Japan and will not abandon the peoples of Greater East Asia. God will come and descend from Heaven, weep with us, and glorify the courage and bravery of our peoples and enable us to liberate ourselves and make our children and our children's children free, happy, and prosperous.

Finally, there were the speeches delivered by Netaji Bose and me. In the course of a press interview given after the Assembly, Bose said that "the keynote of the conference was given expression to in a characteristic manner by Adipadi Dr. Ba Maw." The Japanese press generally took the same view. According to Bose, the keynote was "East Asia is one." This was true, and I believe I gave the clearest utterance of all to the new Asian consciousness and spirit. I will reproduce here those parts of my speech which did it.

On an occasion like this it is only natural that there should be only one thought in our minds. Our words may be many, but our thought is one, one thought arising from one mind, one will, one objective. In a sense I have come from my country to speak the same words others have spoken here, to convey the same message, for, after all, there can be only one message. It is impossible to exaggerate the feelings which are

born out of an occasion like this. For years in Burma I dreamt my Asiatic dreams. My Asiatic blood has always called to other Asiatics. In my dreams, both sleeping and waking, I have heard the voice of Asia calling to her children.

Today . . . I hear Asia's voice calling again, but this time not in a dream. . . . I have listened with the greatest emotion to all the speeches delivered around this table. All these speeches have been memorable, moving, and—I may be exaggerating, and if so you must forgive me—I seem to hear in them the same voice of Asia gathering her children together. It is the call of our Asiatic blood. This is not the time to think with our minds; this is the time to think with our blood, and it is this thinking with the blood which has brought me all the way from Burma to Japan. . . .

The world is indeed moving very swiftly. Before the war it seemed that such a meeting as this would be inconceivable. It would have been impossible then for Asiatics to gather together like this. Yet now we are here. I see . . . a new world being created. I see in the speech of His Excellency the Chairman a new world structure actually organised, an Asiatic world for Asiatics.

Only a very few years back the Asiatic people seemed to have lived in another world, even in different worlds, divided, estranged, and not knowing each other or even caring to know. Asia as a homeland did not exist a few years ago. Asia was not one then, but many, as many as the enemies which kept her divided, large parts of her following like a shadow one or another of these enemy powers.

In the past which now seems to be a very long time ago it was inconceivable that the Asiatic peoples should meet together as we are meeting here today. Well, the impossible has happened. It has happened in a way which outstrips the boldest fantasy or dream of the boldest dreamer among us.

I say that today's meeting is a great symbolic act. As His Excellency the Chairman has said, we are truly creating a new world based upon justice, equality, and reciprocity, upon the great principle of live and let live. From every point of view East Asia is a world in itself. . . . We Asiatics forgot this fact

for long centuries and paid heavily for it, for as a result the Asiatics lost Asia. Now that we have once more, thanks to Japan, recaptured this truth and acted upon it the Asiatics shall certainly recover Asia. In that simple truth lies the whole destiny of Asia. . . .

As for our new Eastern order and economy, I am, as I have said, profoundly grateful to His Excellency the Chairman for his clear and unequivocal statement on it. He has declared with his characteristic courage and decision its basic principles to be justice, reciprocity, and mutual respect for one another's independence and sovereignty. These are clear, reassuring words. These will be forever an East Asiatic charter. . . .

Together with our different nationalism, there must be a wider nationalism. Together with our territorial horizons there must be a single East Asiatic world horizon. . . .

We have once more discovered that we are Asiatics, discovered our Asiatic blood, and it is this Asiatic blood which will redeem us and give us back Asia. Let us therefore march ahead to the end of our road, a thousand million East Asiatics marching into a new world where East Asiatics will be forever free, prosperous, and will find at last their abiding home.

I spoke again the next day. The Assembly held its final session on the afternoon of that day and the diplomatic corps and other distinguished guests were invited to be present at it. Tojo asked me to give the speech for the occasion; it was to be on the Indian struggle for freedom and the part Bose played in it and our duty as Asians to support this struggle of a great Asian people. Tojo wanted a good fighting speech for the world to hear and I promised to do my best.

Now that the main business of the Greater East Asia Assembly has concluded, I wish to draw your attention to a collateral question which follows us constantly like a shadow. That question is . . . the Indian question.

For generations the Burmese and the Indians had to carry on the same struggle. Most of you will not understand the real meaning of my words. It was a struggle against the most

powerful, the most merciless, the most predatory power in the world. It was a struggle between men and guns. Needless to say, every time the guns won. The men rose, but the guns crushed them every time. . . .

I am perfectly certain that the story of Subhas Chandra Bose is known to all of us, that he symbolizes the resurgent, the revolutionary spirit of India—India, although divided, yet remaining unbroken. And we must all be glad to know that Subhas Chandra Bose is now with us prepared to carry on the same struggle, and now not isolated but with a thousand million East Asiatics behind him. I will emphasize the fact that there cannot be a Free Asia without a Free India. . . .

These remarks of mine are just preliminary, just to propose before this Assembly that we do here solemnly declare that we give our complete support to the cause of Indian independence, to His Excellency Mr. Subhas Chandra Bose, who as the head of the Indian Provisional Government is pursuing that struggle, preparing for the day when he and his Indian Independence Army will march into Delhi and redeem India.

Bose replied in one of his most resonant and moving speeches. At one point he broke down and a hush fell on all listening to him which remained unbroken till the end. It was a spellbound moment. When we spoke the next day at a huge mass rally in Hibiya Park, I suggested that he should follow the same line. He did so, and there also his words had a very great effect.

This is not a conference for dividing the spoils among the conquerors. This is not a conference for hatching a conspiracy to victimise a weak power, nor is it a conference for trying to defraud a weak neighbour. This is an assembly of liberated nations, an assembly that is out to create a new order in this part of the world on the basis of the sacred principles of justice, national sovereignty, reciprocity in international relations, and mutual aid and assistance. I do not think that it is an accident that this assembly has been convened in the Land of the Rising Sun. This is not the first time that the world has turned to the East for light and guidance. Attempts to create a new order in this world have been made before and are

being made elsewhere, but they have failed. . . . It is therefore in the fitness of things . . . that the world should once again turn to the East for light. . . .

For India there is no other path but the path of uncompromising struggle against British imperialism. Even if it were possible for other nations to think of compromising with England, for the Indian people at least it is out of the question. Compromising with Britain means to compromise with slavery, and we are determined not to compromise with slavery any more. . . .

But we have to pay the price of our liberty. . . . The Indian people have yet to fight and win their freedom. Therefore I repeat that we have no illusions about the magnitude of the task that awaits us. In fact, I may say that all the time sitting here in my chair, as I was dreaming of a new East Asia and an Asia in a new world, before my mind's eye there floated the scenes of the battles that we will have to fight on any frontline and on the plains of India. . . . I do not know how many members of our national army will survive the coming war, but that is of no consequence to us. Whether we individually live or die, whether we survive the war and live to see India free or not, what is of consequence is the fact that India shall be free. . . .

In setting out to create a new order based on the sublime principles of justice, reciprocity, mutual aid, and assistance you are undertaking a task which is the noblest that the human mind can conceive. I pray to God that your efforts may be crowned with success.

After Bose had spoken Premier Tojo rose to announce Japan's decision to hand over the Andaman and Nicobar Islands in the Indian Ocean to the Azad Hind, or Free India, Government. The applause that followed was overwhelming.

At 3:17 P.M. Premier Tojo rose again to declare the adjournment of the conference; and so the Assembly of the Greater East Asiatic Nations came to an end.

The culminating act of the Assembly took place during the morning session on November 6, when all members stood up and

unanimously adopted a Joint Declaration which contained five fundamental decisions.

1. The countries of Greater East Asia will construct an order of common prosperity and well-being based upon justice.
2. They will ensure the fraternity of nations in their region, by respecting one another's independence and sovereignty.
3. By respecting one another's traditions and developing the creative faculties of each race they will enhance the culture and civilization of Greater East Asia.
4. They will endeavour to accelerate their economic development through close cooperation upon a basis of reciprocity.
5. They will . . . work for the abolition of all racial discrimination.

So in that Assembly held in Tokyo on November 5 and 6, 1943, the dream of a few Asian dreamers became a reality for millions of people in Asia. For the first time Asia became real and luminous for Asians; for the first time Asians met together by themselves to plan and pursue their future, and to speak with one voice, and to manifest a dual personality by being not only national but regional; also for the first time the Asian consciousness, spirit, and pride emerged as an actual world force. Each of these events was unique, and together they marked a new stage of evolution in Asia.

CHAPTER 12

Netaji Bose

Subhas Chandra Bose was a man you could not forget once you knew him; his greatness was manifest. Like many other revolutionists, the essence of this greatness was that he lived for a single task and dream and so set his own seal on them. At one moment he came close to achieving at least a part of that vast, pervasive dream. He failed because the world forces ranged on his side failed. But, fundamentally, Bose did not fail. The independence he won during the war was the true beginning of the independence which came to India a few years later. Only the usual thing happened: one man sowed and others reaped after him. ?

We were close comrades during the war. Besides, many other factors brought us even closer still to each other, our common cause as well as problems and dangers, and beyond that our more or less common outlook generally. I witnessed almost from beginning to end Bose's work during most of the war years, how he moulded out of the most unlikely materials scattered across South-east Asia an independent Indian state and government and army, and turned them into a positive force in the world war. A single mind and will achieved this. It pursued the Indian dream across half the world, through the Middle East, and then into Russia and Germany, then to the farthest end of East Asia, and back to South-east Asia, and finally to Burma, and for a few incredible weeks beyond the border into India itself. Very soon the man and his burning faith set aflame the hearts of three million of his countrymen in Southeast Asia, who gave him practically everything he asked for.

Within a year of Bose's coming Azad Hind was a fullfledged state recognised by nine other states; it had acquired a large piece

of territory, its armies were fighting on eight sectors of the Burma-India border, and within a few months set foot on Indian soil, proudly planted on it the flag of Free India, and just missed winning a great and decisive victory there. When all that reality forged out of an overwhelming dream crashed together with half the world, that lone and tragic dreamer clung to his dream and died with it.

I have stressed the dream element in Bose because I really believe that constituted the deepest part of him. "I often have moments," he once told me, "when I would like to give up everything and spend my days in prayer and contemplation. But I must wait till India is liberated." Again, when someone laughingly asked him when he intended to get married, he laughed back and replied, "As soon as India is free." Thus this dream of a free India haunted him all the time. He, of course, had his relaxed moments, but on the whole he was a haunted man and too much of a national image during a national crisis to be able to forget it for long.

I first met Netaji Bose in Singapore, or Shonan as it was then called, in July 1943. He had been brought from Tokyo to that city, which Premier Tojo was about to visit. I also went to meet Tojo to settle certain questions raised by the impending declaration of independence by Burma. But before this meeting I had sent a message to Bose on the occasion of his first public appearance in Tokyo in June. "Your first words spoken in Tokyo," I said, "which were so full of courage and purpose have impressed the Burmese greatly. Our two peoples have waited for many years for the hour which has now struck. It is now for us to meet it worthily." The impact all over this vast region of Bose's sensational appearance after an equally sensational voyage across half the world was tremendous. It made Asians believe more in Asian unity and strength.

It was at the Singapore airport that we met, while we were waiting for Premier Tojo's arrival. Bose made a fine, handsome, and towering figure among the people round him and he was at ease with all of them. Soon after Tojo had arrived and greeted both of us warmly we were brought together by the Japanese officers. "This is a historic meeting," one of them said rather dramatically. He was probably right, but I did not feel that way at

all. Abstractions did not occur to me at the time. I simply saw Bose as a very palpable presence whose general bearing and personality made him stand out even in that vast glittering scene of military pomp and power. Then my thoughts began to wander and the past and the present became inextricably mixed till I saw Bose as a symbol of the long and passionate Indian revolution that had at last found its way into the wider Asian revolution which would change Asia. I was in that kind of mood. Even more, I seemed to see a revolution within a revolution in India, for Bose's presence with us was a sign that that long-enduring country was at last turning away from its passive philosophy to the more realistic one of meeting force with force, particularly at a time when half the world was fighting the other half. For me who had always believed that the struggle for liberation in India and Burma was one and indivisible, it was a very exciting change. This first meeting was naturally brief and formal, and it was arranged that Bose would call on me soon.

He was kept very busy in the next few days getting together his movement and strength, holding a public meeting of his countrymen, before whom he was offered and accepted the leadership of the Indian Independence League in East Asia, reviewing with Premier Tojo the Indian National Army, which he had created almost overnight, and again holding and addressing an enormous Indian mass rally that he instantly captured with the slogan of *Chalo Delhi*, which sounded so much like a marching order. He ended by bringing into the war the entire Indian community in Singapore with his order for total mobilization. It was marvelously done.

"When France declared war on Germany in 1939 and the campaign began," he told a spellbound gathering, "there was but one cry which rose from the lips of the German soldiers—*To Paris, to Paris*. When the brave soldiers of Nippon set out on their march in December 1941, there was but one cry which rose from their lips—*To Singapore, to Singapore*. Comrades! Let your battle cry be *To Delhi, to Delhi*. . . . I say that we shall ultimately win, and our task will not end until our surviving heroes hold their victory parade on the graveyard of the British Empire—*Lal Kila, the Red Fort of Delhi*."

Very soon after Tojo's departure Bose and I met and were at last

able to talk freely. We talked of a great many things, but mostly of the war and how we could use it for the liberation of our own people. One thing which will always remain in my memory is Bose's first impact upon me. He had recently met the German and Russian leaders and had also witnessed the total character of the war in the West, and this made him thoroughly total and realistic in the way he looked at the world conflict. I too had learnt from my own struggle as well as from the Japanese a good amount of this realism. The result was a meeting of minds between us. But where I, according to my nature, was inclined to be emotional and at times a bit too subjective, Bose showed a cold, clinical objectivity. It was not that he did not have his emotional moments; far from it. But he had them put away when he was dealing with hard facts. As I saw it, this was one of the sources of his strength. Calmly and without any self-deception he faced every fact in a situation, whether it was good or bad or the usual mixture of the two; he brought them together into a single picture, and then drew his conclusions objectively, and then action followed; and after that he was driven along by a sense of compulsion which was almost fatalistic.

When Bose began to talk of the Indian struggle he gave you a feeling that you were listening not to a man, but to a mass, to a long-pent racial force suddenly breaking through. Once he was really carried away, he displayed the essential qualities of such a force, dynamism, dedication, and a sense of direction. This thought leapt to my mind even at that first meeting, and it comes back whenever I recall those years.

Before parting we agreed upon all the fundamental questions we could think of as arising out of the war, that the war was ours in every sense, that British colonialism was our enemy, with which we could never come to terms, that in a war the enemy of our enemy was our friend and ally, that there could be no going back on the road we were taking for any reason whatsoever. That was the beginning of our comradeship, and without any need to talk further we adhered to the words we had spoken to the very end.

We next met in Rangoon when Burma declared her independence. I had personally invited Netaji to come to our celebrations, and he came and witnessed them. He also heard us declare war on

Britain and America. I saw the dream again in his eyes which I had seen before, but it was now a little sad and wistful, and so was his smile. The reason for it seemed apparent: seeing Burma as the first colony to win its independence out of the war, he must have been thinking of the long, bloody journey still ahead of him and his forces before India too would be free.

Upon his return to Singapore Bose acted swiftly. On October 21, 1943, he proclaimed the establishment of the government of the free and sovereign state of Azad Hind; on the same day the new state declared war on Britain and America, and Bose announced the determination of the Indian National Army to enter India that year, meaning during the twelve months ahead. Subsequent events showed that Bose was true to his word. He joined us at the Assembly of the Greater East Asiatic Nations in Tokyo, where he was warmly welcomed by all. On this occasion he was a bold, militant, khaki-clad figure, and carried with him everywhere the aura of his vast, fabulous country. Within a month of his return to Singapore he requested me for permission to shift his headquarters to Burma. He had no need to tell me that he must operate from a base as close as possible to India. I openly welcomed him; and so on January 6, 1944, and the days following Netaji Bose and his government and army arrived in Burma and remained till the final defeat of the Japanese in 1945. They received the utmost hospitality as well as cooperation from the Burmese. At the same time the bonds between the two peoples became firmer and the racial tensions which had once existed under the British practically disappeared. Netaji and I met often, discussed our common problems, and did our utmost to help each other.

I have said that Bose was a great force. In Burma he became a positive whirlwind. "What are you going to do next?" I asked him casually upon his arrival. He stared at me and replied, "Why, fight of course," and within less than a month he was doing just that. On February 4, 1944, the Indian National Army (I.N.A.) fired its first shot in Arakan in the west of Burma. That was a proud day for Netaji Bose. March 18 was an even prouder day, for the I.N.A. broke into India on that day. After that, one action followed another continuously. The Indian Army fought on eight sectors

along a frontier stretching 800 miles, as Bose mentioned in a radio speech, from Arakan in the south through the Hukong and the Chin hills right up to Kohima and the plains of Imphal in the north.

By March a wider offensive had started and the Indian frontier was again crossed and the Japanese and Indian forces marched into Manipur and Assam. During March and April the battle for the vital towns of Kohima and Imphal reached its height. The Indian Army fought its greatest battle there, and won its greatest victory, and in the end suffered its greatest defeat because it was completely outnumbered, outgunned, and without a single plane. It penetrated deep into India, captured Kohima and the hills around, and was all set to attack and enter Imphal when it was stopped by the Japanese. Whatever military or political reasons the Japanese had for their action, it proved to be the most crushing blow that Bose and his army received during the whole war. From then on one disaster followed another for that little force; the British poured colossal reinforcements into the area by air while the Japanese and the Indians were running short of everything and had lost all their planes and thus were fighting blindly; and then the rains came down in torrents before their time. Finally, the ill-starred little Indian army was forced to retreat in disorder and confusion.

Bose took the defeat courageously. I cannot, of course, say what he felt within himself, but outwardly there was no sign of change or discouragement. He at once broadcasted the whole truth to his people, telling them that in a war only the last battle and victory counted. "India is a land of long distances," he reminded them, "and the Indian people are accustomed to long marches." He then began to act according to his words by getting ready to fight another day.

The true story of the defeat and debacle at Imphal is a many-sided one, over which there is much disagreement. As the Indian army tells it, it was the outcome of a clash of purposes between the Japanese and the Indians. Both wanted to be the first to enter the city and be acclaimed its victor. Imphal lay completely open to the I.N.A. on April 18, 1944—only a stone's throw away, as an Indian officer described it. The Indian military governor of the area had already been appointed, the new currency kept ready for imme-

ciate circulation and use, and all arrangements made for a military occupation. Then the Japanese intervened. It was going to be the first real victory on Indian soil, and they wanted it for themselves; even more, they wanted to present Imphal to their Emperor as a gift for his forty-third birthday, which fell on April 29. They wanted to exploit the victory in Imphal to the utmost to counteract the effects of the reverses they were suffering at the time. Colonel Hiraoka, the Japanese liaison officer, asked me to prepare a radio broadcast to be delivered on the Emperor's birthday, in which I would join the Japanese army in offering Imphal as a birthday gift to the Emperor.

But Bose had his own plans and ambitions and the strongest reasons for them. He contended rightly that a Japanese invasion of India would create very divided feelings among the Indians and might even swing a large mass of them to the side of the British, whereas the appearance on Indian soil of an Indian army of liberation which had actually succeeded in capturing an important part of India would have the most rousing effect all over India. The world would hear for the first time of the Indian National Army and its exploits, and thousands in India would surge to it. While these two armies were arguing inanely over this question the first momentum was lost, the British rushed their reinforcements into the area, the Japanese offensive slowed down for lack of planes and tanks, and so Imphal was lost and a long disastrous retreat began.

Bose lived his finest as well as darkest hour during that hopelessly unequal fight, the retreat that followed, and the subsequent organisation of a virtually new army out of the broken pieces of the old. He was a sadder man, but he was as defiant of the enemy as ever and as fixed in his resolve to fight on. I noticed that he blamed no one for the defeat in Imphal.

As for the men in the Indian army, they felt most keenly this sudden turn of luck which snatched the victory out of their hands. They had been worked up to such a pitch from the very moment they set foot on their native earth that the blow stunned them. The thought of winning a piece of their homeland back from the enemy was enthralling, and almost all of them had gone wild with joy. Some even got down on their knees and kissed the earth of

India. Two Japanese war correspondents who accompanied the Indian forces have given an account of it:

We were deeply moved when we saw the Indian soldiers bursting out with joy when they had the first glance of the mountains and rivers of their beloved motherland. . . . There was an Indian soldier with the units who could scarcely hold himself up and had to be supported by his comrade. However, he was keeping up pace with the advancing units, being encouraged with the hope of entering the sacred soil of his motherland. It was then that he almost collapsed because of fatigue due to high fever. A Nipponese soldier went down to a nearby ravine to get water and brought the water to him. "This is the water of India that I went down to get." The Indian soldier drank it as crazily as he could. "Is it sweet?" asked the Nipponese soldier. "Yes," answered the Indian soldier. But that was all he could say in words with tears in his eyes. . . . The cries of *Jai Hind, Jai Hind* rent the sky and reverberated in the enemy camp through dense jungle on the borderline.

When he returned to Rangoon after the retreat Bose found his relations with the Japanese getting more difficult. Like me he had to deal with some of the grossest racists and militarists in the Japanese army; in fact, his difficulties were greater because India was outside the Japanese concept of Greater East Asia and so their interest in it was less. The failure of their recent drive into India reduced this interest still further. Bose however was determined to have a new army to carry out a joint operation with the Burmese army, by themselves if the Japanese would not come into it. (I will deal with this plan later.) With this aim in mind he kept pressing the Japanese for a considerable supply of arms and equipment, which the Japanese were unable to give him. In November 1944, Bose went to Tokyo to make a final attempt to get what he needed and found that Japan and her forces were themselves desperately in need of just those things in Southeast Asia. One result of these attempts to prepare for a new battle with the British was that General Isoda and his Hikari Kikan organisation, who were supposed to be advising the Indian government,

tried to control its activities more than they did before. I was told that often Bose and Isoda or his second man would disagree so violently that they would sit and stare at each other across a table for hours, both sides refusing to budge from a position they had taken, and the meeting would break up in that posture.

But whatever his relations with the local Japanese were Bose stood unwaveringly by the Japanese in the fight against the Western imperialist nations. He never allowed the main issue in the war to get lost among the far smaller personal ones. For him, whether the Germans and the Japanese were good or bad was not the point; the point was whether the imperialisms destroying the Asian nations should themselves be destroyed and who would destroy them. The answer was clear: only Germany and Japan could do it in this war, and so the colonial countries in Asia must fight for their victory.

At every crisis when many others weakened Bose did not do so, but repeated his pledge to be with the Japanese till the very end of the conflict. In a broadcast message sent to Mahatma Gandhi in July 1944, he openly defended Japan and her policy in Asia, declaring that "Japan is true to her word." In September when the Japanese defences in the Pacific were breaking down, he at once assured Premier Koiso of his determination to fight "under all circumstances side by side with Nippon and her allies until our common victory is achieved." In October when the American invasion of the Philippines began he repeated his pledge to fight on together with Japan. In January 1945, after witnessing the crumbling situation in Japan itself he again told the Japanese that he and his army and men would "continue to fight with the blood and spirit of the kamikaze." Finally on February 4, 1945, which was the anniversary of the first Indian action against the British in Arakan, Bose called upon all his men to give their last drop of blood. "The slogan, the battle cry for the Azad Hind Fauj [Army] for 1945, is therefore *Blood, blood, and blood*. We have to give our blood and take the blood of the enemies." He asked his troops "to convert the whole of the Azad Hind Fauj into a *Jan Baz* or suicide squad."

It was characteristic of Bose that when a comrade was down he drew closer to him, and when a cause was defeated he fought all the harder for it. That was his finest quality when displayed on the

highest levels, but to many it was also his weakness when he was handling matters at a lower level, for it often clouded his judgment of people and situations. This unfortunately occurred at times when he was dealing with certain sections of his widely dispersed movement, which was to a large extent composed of small commercial or professional people who had almost forgotten their homeland and had acquired the habit of judging a situation by the personal gain to be derived from it. While most of them were stirred by his example and stood by him loyally, there were also many who abused his trust and loyalty to them.

So we come to the final tragedy which began in April 1945. Everything was giving way round us, the British forces had recaptured most of Upper Burma, and the Burmese army and those working together with it had changed sides. I recall vividly my last meeting with Netaji Bose before we started on our long retreat with the Japanese forces from Rangoon to Moulmein, two hundred miles away in the southeast. We had previously planned to continue the fight together even if the British recaptured the whole of Burma, but that plan had to be abandoned when the Burmese army went over to the British. It was a very gloomy hour for both of us. Netaji was deprived of so much by the Burmese army's switch-over that he had to think of starting all over again almost from the ground somewhere else.

If I remember rightly, we spoke very little of our plans at that last meeting, for we already knew each other's thoughts and were sure that they would not be changed by defeat. However, to say something I asked Netaji what he intended to do next. "Why," he replied, calmly lighting a cigarette, "start again and go on fighting when ready. What else can we do? The fight against British imperialism certainly has to go on." These words echoed my own thoughts so much that I nearly wept to hear them.

In my case, of course, with Burma and the Burmese army in the hands of the British I would not be able to do anything, at least for some time. I explained that to Netaji and he saw it completely. Later I heard that he told his men, "Now that Germany and Italy are out of the war we must continue it with the Japanese, and if they too are knocked out we must fight by ourselves." Those words spoken during the greatest crisis of his life sum up the essential spirit and character of the man.

We finally parted to undertake each with his own men the long, tormenting retreat to Moulmein, during which we were for more than two weeks pursued and attacked day and night by enemy planes. It was like a journey in an unending nightmare. Netaji left Rangoon on April 24. Before he did so he broadcasted a farewell to his troops which made many of them weep. He also bade farewell to all his friends, both Burmese and Indian, in Burma.

"Comrades," he said to his army, "at this critical hour I have only one word for you, and that is that if you have to go down temporarily, then go down fighting with the national tricolour held aloft. Go down as heroes; go down upholding the highest code of honour and discipline."

His last words to the Burmese and Indians were sad and gloomy, but there was no trace of defeat in them. "I have always said that the darkest hour precedes the dawn. We are now passing through the darkest hour; therefore, the dawn is not far off. India shall be free."

Upon reaching Moulmein I remained behind, determined not to leave Burma as long as the hostilities continued and Burma had not been completely occupied. Netaji however left for Bangkok. For him and his party the long trek from Rangoon to Nanpaledok on the Burma-Thai border took over three weeks. They passed through some of the most pestilential jungles in East Asia, hid in the day and travelled at night. From Bangkok Netaji moved to Singapore to start work again.

During his short stay in Bangkok he performed a seemingly small act which was however unforgettable to me and my family. As soon as he heard that my family had arrived in that city he visited them, inquired about their needs and difficulties, told some of his men there that they were to see that my wife and children lacked nothing, from funds right down to toys and candies for the children. He visited them again before he departed for Singapore. These last acts of personal affection and courtesy have left a lasting memory for all of us.

We were now completely cut off from each other, for we had no means of keeping up our contact. So the next I heard of him was on August 22, 1945, when my plane stopped at Taiwan on the way to Tokyo. The Japanese officer who met me at the airport broke the tragic news to me. Numbed by the crisis I had been passing

through for days and nights continuously, my mind did not take in fully what the officer had told me. Dazedly I listened to it as I would have done to a routine report made to me while flying or on touching down. It was only when, after the night's rest, I arrived at the airfield the next morning that I asked the same officer for the full facts of the tragedy.* Immediately after he had finished telling me, the pilot of my plane came over to explain how terribly hazardous our journey to Tokyo that day was going to be. He wanted to know if, after having heard of Netaji's fate, I still wanted to go. "Certainly," I yelled at him, "let's go at once and end the whole damn show if it has got to end that way." Incredibly, we got through to Tokyo. The next day the news of Netaji Bose's death was splashed across the front page of all the newspapers in the city.

This is the story of Netaji Bose exactly as I knew it. He and I went through so much together. The fortunes of war were nearly the same for both of us, especially the critical situations we got into, and the preposterous ones too, for we found ourselves fighting against several enemies at the same time, the open British enemy facing us and the hidden enemy behind and within and around. When one comes to think of it, the whole thing had a surrealist quality; it was so real and yet unreal, such a vast, incredible intermingling of the best and the worst, of hope and joy and pain; there was so much of ecstasy in it, and also so much of gloom and heartbreak.

* A Reuter's report of August 24 stated that Subhas Chandra Bose died August 19 in a hospital in Japan after his plane crashed at Taiwan airport en route from Singapore to Tokyo. [Note added by Theda Maw.]

CHAPTER 13

The Crisis

ASSASSINATION ATTEMPTS

✓ As the situation deteriorated day by day the Japanese drove themselves harder and wanted the Burmese to do the same, and when we could not do it to their extent and in their way they grew morbidly suspicious of us. With every setback their suspicions increased till it made them lose all judgment in their relations with the Burmese. They simply could not understand that the only way to win over our people was to demonstrate to them that they were really independent and that their independence was being threatened by the British enemy. Instead, the militarists acted as if we existed only to carry out their orders without questioning. It created a moral deadlock, for the Burmese felt that if they had to fight the British it would have to be for themselves primarily.

✓ Soon both sides were moving in a vicious circle. The more the danger from the enemy drew closer the more stories were spread by the enemy's secret agents and partisans that many of us in the government were collaborating with the British, and the more these stories were believed by the militarists generally. Again, the more we tried to rouse the old anticolonial emotions by making our independence real and visible, the more the militarists were convinced that we were trying to desert them in their defeat. It created a mental panic among the Japanese which paved the way for the eventual resistance against them. They began to see a secret enemy in every member of the Burmese government who acted independently of them or even asked too many questions, and needless to say I was regarded as the principal enemy agent.

| A clique within the Japanese army led by the highest officers,

General Kawabe, the commander-in-chief, General Isomura, the deputy chief-of-staff, and Ozeki, the chief of the civilian political section, decided to change the situation by getting rid of me anyhow. First of all, Ozeki tried to persuade U Nu to agree to take my place, but U Nu saw the Japanese game, refused to play it, and promptly informed me of it. I was so disgusted with this perpetual tussle with the militarists that I once asked U Nu to tell the Japanese that I would be only too willing to give up my position to anyone among us who was willing to have it. U Nu had carried my offer to the Japanese, but they would not accept it because that way of disposing of me would have brought upon them the displeasure of the highest personages in Japan and Singapore. They wanted a Burmese group to do it. When they failed to find one they became so desperate that they decided to do it themselves by assassinating me, the customary method by which the militarists found a way out of difficult situations in Korea and Manchuria. An elaborate plan was prepared to carry it out, and then to change the regime altogether in order to get rid of the whole of my government.

I was to be killed ostensibly by the Burmese army, to prove which Aung San would accompany the Japanese assassin. The next day a mass meeting would be held at the Shwedagon Pagoda, and under the shadow of that great national shrine the Burmese would with a single voice demand the restoration of the monarchy in the country. Taw Payagyi, the oldest grandson of Thibaw, the last Burmese king, would then be proclaimed the new king of Burma, a new administration would be installed, new relations with the Japanese army would begin, and so a new Manchukuo would be created in Southeast Asia as an example to be followed later by the other Southeast Asian peoples. Taw Payagyi was a young man without any political background or ambitions, so he was just the kind of nominal ruler the Japanese militarists wanted. The young man was completely unaware of the destiny which these militarists were preparing for him, nor did he have any real desire for it; incidentally, his wife was a niece of mine, and he was deeply attached to me.

With their plans ready they struck on the night of February 15, 1944. Isomura, the hidden hand behind it all, had sent for a man, Captain Asahi, from Singapore, to carry out the assassination. He

was shrewd enough to keep the Japanese army in Burma out of the affair, but he was also sufficiently crass not to see that a total stranger from abroad could not have thought of committing such a desperate crime by himself, but must have been acting for a powerful clique in Burma. The Burmese government already knew of the existence of such a clique, and also knew that they would strike sooner or later. Many ministers wondered for a long time how I could take it so coolly.

Asahi arrived in Rangoon a few days before the attempt to kill me. He actually stayed with Isomura. Meanwhile, he visited Kyaw Myint, a leader of the East Asia Youth League, which, as I have mentioned before, was a creation of the Japanese and was therefore believed to be easily influenced by them. Kyaw Myint, who is naturally a timid man, was panic-stricken when Asahi disclosed to him his plans. He was really against such a foul design, but was too weak to oppose it openly or even to inform me about it.

✓ On the evening of the chosen day Asahi, accompanied by Kyaw Myint, visited Aung San. He told Aung San of his intention to finish me and asked him to join him in carrying it out. Aung San was aghast, but, like Kyaw Myint, his reflexes went dead so totally that it also did not occur to him that he could warn me at once by telephone of the danger. "Asahi's words took me so completely by surprise," he explained to me a few hours later, "that I could not think clearly for some time. All I could do was to ask him if the Japanese commander-in-chief knew of the plan, to which he very quickly replied that none in the Japanese army knew anything about it. I told him to go in advance in order to get rid of him." I pointed out to Aung San that his blunder was in creating an impression in Asahi that he would be in it, or at least that he was not against the assassination.

✓ Just at that moment the air-raid siren sounded, which stopped all traffic. Asahi then left by himself, asking Aung San to follow after the all-clear signal was given. Even after Asahi had left, Aung San and Kyaw Myint had not recovered from the shock enough to remember the telephone, or it may have been that they did not believe that the man would pursue his plan alone. But Asahi was not acting alone, and so he arrived at my gate with another Japanese soldier. He told the Burmese military guard on duty at the gate that there was an American spy hiding within my compound

whom they must hunt down and kill, and that General Aung San himself would join them as soon as the air raid was over. Aung San's name led these raw, simple-minded boys to believe Asahi and put themselves in that man's hands. They were ordered to surround my house and shoot down anyone who came out.

What saved me was that the air-raid alarm proved to be false. It was fearfully hot and stuffy within the air-raid shelter that night, and there was no sign of any enemy bombers coming, so we returned to the house before the all-clear was sounded and locked up for the night.

Within a few minutes of our return the Burmese boys quietly surrounded the house, and Asahi and his Japanese companion rushed into the air-raid shelter where he had ascertained beforehand that I and my family would be at the time. With their guns and bayonets at the ready they searched everywhere for me. When Asahi did not find me there he came to the house and tried to force the doors, but stopped doing so when the Burmese boys protested. He was then seen by the servants, who shouted out to me that a drunken Japanese soldier was disturbing the house. Thereupon I rang up Colonel Hiraoka to come over and remove the drunken fellow. Hiraoka at once scented what was really happening; he rushed to the Kempetai Headquarters, collected a small Kempetai force, had the houses of Aung San and a few other Burmese army officers watched, came with the other Kempetai men to my residence, found Asahi waiting for Aung San, as he explained, disarmed and arrested him, sent away the Burmese boys and posted the Kempetai round the house, and when all that was done he came into the house and told the servants to lock and bolt the doors securely. It was only then that I realised how very narrowly my family and I had escaped death that night.

Then followed a stream of visits and inquiries and congratulations from the Japanese military command. Kawabe and Isomura were among the first to arrive and to talk most of their surprise and horror, but they did not promise to take any action against any Japanese involved in the crime or to conduct any inquiry that would get to the very bottom of it. I listened to them coldly. Aung San also arrived that night, looking dazed and rather shame-faced. I told him I was convinced that he was not in the least involved in it, "but your trouble was that you lost your head at a critical

moment." He was still too confused by events to speak much, but inwardly he had learnt his lesson, for a few months later he visited me one morning to tell me that a Japanese officer he had never seen before had come to him the previous night and spoken about the need to liquidate me. "You need not actually do it yourself," the man had told him, "but we will do it in the name of the Burmese army. We just want one or two of your men to be with us." This time Aung San's reflexes worked much more swiftly. He scowled and said absolutely nothing so that the Japanese should know that he would never agree to their proposal. The man had mentioned that I was in the habit of taking an evening walk round the race course, so Aung San strongly urged me to stop those walks.

✓ The repercussions following this incident were wide. Premier Tojo and many within the Japanese government sent me the warmest messages expressing their horror at the attempt made on my life as well as their happiness at my narrow escape. Isomura, looking thoroughly beaten, conveyed to me a message which mentioned the Emperor's displeasure at the occurrence, which for the Japanese was the ultimate form of condemnation. I was also informed that Field Marshal Count Terauchi had ordered the cancellation of all formal social activities for a month, or some said more, in the armies in Rangoon and Singapore. Within the next months Ozeki left Burma, General Isomura was sent away to a remote post in Indonesia, and in September 1944 General Kawabe was replaced by General Heitaro Kimura. At about the same time Itaro Ishii was appointed ambassador to Burma jointly with Renzo Sawada.

These were hopeful signs of a change in Japanese policy in Burma. But it did not turn out to be quite so, for within the same period General Tanaka, a blood-thirsty, bull-headed militarist who was even worse than Isomura, arrived as the chief-of-staff. In the final phase of the campaign he advocated a no-retreat policy to defend Rangoon to the last. He proposed to sacrifice us and our cities completely, as I will relate later. I had to go to Tokyo personally to avert such a calamity from the Burmese,

Coming back to the attempt to assassinate me, a Japanese military court tried the culprits. The outcome was that the two Burmese implicated in the offence were set free and Asahi, the

principal culprit, was sentenced to fifteen years' imprisonment. But after the sentence was passed he was seen living comfortably with some other officers in Rangoon. I learnt that he was subsequently sent back to Japan. If so, I am sure he was released there.

THE CRISIS MOUNTS

By the middle of 1944 we no longer believed in the possibility of an Axis victory. Their defeats were too decisive and uninterrupted: the fall of Rome, followed the next day by the Normandy invasion, which seemed to be gathering speed rapidly, and a little over two months later the spectacular fall of Paris. On the other side the Soviet armies also were surging forward. In the East, Saipan was lost, a blow so damaging that it destroyed Tojo's government, and Tinian, where the entire Japanese population of 15,000 was said to have killed themselves, and also Omayya, where 5,000 similarly died. All these events indicated that Germany and Japan were on the defensive and losing.

✓ However, although we did not now believe that the Axis powers could win, we refused to believe that they would lose irretrievably, for we were still convinced that they possessed the strength to defend their homelands, which by all accounts were virtually impregnable. German war power continued to cast a spell upon us, and the legend of the kamikaze and the prodigious losses they were said to be inflicting upon the American naval forces was widespread in Burma. There were also the deep, hidden polarities within the Western camp, which led us to expect that the Anglo-Americans and the Soviets would split apart, if not during the war at least after their victory when the scramble for the spoils would commence. We took into account all these factors insofar as they had a bearing on our future fate, and they gave us hope that even if we did not win the war we would not lose it, because it would end so inconclusively that there would be no real victors, and, what mattered for us most of all, both sides would be too exhausted to prove to be a menace to our independence. So many of us thought at the time.

The new perspective in which we saw the war kept up our hopes during the celebration of the first anniversary of our independence on August 1, 1944. Our statements made then

showed our determination to resist British colonialism to the very end. In my speech on the occasion I said, "Our liberty as a nation is being threatened by the British, who are preparing to seize the country again. We lost Burma once, and as a result became slaves for several generations. Let us not lose it again and become slaves forever. There is the old cry of liberty or death which once freed a people. It must free us now, for nothing else will do it. So let it be liberty or death for us too."

Aung San spoke equally clearly. "The crowning act of our endeavours," he said, "is the achievement of independence of our country a year ago today. . . . We will win or get smashed. In close collaboration with the government, the Burmese people, the Imperial Nippon Forces, and other organisations we must put up a united front in all our future activities."

A few days later the East Asia Youth League, the biggest youth organisation in the country, issued an appeal to all to "cooperate with the Japanese and Indian forces in fighting the war to victory." Similarly, the Mahabama Asiayone, our national united front, called upon the people to wage the war in complete unity with all the armed forces defending Burma against the threat of a British invasion. Other organisations and leaders like Thakin Mya, U Nu, and Saw Ba U Gyi, the Karen leader, spoke or wrote with a similar fixity of purpose.

The general feeling on that anniversary of independence and during the months that followed was definitely for resisting the return of the British to Burma. Within Bose's Free India and the Indian National Army the feeling was solid. Nearly every leader spoke on the occasion, and every speech was full of the old resonances.

The British, however, were doing their best to displace the anti-colonial resistance against them with a new antifascist resistance directed against the Japanese, and they were succeeding among certain segments. Those in the forefront of the antifascist campaign were naturally the Communists, led by Thakin Than Tun and Thakin Soe. A powerful group within the Burmese army also was in it in pursuance of their own plans. And there were, of course, the British partisans and the usual fence-sitters who were watching events before they jumped. Thus while there was a

general cry against a British reconquest and a call to resist it at the time we were celebrating the first year of our independence, the groups I have spoken of remained ominously silent. Aung San had declared for fighting unitedly with the Japanese and the Indian armies, but I already knew that a growing number within his army were for going over to the British on their successful return. I also knew that Aung San was still vacillating.

During the last months of 1944 our wartime anticolonial unity irretrievably tore apart, and many Japanese militarists helped to tear it further by trying to make a mockery of our independence. These men, led by General Tanaka, actually regarded Burma as just a battleground for their war and the Burmese as just material to be used in that war. This policy was so outrageous that I openly attacked it by making some positive demands. The militarists were furious with me, and I believe it was this action of mine that led to the second attempt to assassinate me.

It is also rather interesting to find that it was this action which made one of my bitterest critics, John F. Cady, the American author of *Modern Burma*, say a kind word about me. Cady's book is a typical product of the wartime mentality. It is a propagandist history written around the thesis that modern Burma was created by the Thakins who turned against the Japanese in the last hour, while I who had refused to do any such thing was a complete villain whom the people "viewed with attitudes ranging from distrust to hatred" on account of my "egotism, vanity, opportunism, chameleon tactics, lust of power," and lots of more unmentionable vices. Cady is right in saying that there were people who distrusted and hated me, and would have even killed me if they had a chance, for no one could hold power in any country and use it to see the country through one of its most cataclysmic periods without arousing distrust and hatred in many places. Again, to be fair to Cady, he wrote his book when wartime propaganda views were still widespread in Burma, and the anti-Japanese Thakins were in full power, and he had obtained his facts mainly from them and the British writers. Obviously, these sources cannot be expected to give an objective view of their enemies. I might mention that, on the same theory that everyone who had fought against the Anglo-American powers in that war must be both a fool and a knave de-

tested by his people, Cady writes with the same subtle venom about Bose and the Indian National Army, again taking all his facts from enemy sources.

Anyway, here is what Cady, forgetting for a moment his propaganda line, says about my action:

In June, 1944, Dr. Ba Maw published a revision of his 1943 booklet entitled *Burma's New Order Plan*. . . . He declared flatly that Burmans would not fight unless they were given a tangible stake in the outcome of the war. Burmans, he said, were suspicious of independence which denied them the concrete right and the power to administer their own affairs in their own way. Daily proof must be afforded that the country was already free and that the people must fight to keep it so. He pointed out four minimum essentials for Burmese-Japanese co-operation: (1) the Japanese must not mix in Burma's political affairs; (2) they must abstain from taking opinion polls calculated to sow distrust of the government; (3) they must accord to Burmese government servants, for purposes of negotiation, some equivalency of rank with that of officers within the Japanese army; (4) both the Japanese army and business firms must utilize Burmese liaison officers as a means of reducing friction with the people.

While I am on this subject I might add that there are a great many people in Burma besides the Thakins of the Anti-Fascist League, and a large number of them have expressed views completely contradicting Cady and other Anglo-American propagandists. To name a few, U Nu, a Thakin leader himself, has done so in his *Burma under the Japanese*, and so has Maung Maung Pye in *Burma in the Crucible*, S. A. Ayer in *Unto Him a Witness*, and Desai in *India and Burma*. I am only mentioning some examples in passing. I would also, quite objectively, remind Cady and people like him of a few elementary facts. To understand Burmese events, especially during a confused period, they must first understand the Burmese character and its reactions. For instance, the Burmese are a very individualistic race who instinctively dislike control and authority, so that no government or person in power can be popular with them for long. In fact, it is a tenet of their religion that government is one of the five deadly enemies. An-

other fact is that the postwar years in Burma were, like everywhere else, very turbulent ones, when the struggle for power among the political parties and factions had broken out again and every party was denouncing the others and their leaders most virulently. In Burma it even led to a mass assassination of seven ministers. Yet Cady himself has admitted that while they were attacking me behind my back the Anti-Fascist League tried to induce me by various means to join them in those years. Aung San personally tried to do so. I declined to be drawn again into office, but not for the reasons Cady has given with such a clear touch of malice.

To get back to the Japanese militarists and their doings, they were a constant cause of worry and suspense to us, and as the crisis worsened they also became worse. However, I did not allow that fact to change or weaken my fundamental faith. I most firmly believed that for us it was a war against British colonialism, and since the Japanese were fighting against the same enemy we just had to close our eyes to everything else and fight along with them; any other course would be historically wrong and even a betrayal. With this conviction I tried to save our anticolonial unity from falling apart further; I tried to win support for it from leaders of the opposite camp like Thakin Mya, U Nu, Aung San. But the Burmese army proved to be the deciding factor, and when it finally joined the British our anticolonial cause was lost.

I recall a talk about the Burmese army which I had with General Kawabe in the latter part of 1944. The British infiltration into Katha District under Major General Wingate had begun early that year. By September, Wingate and his Chindits had strengthened and enlarged their positions in that district and those around it. Preparations were also being made for a general Allied offensive. In this mounting crisis I suggested to Kawabe that the Burmese army should be used in active military operations. I mentioned that the Indian army had been fighting continuously in one battle or another on eight sectors or perhaps more since its arrival in Burma in January, whereas the Burmese troops had never yet fired a shot. "You are showing your faith in the Indian army and not in ours," I told Kawabe. "That's rather humiliating for us." I also pointed out the psychological angle in it.

"By making our Burmese troops meet the British in actual battle you would make them see for themselves that it is the British,

'and their allies they are fighting against, and should there be any among them who did not wish to meet this enemy they would be discovered in time. There is also another danger you are running. By keeping them concentrated in a few accessible places you might be opening a way for enemy agents to infiltrate and work among them at leisure.'" But it was no use; Kawabe just smiled and listened, and then remarked that we might give the Burmese troops something to do by holding parades now and then. He was clearly trying to make a fool of me, and so I retorted, "And why not make them dance and sing a little too now and then?"

After that I dropped the subject altogether, convinced that Kawabe suspected my motives in making suggestions; he must have thought that I wanted to disperse the Burmese force close to the British lines in order to make it easier for them to cross over to the other side. That was the only way I could explain the man's extraordinary reactions. Anyway, Kawabe did not budge an inch from his old policy, and by smugly refusing to give the Burmese army an active military role to play he gave it plenty of time and opportunity and temptation to turn to a political role. I am convinced that the Japanese policy of creating an armed force in, for them, a totally new country and then keeping it idle and exposed to all kinds of political contacts and frustrations was one of the worst blunders the Japanese committed in Burma.

After the British offensive on the Katha sector began in September, Netaji Bose and I decided that the time had arrived to coordinate our future action. By now it had become fairly clear that we could not rely upon an Axis victory to save our causes but must find another way of doing it. We talked it over between ourselves, and then met with Aung San. I wanted to bring Than Tun into the talk, but Bose thought that a communist would introduce too many international angles to suit us, since we wanted to deal with the problem nationally.

We explained our plan to Aung San. As much as possible the Burmese and Indian forces would stay out of the actual fighting that would start with the final British offensive and would leave it mainly to the Japanese to do it, they alone being effectively trained and armed for such highly mechanised combat. Meanwhile, we could keep our two forces poised in certain strategic areas. Upon the Japanese withdrawal from Burma, which was now

a certainty, we would be ready to start an anti-British resistance with the arms the Japanese would leave behind. Thus, before the British would be able to stabilise their hold on Burma again, we could keep up a joint guerrilla attack from a line stretching into Bengal, Bose's stronghold, till the postwar situation would come to our rescue in India and Burma.

Aung San, who perhaps saw in the plan a way out of his own inner conflicts, liked the idea enormously. I might add that he had great confidence in Bose's political judgment. However, he said that he would have to sound others also on it, meaning, as Bose and I understood, the communists and his army officers. The Burmese army was already deeply split over this matter and Aung San had rightly to take that into account. Bose and I knew that Aung San was thinking very much of the consequences to himself and his army men of any step he took now in the struggle for political power that was bound to follow immediately after the British were back in Burma. He could not allow Than Tun and the Communists to be one step ahead of him and his army then. Than Tun's shadow stalked him all the time. Nevertheless, he looked impressed by our plan and promised to explain it to his group, and that gave us hope that he would eventually be with us. So we agreed to follow that plan in preparing our future course of action.

VISIT TO TOKYO AND THE KAMIKAZE

In the last months of 1944 the situation became really grave. The war had returned in full fury to the East. The American invasion of the Philippines began in September and was soon followed by a patterned mass bombing of Japan. In Burma the British beachhead in the Katha and Kachin sectors in the north expanded, and in November after the monsoon the Allies opened a general offensive, the Chinese forces attacking in northeast Burma, and the Salween areas, the Indians along the Mandalay-Myitkyina railway and Upper Chindwin, and combined Indian and West African divisions in Arakan. It was clear that the enemy was out for a final breakthrough in Burma.

At this moment when they needed Burmese cooperation most, Tanaka and his militarists ignored Burmese wishes and interests in pursuing their battle plans and turned Burma into a battle area

BREAKTHROUGH IN BURMA

under their total command. Without taking us into their confidence they asked for our cooperation in just the form they wanted it and no more. Soon they were preparing for a total war. "We have over a million troops in Southeast Asia and we will throw every soldier into the battle," they told me. For us it meant that they would throw all Burma and the Burmese too into the fight, without even consulting us. They were following this policy in the Philippines at that very moment, and they could do it in Burma too; in fact, everything indicated that they would do it.

Reports reached me almost daily that the Japanese were getting ready to wage a last-ditch war in a large number of areas. Even the Shwedagon Pagoda hill was to be turned into a fort and mined to defend Rangoon to the very last. Similarly, explosives were being buried in the large commercial buildings belonging to the British banks and companies in the heart of the town to blow them up in case of a retreat. The Deputy Prime Minister, the Home Minister, the Chief of Police, and I spent days trying to think of a way of saving our capital city and the Shwedagon Pagoda in particular. Finally, I saw the Japanese commander-in-chief and warned him directly of the catastrophic consequences which would follow such an anti-Burmese action on their part. General Kimura heard me very silently, and from the few words he spoke I had the impression that the Japanese had not completely made up their minds on it; or perhaps the futile destruction in the Philippines, which only turned the people there against them, was giving them new thoughts.

Another disturbing report followed. In the areas close to the front the Burmese civilian officers were being ordered to stay at their posts to the end, even in the worst battle conditions, in order to keep the administration functioning. Many of them were also compelled to act as spies and saboteurs against their will, and then were abandoned and left behind when the Japanese retreated from any area after completely scorching it. Tanaka and his men were employing a thorough form of terrorism and destruction. I lived in a nightmare during those months of October and November. So much had to be saved and I was so helpless; the faith of the people in their independence had to be saved in order that they should resist the British, and the militarists were doing their best to destroy that faith. Rangoon had to be saved, and the

Shwedagon Pagoda, and the government officers and their families living in daily danger near the various fighting fronts, and the Burmese army from being thrown into a modern combat for which they were not equipped or trained, and the cause of our independence itself had to be saved either in this war or in a coming struggle. At this fateful moment, when everything seemed to be slipping out of my hands, I was invited to Tokyo as the guest of the Emperor. It was the biggest stroke of luck I have ever known.

It happened that in those critical months Japan was desperately trying to raise as many kamikaze squads as possible to cripple the American fleet before it could get closer to her shores. I was told that the government in Tokyo wanted a leader from Southeast Asia, whose presence and words would appeal to the Japanese youth, to visit Japan to make the recruitment for these squads more spectacular. It chose me for this purpose. Officially I was invited, in Premier Koiso's words, "to come to our country at this time to express his thanks for the decoration which His Imperial Majesty was pleased to confer upon him. I understand that His Imperial Majesty has in person graciously accorded His Excellency Premier Dr. Ba Maw treatment as Chief of State of an allied country." In Japanese eyes those words were the ultimate honour. Just before receiving this invitation I had been given the First Class Order of the Rising Sun with Paulownia leaves, which was the highest Japanese decoration awarded to a foreign head of state. I was the first to receive it in Southeast Asia. I was genuinely glad to get it because it would give me far greater weight with the Japanese at a time when I really needed that weight most.

Upon getting the invitation I informed General Kimura of my own desire to discuss with the Japanese government the future course of the war in Burma, and particularly the problems I had already mentioned to him. Knowing that the Japanese government wished to use me, I wanted to extract the greatest gain out of it. The Japanese agreed to discuss my problems and I went.

U Tun Aung, the minister for war cooperation, Kyaw Nyein, the foreign secretary, and Ko Ko Gyi, a secretary, very heroically accompanied me on this incredible journey. We had to fly a little to the north of the hell raging in the seas and skies round the Philippines, but by another piece of great luck we reached Tokyo safely.

Tokyo and its people had changed since I had seen them a year ago, visibly subdued and disillusioned by events, but most of them as determined and defiant as ever. They were now a people in the grip of the biggest crisis in all their history and grimly waiting for the worst. But they were facing the situation wonderfully and revealing their latent racial qualities, their almost inexhaustible capacity to take whatever should come, to endure and survive and wait and even hope. They were more or less the same outwardly, but in the course of a long quiet talk they could not help but betray their true thoughts and fears. Unlike before, they now spoke mainly of the kamikazes, thus showing that they were placing most of their hopes on something which was really an act of desperation. The people were living with a new terror, the threat of American mass air bombing; they knew that they had no real way to protect their millions of paper and bamboo houses, not even, as it turned out, the Imperial Palace.

This was their most agonizing fear and sorrow. One of the worst incendiary bombings of Tokyo occurred when I was there near the end of November 1944. The result was quite literally a holocaust, a mass burning of one of the densest areas of the city. I saw the ghastly devastation the next morning. But there was no panic or self-pity or even audible complaint among the huge mass of victims. In fact some of them were able to express their happiness that the Imperial Palace had escaped. It was a heart-breaking sight, but it also lifted one's heart immensely to see so much human endurance and strength of character displayed in so dark an hour.

✓ My visit and the reason for it had been given wide publicity, and now I was to appear in public places and speak and assure the Japanese that we in Southeast Asia were staunchly carrying on the fight. Almost every night I appeared somewhere and spoke, and the speech was broadcasted, and some of the speeches were repeated several times because many wanted to hear them again. Altogether I gave five speeches. To convey the mood prevailing in Japan at the time I will quote some of the things which I was told stirred the youth most. Aware by now of the slow sense of doom which was beginning to creep over the people I struck in all my speeches the most basic and emotional chords that nothing could

ever defeat or silence. I was told later that it was these words which had the greatest appeal.

The first speech was given on November 17, at the banquet held in my honour by Premier Koiso and the Japanese government.

We in the East think in terms of race and centuries. Individual loss and suffering don't matter so long as the race goes on, and so also one or ten or even a hundred years of war don't matter so long as the centuries to follow are saved. In Burma you will find this philosophy concentrated in the phrase *Do bama*, or *We Burmese*. It is the call of the race, the oldest, the most irresistible call in the world, and now in this war it has become the wider, deeper blood-call of East Asia itself. This race philosophy by itself completely assures us of victory, a philosophy which dedicates us as a race to the service of our destiny. You, I, all of us as individual members of the race are merely servants of that inexorable race destiny which claims us utterly. . . . Our common East Asiatic struggle will continue right till the end to be all that matters for us. There can really be nothing much else for anyone among the billion East Asiatic peoples so long as our whole future remains undecided as it does now; and should it be not life but death which calls us, we must be ready to answer that too, and go as the kamikazes do. This is the Oriental way, the only way for us to survive. . . . I have come to Nippon to learn what I can about this way.

On November 21 I spoke at the dinner given by Mr. Shigemitsu, the foreign minister and also minister for Greater East Asiatic affairs.

Experience under the British has taught my people to be very cautious and always to keep their hands tightly on their pockets when somebody employs fine abstract phrases. So the Burmese watched at first how the East Asiatic conception would develop; they wanted to know about the East Asiatics as much as about East Asia because their national instinct told them that there could be no real East Asiatic order without real East Asiatics who would think and act and react as East Asiatics. . . . I am glad to inform you that many such East

Asiatics have appeared in Nippon. . . . We know that a lopsided world order could not be stable, and that the rights of man belong to all men. We know that there cannot be a new world order so long as the robber powers are free to prowl about stealing and killing as they like.

Between those two banquet speeches I spoke at a large mass rally held in the Hibiya Public Hall.

I do not wish to speak about the material aspect [of the war] because so many men who are far more competent than I am have already spoken to you about it. . . . As for the spiritual aspect of the war, the centre is everywhere, not only in Nippon and East Asia, but in the whole world. I am referring to ideas, thoughts, emotions, the spiritual effort and struggle behind the war. As I read history, that is the story of man, it is fundamentally a spiritual struggle, the struggle of life to create a higher life, and yet a higher life. And the material things, the guns and planes and tanks and such things, are only a weapon, only an instrument in the service of this vast fundamental spiritual struggle. The final issue will always depend upon the strength of the spirit behind the struggle.

I say that the issue will be decided, not by planes and tanks, but by the spirit of man, by the spirit of the kamikaze. . . . Ask yourselves two questions only. Why did Asia as a whole lose her past heritage? Civilisation began in the East. The world's progress began in the East. Why did we lose what we had gained in the past? The answer can be very simply given. It is that East Asia lost the past because she could not move out of it into the future. She got stuck in it. In a materialist age she could not adjust herself to the materialist environment. She tried to be spiritual both in spiritual and material times with the result that she could not move when the world was moving and so was left behind. The new world is neither for the materialist nor for the idealist; it is for the realist. . . . What is happening in East Asia is not a war—it is a peoples' revolution. It is for us to be true revolutionists, pursuing the East Asiatic revolution as the past great revolutions were pursued and consummated. It is everybody's revo-

lution, and the revolutionary front is in every home and every town. That is the way to win a revolution. . . .

I will now give you my third reason for believing in our final victory. It is based upon something that has astounded the whole world, something that displays the basic spirit and meaning of our East Asiatic revolution, namely the spirit of the kamikaze. That is going to be the real foundation of the new East Asia, its armour which no enemy can destroy, the spirit of self-dedication, the spirit to win or to die, indeed to die so as to win. I tell you very sincerely that I was never so moved in all my life as when I read of the exploits of the kamikazes in Taiwan and in the Philippines; and I said to myself, East Asia will never die so long as the spirit of the kamikaze never dies.

Finally, I addressed the entire nation in a radio broadcast before I left to visit some kamikaze camps in Taiwan.

A terrific storm has broken loose both in the East and in the West which shows every sign of spreading and getting rougher in the coming months. The storm which they [the Japanese] know will hit them even harder before it is over has brought them together still more closely, has aroused in them their whole instinct of race-preservation so that the war is now a personal question of life or death for every single man and woman I have seen in Japan. . . .

There are the incomparable kamikaze and *oka* units who are fighting really as a part of the machine on which they go out on their last mission of sure hit and sure death. You must have heard of how these young heroes salute their machines before they climb into them for their last flight. I will tell you another thing which perhaps is not yet known to many. Every member of these units is asked to mention his last wish before he rides to his death. And I have been told authoritatively that in every case it has been the same last wish, namely, that they hit their objective and help to win the war.

And I can tell you without the slightest exaggeration that this spirit of the kamikaze and the *oka* has seized hold of the whole nation in Japan. The will to self-preservation has taken this sacrificial form here. Even young boys have been heard to

wish that the war may continue until they are of age to join one of these death-seeking units. Only the other day I happened to question a housemaid as to what she thought of the war, and among the first things she told me spontaneously was that her one regret was that she wasn't a man, because then she could have become a kamikaze. In Japan therefore the war has gone even beyond the stage of total mobilisation and reached that of a total mechanisation. In everything one sees a machine working, fighting, speaking, thinking. It is a war machine endowed with the soul of a whole people and all their indomitable will, courage, and devotion. Nothing like this has ever occurred before in history.

In those days the Tokyo radio broadcasted the famous "Song of the Kamikazes," a sad and haunting little song, after every announcement of a kamikaze or oka attack. It was also broadcasted at the end of my speeches.

In fathomless deep may my body lie,
Or among bushes let it slowly rot.
Near my emperor, O, suffer me to die,
For my own life I care not.

They were grateful to me for my speeches, for they knew I had spoken with the greatest conviction. Premier Koiso and Field Marshal Sugiyama, the minister for defence, thanked me feelingly. Koiso was by nature taciturn and spoke little, but Sugiyama made no attempt to hide his feelings. He was truly a good and greatly gifted man, an officer and a gentleman as the British would say, but without the British touch of class and snobbery. He had listened very carefully to my speech at the government banquet, and the first thing he did when he met me the next day was to mention it.

"Your speech moved me very much. You expressed all that I feel in my heart but am unable to put into words."

"Well," I replied, "you plan and win great victories and don't talk of them whereas I talk of these victories but can't plan or win them."

"There again. Your words sound so appropriate." That was the kind of man Field Marshal Sugiyama was, a brilliant yet unassuming soldier who was behind many of the Japanese victories and yet

had the humility to recognise his trivial limitations. He and his wife had no children, and perhaps that was the reason why they undertook the charge of my son Zali while he was studying in Tokyo. They regarded Zali as their own son.

Both Sugiyama and his wife committed *hara kiri* upon the arrival of the American occupation forces in Japan. Thus a true samurai bid his last farewell to arms.

SAVING BURMA FROM DEVASTATION

Having done what I could for them it was now my turn to ask them to do what they could for me. I first mentioned my problems to Premier Koiso in a general way, but it was with Field Marshal Sugiyama that I had to discuss them fully, for they all arose out of the military campaign in Burma. Many events created a hopeful atmosphere for the discussion. First of all, the Emperor himself had honoured me by making me his personal guest and had welcomed me warmly; in fact, I was the only person from abroad who had received such a privilege during that crisis, which was an immense source of strength for me in dealing with the Japanese. Then there was the small but timely service I had just rendered by coming over at a most perilous time to help them. There was also the fact that at the very moment when I was trying to save Rangoon and other Burmese cities from destruction Manila was demonstrating how thorough and ruthless the destruction could be. "Manila in flames," the newspapers that day screamed, and that gave a tremendous relevance to my plea.

To come to the point, I asked mainly for four things. The first was that no battle should be fought in Rangoon or any other city in Burma—in other words, that Burma should be spared the fate of so many cities in the Philippines which had been brutally sacrificed.

The next request was that the Burmese army should not be pitted against an enemy armed with the most modern and destructive weapons for the simple reason that our troops did not possess similar weapons nor had they been trained to resist them. Instead, they would be most useful to mobilise and lead mass resistance in the rear lines or to counteract any rear-line activities of the enemy. I made this proposal in pursuance of the plan that Bose, Aung San, and I had discussed.

The third request related to our civilian officers who were risking their lives by carrying on the administration close to the fighting areas. I strongly protested against the policy of forcing them to remain at their posts even under fire or employing them on active military duties such as sniping or espionage or secret missions. By all the rules of warfare they would, if captured while engaged in such military activities, be summarily shot.

Lastly, I brought up the case of the Burmese who were serving the Japanese army by performing various tasks of a dangerous nature. Such people and their families were risking not only their lives but were exposing themselves to a terrible future vengeance from the enemy and his partisans, and the least that could be done for them was to give them and their families the utmost protection and compensation. This, I insisted, was a point of elementary honour for the Japanese. Sugiyama at once agreed with me that it was so, and promised that it would be done. He even looked slightly hurt that there should be any doubt about Japanese honour. "Look how we are doing all we can for Wang Ching-wei, who is now critically ill in Tokyo," he said. "Please assure your people that Japan will never leave them in the lurch. We will spend our last yen if necessary to compensate them for whatever they suffer on our account."

As for the three other requests Sugiyama listened to them in complete silence, only nodding now and then to show that he was really following me. When I had finished, after hours it seemed, he simply told me that he would give me a reply within a day or two. Those words meant that there was hope for me, and I was happy. Two days later we met again and Sugiyama gave me the Japanese decision. Regarding my desire to keep the fighting away from the Burmese cities he said that the Japanese understood Burmese feelings in the matter, especially in regard to the Shwedagon Pagoda. "We will do our utmost to spare your cities," he said, "but I warn you that if, no matter how or through whom, the enemy should come to suspect that we will not defend Rangoon or any other big town we will fight anywhere necessary regardless of consequences. You will have to see to it that nothing leaks out."

It was such a dubious reprieve that I did not know whether I had failed or succeeded. One thing however was certain; it would put me into a terrible dilemma. I would see the panic among the people grow, and yet be unable to dispel it by telling them the

facts; least of all would I be able to tell the members of the government, for the obvious reason that some of them were already collaborating with the enemy. I was in a terrible predicament.

As regards the role of the Burmese army in the impending battles, Sugiyama agreed with my suggestion because, I believe, it fitted into the plans already drawn up by the Japanese army in Burma. He also promised to inquire into my complaint about the way the Japanese army was treating the Burmese civilian officers carrying on the administration near the fighting front, and particularly into the way these officers and their families were abandoned to their fate whenever the Japanese forces suddenly retreated from the area. "That should not be done," he said emphatically.

So my mission in Tokyo was completed and I left with a much lighter heart. I next went to Taiwan to visit a kamikaze training camp which was just about to send a batch of kamikaze planes for an attack on the American naval forces around the Philippines.

The camp was some miles away from Taihokku, or Taipeh, the capital city. We arrived there in the afternoon and were just in time to see the kamikaze boys getting ready to leave for their last destination. There were six of them, of whom one lay ill in bed complaining of his luck in being unable to leave with the others. The colonel who was in charge introduced them to me. They smiled and bowed low, and one of them, looking up at me, said, "Dr. Ba Maw? The man we heard on the radio?" The colonel told him it was so, and that I had come all the way from Burma to wish them success and farewell, and to tell the Burmese about them on my return. The boy was too embarrassed to reply and turned away. I turned away too, not to betray my emotions.

As far as I could judge, none of them was more than twenty-one years old. They looked fit and toughened by strict training and discipline. Each had, tied round his head, the badge of the samurai, a white band with a red ball representing the rising sun on the front of it. This, the colonel explained, was a death sign, to show that they were already marked out for death; and there was something in their eyes which showed it too—the hot, piercing, far-away gaze of one who is living his last moments. It was inexpressibly sad to watch these doomed boys calmly tidying up everything and putting their few possessions away before they left, as if they would be back soon. Meanwhile, the colonel was shouting good-

humouredly at some of them; I suspected that he did so to break the tension and make things look as normal as possible. He pointed at a fair, fine-looking lad who, he said, loved dance music and actually wanted to learn how to dance before he went to his death. "That is the spirit in which they are going out to die," the colonel said with a laugh. It was a brutal laugh, but I am sure the colonel was merely trying to disguise his feelings.

Then the time for departure came. Five of them walked up quietly to their machines and stood erect and bowed before them; they then wheeled around and saluted the colonel, who took the salute standing on a box; then they saluted me and I bowed most deeply; and then they climbed into the machines. One by one they took off, rose and wheeled slowly and gracefully, dipped their wings in a last salute to us, then getting into formation flew away. We stood and watched the five planes till they were lost in the clouds. The colonel smiled, but his eyes were wet, and so were mine. I left immediately, not wishing to see the sudden void in the camp any longer.

The next afternoon the colonel sent word to me that two of the boys had plunged to their death near the Philippines. The Tokyo radio also reported the attack, and again I heard the "Song of the Kamikaze," sad and lonely as ever, but for me much more so now, for I heard in it the voices of those two dead boys speaking to me from the seas around the Philippines.

For a long time after our return to Burma we told the people the story of the kamikazes, and there was awe and admiration everywhere for such a spirit of utter sacrifice. Even Kyaw Nyein, who was by then deep in the anti-Japanese plot, was carried away by the wonder of it. In a statement made on February 10, 1945, that is, a little more than a month before the anti-Japanese resistance began, he said, "But many times more impressive than all the war weapons and heavy materials heaped together is first the spirit of the kamikaze and last the spirit of the kamikaze, which will ultimately prove its triumph over the much-vaunted manpower and material strength of Britain and the United States." Kyaw Nyein, of course, could not really have meant what he said, or else he was still vacillating as Aung San was. But his words show that even the resistance leaders knew what the people wanted to hear, and spoke of it glowingly.

CHAPTER 14

The End of the War

THE ANTI-JAPANESE RESISTANCE

It was now 1945 and we were only waiting for the end. With almost every day and every event it loomed nearer. The last great German counteroffensive had failed in the Battle of the Bulge, the Soviet armies had broken into Eastern Germany and the whole German resistance was beginning to collapse. In Asia, Manila had fallen and the American forces were heading for Okinawa, on the very doorstep of the Japanese mainland. On the day the Americans launched their assault on Luzon Island in the Philippines, an all-out British offensive opened in Burma with a drive towards Mandalay.

We were clearly losing the war, but I was now looking further ahead to the war after the war, that is, to the armed struggle that Bose and I had in mind. With these thoughts in my head I found myself working alone, in a vacuum as it were, for Bose was busy elsewhere and Aung San was evidently still undecided, and the anti-Japanese plot was quickly ripening within the Burmese army and the extreme Communist and socialist groups. It was daily getting more difficult to know who were what and for whom; except for those in the conspiracy, everyone was just watching events and keeping out of them during these days. All I could do was to wait and hope and go on doggedly with my work.

First of all, I had to convince the people that our state was still a very real thing and we would have to defend it to the end. To make this fact more palpable I formed a new Mahabama war government which would work more visibly with the people. On the same day a Supreme Defence Council was created, consisting

of seven of the most important members of the government, who would devote themselves entirely to war activities among the Burmese. It was Aung San who gave me the idea of setting up such a body, and he took a very busy part in it, which made me continue to hope that he would not abandon our cause. I went on hoping till the Japanese defeat in Meiktila, after which I lost touch with him altogether.

Special war commissioners were also appointed to keep up the general war morale and to deal with complaints from the people on the spot. Likewise the various bodies created under my New Order Plan carried on as usual and no activity of the government was allowed to stop or slow down until the last possible moment. I even went to the extent of passing three clearly anti-Japanese laws, in defiance of the strongest resistance and even veiled threats from Tanaka, to convince the Burmese that we were fighting most of all for ourselves, to defend our independence and our rights.

Next, we had to rouse the war spirit in the country. In fact, taking a long view, this was the most crucial task of all because it would create the driving force which would carry us not only through the war but the struggle that would follow later; we were sure that with a British victory there would be such a struggle. The anticolonial and consequently the anti-British character of the war had therefore to be preserved at all costs.

I decided upon a new approach to the hostilities to show that we were primarily fighting against the British. I declared it to be the Fourth Anglo-Burmese War. The Burmese had fought three wars before with the British and lost them, and so lost their independence. It was now a fourth war to avenge our past defeats and win back our country. Such a way of putting it brought out the Burmese side of the conflict more dramatically.

The new slogan was "This is our war, our state, our people, our independence." Speaking about the Fourth War I said, "This is the final battle in our long struggle with British imperialism. We have fought it three times before and lost and so became a subject race for generations. We must now fight and win this fourth and final round with the help of Japan, for if we lose again we shall be slaves for a very long time more."

✓ This way of putting it gave the conflict a Burmese purpose and removed the Japanese out of it altogether. U Nu, Saw Ba U Gyi,

the Karen leader, and many other political veterans toured the southern delta areas to present the situation in this entirely national perspective, and everywhere the masses responded. They held eighteen mass rallies in Bassein and Myaungmya districts, the two Karen strongholds, to which the people flocked to listen and to promise their complete cooperation. Another team led by two Mahabama ministers, Bandoola U Sein and U Ba Win, carried the same message to Mandalay and other parts of Upper Burma, and the response there was even more ardent because historical memories are much stronger there. They found war morale very high in Mandalay, where the people were determined to resist the return of the British. Even the monks expressed a wish to join in another Anglo-Burmese war. The team did not find the slightest indication of any anti-Japanese resistance movement among the population; whatever existed of it was still at the stage of a close conspiracy within a group of the Burmese army, the Communists, and a certain section of the socialists.

In the middle of March the British attacked Mandalay and succeeded in penetrating its defences. That marked the beginning of the end, if not the end itself. I told the people the whole truth while the fight was actually raging. "The enemy has finally infiltrated into Mandalay, where the bitterest street fighting is now taking place," I said. "This is bad news for you. . . . We as a realistic people must face reality, but at the same time we must remember that we are defending our country to the last man and the last gun. The administration is going on peacefully. Order is being maintained." The people took the news calmly.

The British advanced rapidly, and when they reached Meiktila even the Japanese showed signs of losing hope. They began to talk of defending Lower Burma. I must mention that soon after my return from Japan at the end of 1944, I noticed a change for the better among them. Showing a greater sense of reality than his smug, stone-like predecessor, General Kimura tried to improve Japanese behaviour towards others. There were also indications that my visit to Japan and the talks I had there had had their effect. There were no further preparations to turn Rangoon or any of our big towns into a slaughterhouse; government officers in the frontline areas ceased to be put to military use, but were permitted to leave the area before fighting broke out or when the

Japanese evacuated; and it was decided that the Burmese army would not be made to bear the brunt of the main British offensive.

The most heartening of all the changes, however, occurred only on the eve of our retreat from Rangoon. It was the sudden departure from Burma of Tanaka, the chief-of-staff who planned to throw our towns and pagodas into the flames. I learnt later that he was involved in an air crash in Thailand and was seriously injured. Tanaka's disappearance defeated his policy as well as his gang.

With the imminent fall of Mandalay, Meiktila, and other strategic places in Upper Burma and the threat to Toungoo in Central Burma I began to lose control of the situation. The Burmese army got ready to launch their resistance, and it was Aung San mainly who was holding it back till the British victory in Lower Burma seemed to be coming swiftly.

At this time the Communists were the cause of most of my worry. I had promised Than Tun to shield them against any danger to their lives, and they were making the greatest use of that promise. I had sent word to Thakin Soe, the most reckless among them, to be more careful, but he kept going about openly in various disguises, and the Thakins who were working for the Japanese were hotly after him. Some from Than Tun's camp were no better, and the Kempetai were tailing them closely. They were nearly caught on one occasion.

It happened in Insein District, which is close to Rangoon. Some of Than Tun's men were found distributing secret instructions for an anti-Japanese rising in collaboration with the British forces. The police seized the documents and forwarded them to the district commissioner, who, most fortunately, belonged to my political party. This officer was so unnerved by the incident that he decided to report it to me personally instead of to the local Kempetai. He asked for instructions as to the action he should take. It was this which saved the Communists and even the whole resistance. I took away the documents from the district commissioner, telling him to leave the matter to me and not to disclose it to anyone else. I had the documents destroyed immediately and at the same time warned Than Tun that if he persisted in exposing all of us to danger like this I would make no further attempt to save him or his comrades. This stopped all such Communist recklessness.

Realising by now how hopeless and dangerous the situation had become, largely because of a few giddy Communists, and no longer trusting my ability to protect them, I decided to put an end to it. I would give Than Tun an opening to get away as soon as possible, before the trap closed around him. So I sent for him and suggested that he should make a ministerial tour in Toungoo District, which I knew was his main base of operations. He was to go there to carry out government war propaganda. I had just dispatched a contingent of 500 troops, under the command of Bo Yan Naing, to take part in the battle round Meiktila in order to convince Upper Burma that we were not leaving it in the lurch. Than Tun was advised to follow these troops as far as Toungoo. He jumped at the proposal, and the next day he left Rangoon and so vanished with his men into the hills and jungles behind Toungoo.

✓As I have just related, the Japanese had agreed with my proposal to send a Burmese force under Bo Yan Naing, who had in 1942 fought against the British at Shwedaung and won, to the Meiktila front as a token of Burmese participation in the defence of Upper Burma. Actually, this action was my last move to frustrate the British attempt to transform the character of the war. My plan was to turn a small part of our army into a nucleus for a full-scale anti-British resistance. But as always, the Japanese suspected my motives, and I could not explain my action completely to them without exposing the plots going on and so endangering a large number of Burmese lives. So some Japanese thought I was manoeuvring to put Yan Naing, my son-in-law, in Aung San's place, and some even concluded that I was trying to help the defection of Yan Naing and a full Burmese force to the enemy. Yan Naing felt so frustrated over it that when the resistance broke out, which happened while he was on the way to Meiktila, he disbanded his force. The troops returned thoroughly confused and demoralised.

✓Aung San and his army soon followed. I knew that they would not be able to hold back their feeling that they must never allow Than Tun to wrest the leadership of the resistance from the army, which alone was equipped to lead it and therefore had the right to do so.

On March 17 there was a final, full-dress parade of the Burmese forces, a leaving ceremony as the Japanese called it, after which,

they would depart for their destinations. The Japanese commander-in-chief and a whole array of Japanese officers were present at the ceremony, smiling and confident that their defeat had changed nothing. As the Burmese commander of the forces I took the salute and bade farewell to our troops.

✓ I must deal here with a curious propaganda story which was spun out of the fact that Aung San in his speech on that occasion ordered the troops to go out and fight the enemy. According to this story Aung San tricked the Japanese by declaring that the fight would be against *the enemy* without specifying whether it was the British or the Japanese. This is simply a ridiculous attempt to isolate a single word out of a whole unbroken background of statements made during all the war years. Like the rest of us, Aung San had in all his past speeches and other declarations stressed the fact that the British were our enemies and we would have to crush them "in full cooperation with the Imperial Nippon Forces." Some of these declarations have already been mentioned earlier.

✓ The last one to that effect was as recent as February 1, 1945, when the new Mahabama war government, of which he was a member, issued a statement of policy. One of the pledges it contained was: "We will dedicate ourselves unconditionally to the first national task of defending the nation's independence against the Anglo-American enemies in the closest unity with Nippon and the other East Asiatic nations." When one of the more cautious ministers wanted to tone down the strongly worded statement, Aung San was among those who opposed him. Of course, there is always an easy reply to this: Aung San, it will be said, was only fooling the Japanese army, although if this were true he was also fooling his own people as well, since everyone read the statement. Such an explanation would be even more absurd than the story about Aung San's cryptic use of the word *enemy* at the parade. I am dwelling on this incident in order to prevent a manifestly crass and even immoral story from becoming an actual part of our history.

The air was now tense and thick with the wildest rumours. Gradually, people came to learn of the disappearance of Than Tun and a little later of Aung San with his troops. Life seemed to proceed as before, but it was clear that everything was on the

brink of collapse. People remembered the havoc that had followed when the British withdrew from Rangoon in 1942 and before the Japanese forces entered it and restored order, and again they saw those chaotic days returning.

Then on March 27 the antifascist resistance struck its first blow when a Burmese military unit attacked a group of Japanese in Pegu. The resistance now came out into the open; the Burmese army as a whole melted away into the hinterlands in the southern and central parts of Burma and waited for the arrival of the British forces. Aung San had already disappeared from Prome after he had told his Japanese adviser that his head was burning and he was praying to the Buddha to put the fire out.

✓ Soon after he reached Shwedaung, a junction town near Prome, Aung San wrote me a letter (in English) which throws so much light on this critical period and its events that I must give it here in full. It reveals the actual state of Aung San's mind and even its subconscious workings at the time, and also puts the facts I have related so far regarding him in a total perspective.

My dear Adipadigy,

I am sorry that I was unable to meet you before I came out here as I had promised you. Conditions were such that I had to do things in a hurry. Sometimes I am afraid you might misunderstand me. I shall be coming back to Rangoon and, if conditions do not worsen so unexpectedly, I hope to meet you again. Meantime I wish to send you some report.

As I said in my speech, I would do my best to *save the situation*. But as you would also understand, these are dark days for us. *The Japanese troops are withdrawing* to all intents and purposes. And I shall not be surprised if, before monsoon, the war in Burma is over. Anyway, I think *I don't blame the Japanese too*, for from the strategical point of view, if you might understand, this is the only *wise and sound course* for them to do. Nevertheless, there is still hope for us, I suppose. Of course, we shall have to be prepared to struggle alone for some time. But I have every confidence that our cause will win ultimately. *War or no war, peace or no peace, the struggle for our national independence must go on till it ends in victory.* And I will do my best. You might misunderstand me

now perhaps. But believe me, after some time you will see whether I mean what I say. At present I have to fix up many things because there are so many angles to be straightened. Meantime, I wish you to be prepared for the worst and *do whatever possible in your line.*

Yours,
Aung San

The parts of the letter that I have given in italics are the most revealing. Some of the facts which emerge from them are that Aung San acted with clear emotions and confused ideas; that he kept in mind the plan he had discussed with Bose and me to preserve the essentially anti-British character of our struggle which must go on till independence was won; that he did not want me to misunderstand his failure to give me a final reply to our plan before he suddenly left; that at the time he bore no ill-feeling towards the Japanese but could even say that he did not "blame the Japanese" and thought their decision to withdraw from Burma "wise and sound"; that in fact he had acted as he did when he knew that "the Japanese troops are withdrawing," not for any antifascist reasons, of which he makes no mention whatsoever, but to "save the situation," that is, as he told Slim, because of the British victory, and he wanted the Burmese to be with the victors. There is an unfinished sentence in the letter which has been scored out: "Please tell the Japanese that . . ." He asks me to "tell the Japanese," and then decides to leave the request unexpressed. However, this half sentence shows what was in his mind, that he wanted to maintain communication with the Japanese without any anger, to tell them something, probably to explain his action.

Yet another very revealing statement is that "conditions were such that I had to do things in a hurry." I have already explained how Aung San's hand was forced before he had arrived at a clear decision for himself by two events: Than Tun's sudden departure to start the Communist rising and the consequent restlessness of the Burmese army to start its own resistance as soon as possible to overtake the Communists in the race to get to the new stage into which the Burmese struggle was clearly entering.

This letter was not delivered to me at that time, having been

intercepted and hidden away by someone for unknown reasons. It was discovered many years later. However, it has now appeared like a voice out of the grave.

Maung Maung Pye, a well-known editor and political commentator who wrote *Burma in the Crucible*, says of this period: "It was the first time that the existence of the resistance movement was known and participated in not only by members of the Burma Defence Army but also by many civilians as well." That is true. The resistance was essentially a conspiratorial movement within the Burmese army, the communist and socialist factions among the Thakins, and the East Asia Youth League, which the Japanese had created to use as one of their instruments, and it remained within these groups till, with the Japanese withdrawal and the British advance, its victory was assured, and then there was the expected surge of certain elements to the winning side.

The masses in general, especially the peasants and workers, kept out of the conflict. So did the government services and the large number of mass organisations created by the government, such as the Mahabama Party, and the minority communities. Speaking as a whole, they remained loyal to the government or, at the worst, neutral. None of them, however, were able to take an active part in an anti-British countermove for the simple reason that they were not organised for such military action, nor had they the necessary arms and other equipment, the Japanese refusing to give them any through distrust of all Burmese during that period. So all the weapons were with the Burmese army and those whom the British were secretly arming. That proved to be the decisive factor in the crisis.

Coming to the political leaders, nearly all of them were completely confused and disoriented by the sudden turn and rush of events, and there were cases in which party loyalties were strained and even divided for a time. This happened mostly among the Thakins, owing to the fact that they were composed of the most conflicting elements, which shared a common name and hardly anything more. During the critical days very few of them were able to make up their minds. Over twenty Thakin leaders led by Thakin Kodaw Hmaing went on the air to tell the people that they opposed the resistance and its attempt to change sides at a critical moment. Some of the most important among them joined

me in the retreat to Moulmein with the Japanese. There were many who wanted to start an anti-British resistance as a counter-move. Thakin Tin, the leader of the All-Burma Peasants Association, who was one of my secretaries at the time, requested that he be sent to Tharrawaddy, his native place, to carry on the anti-British war. While we were waiting at Mudon for the hostilities to end I asked Thakin Mya and U Nu if they were willing to continue the struggle against the British after the Japanese had left the country, in which case I would get the Japanese to supply them with arms from Thailand. I gave them a whole day to consider the matter very carefully. The next day they replied that they were willing to do it.

✓ The population at large similarly lost their bearings in the last days. Most of them were too tired and bewildered to take sides or even really to care for anything beyond the security of their lives and homes, and they went on living outside the big epochal events which were happening so close to them. They were reduced to a condition in which they were ready to help any side that asked for help and gave them security in return, to work for anyone who gave them work and again security, to join any group or movement which called them if there was no risk in doing so. Those with grievances against the Japanese naturally turned against them just as those with more historical and traumatic memories turned against the British, and of course there were the usual creatures spawned by a war, the jackals and vultures who waited to follow in the wake of the winning armies. Taken as a whole, however, such people were too few really to count by themselves during that uncertain period, but they counted tremendously when the great undercurrents set loose by the Japanese defeat and the British advance swept the masses everywhere into the movements waiting for them. Then the success of the resistance proved the decisive factor, and the political party which arose out of it took complete possession of the field, and the people rushed to join it. This party and its leaders also became inevitably identified with the vast surge towards national independence which swept across all Asia when the war ended, and finally with the achievement of that independence when the British decided to relinquish their empire.

~ We were now only waiting for the day the war would reach

Rangoon or we would be quitting the city. Everyone was closely watching my movements for a sign that would reveal the fate of Rangoon, and the Japanese also were watching to know if I would betray anything, and thus I could do nothing, move no property from my house to store it away elsewhere in preparation for my departure, not even to take down the window curtains for fear it would be taken amiss. That was why I had to leave behind practically all my movable property when I left Rangoon and so lost it.

Then news came that the British spearhead was driving towards Toungoo and that Pegu, the gateway to Rangoon, would soon be threatened. The fall of Pegu would have completely cut off a retreat from Rangoon and the areas round it. It was then that I was informed that the commander-in-chief had overruled Tanaka's plan to defend Rangoon and decided upon a general retreat to Moulmein District in the southeast before Pegu fell into British hands. It was April 21, and I was told that all the Burmese ministers and their families who wished to join in the retreat would have to leave on the night of April 23.

I at once called a cabinet meeting and broke the news to the ministers, asking them at the same time to keep it a close secret till we had left. Five ministers finally agreed to accompany me. After requesting the other ministers to carry on the administration till the very end, I wished them a last farewell, sure in my mind that I would never return alive and free.

All we had dreamt and planned and built up so laboriously had crumbled, and we were leaving the ruins behind. It filled me with an almost unbearable sense of defeat; yet there was also a feeling of pride and triumph mixed with it. For a few heroic years we had fought and won back for our people their independence and also given them in many ways a new destiny and dignity, and the fruits of that triumph would certainly endure forever in our history. There was also a feeling of intense joy that I derived from my certainty now that Rangoon, with the great Shwedagon Pagoda and almost all the other cities in Burma, had been saved from the wholesale destruction which had overtaken so many cities in the Philippines. It was a feeling shared by the entire population. "The people as a whole rejoiced in one fact," writes Maung Maung Pye in *Burma in the Crucible*: "it was that, as a result of Dr. Ba Maw's

persistent refusal to agree with the Japanese brass hats that Rangoon should be defended and the northern slope of the Shwedagon Pagoda used as a fort, Rangoon had been saved. Gradually the few Japanese soldiers who remained behind and had actually acted as the demolition squad, evidently to carry out scorched-earth tactics, began to leave."

The next day U Nu came to see me. His whole face and behaviour showed the struggle he was passing through. Soon he revealed that he was being torn by a deep moral conflict. A man of the utmost integrity, he was loyal to the core to his party, or rather the group within his party which had planned the resistance, but at the same time it was an agonizing thought to him that he should even appear to have forsaken me in such a crisis, and he had come to me to find a way out. He did not know what to do, he told me poignantly, and he had informed his comrades that he would seek my advice before coming to a decision. I was myself too sick and torn at heart to be able to advise anyone at such a juncture. So I replied that it was a personal crisis for all of us and he must really choose for himself. At the same time I assured him that I would not misunderstand him if he went into hiding; in fact, it would be the best course for him.

U Nu has given a more dramatic account of this talk in *Burma under the Japanese*. I will give it here, for it will show how even the best of us were floundering during that period.

I went to see the Adipadi. For two or three minutes he remained silent, gazing upwards reflectively. Then, sighing deeply, he said, very sadly, "I suppose you had better go into hiding, Thakin Nu, if you feel like it. As things are I am hardly in a position to protect you, and before long it will be as much as I can do to protect myself. So there you are! If you want to go into hiding, do so. As for any kind of promise that you pledged to me I give you full absolution."

"But if I go into hiding, won't the Japanese be doubly suspicious of you?"

"They won't trust me any more because you remain. When do you propose to go?"

I told him that I was off at once, and he asked me if I had a secure refuge. When I said that it was safe he warned me, "Be

careful whom you trust. You are inclined to be too trustful. Some people will tell all they know under a little pressure from the military police.”

I bowed to him very respectfully as if for the last time and took my departure.

U Nu accompanied me almost through the whole retreat to Mudon and was with me till the war ended and I finally fled from Burma. While at Mudon we had the narrowest escape from death together, as I will relate soon. All these memories remain like a perpetual fragrance in my mind.

THE RETREAT AND SURRENDER

There was every indication beforehand that the retreat would be a very severe ordeal. Ambassador Ishii, who proved to be such a true friend, had told me how Tanaka was holding up everything and refusing to prepare in time for a withdrawal from Rangoon. It was only at the last minute that the commander-in-chief overruled him and ordered a general withdrawal from the area. As the result of the delay the retreat was turned into a sudden, headlong flight and almost a stampede. Two huge armies, Japanese and Indian, and two governments, Burmese and Indian, and an endless throng of vehicles in all sorts of condition and moving at all sorts of speed choked the whole length of the narrow road to Pegu, and everything was just crawling along and even brought at times to a long halt, while a brilliant moon shone pitilessly, showing up every object on the road. There was absolutely no air cover or any protection along the way. That was how the retreat began, and it went on like that for the greater part of its long distance, no preparations whatsoever having been made for it anywhere. Meanwhile, Ishii informed us, the commander-in-chief and his staff had got away safely to Moulmein by air within less than an hour.

The military command had taken over the entire control of the situation, and one of their first open acts was to ignore us almost totally. All the old talk of independence and rights was nearly gone, and Burma had again become just a battleground and the Burmese just material to be employed in the imminent battles.

The change was seen even in the way the Japanese army treated the Burmese government. For example, we were given no military

trucks for our journey, although there were plenty available for themselves, but old, decaying buses taken off the streets to travel without a stop for over two weeks across broken terrain and under ceaseless enemy fire from the air. Nothing had been done even to put these buses into a fit state for such a long and violent journey, and the drivers had been made to understand that it was a trip to Pegu some fifty miles away and back again the same night.

All government officials and their families left in a convoy on the evening of April 23, 1945. Almost immediately we were swallowed up in the growing tide of men and vehicles that was already beginning to fill the road, and before long we lost touch with each other and only got together again almost by accident after more than a week. Our cars and trucks were now an inseparable part of two retreating armies, and so we got the full brunt of the enemy air attacks, which went on day and night through most of the long way. The attacks began on the very first night of the retreat. The moon was almost full and the enemy planes could not miss anything. The planes would suddenly be heard, and soon they would be seen roaring and swooping down on the long creeping line of vehicles; then the bombs came screaming down and the machine guns barked and rattled and some guns from below barked back. Every time this occurred the vehicles under attack dodged wildly and people shouted and jumped out and scampered into the nearest fields and bushes and remained there till the planes flew away; meanwhile all the other vehicles on the road got terribly tangled and were held up. We were having a first taste of the way the retreat would proceed. It was just the beginning.

Speaking of my own household group, there was a family event which made our departure with two armies in full flight from an enemy pursuing them almost a foolhardy act. My oldest daughter was not in condition to travel as she was on the very eve of giving birth to her first child. The repeated shocks and strains of the flight could have led to the gravest consequences for her and the child. Such were the circumstances in which we took part in that incredible retreat.

The next morning we reached Pegu, but wisely drove on till we got to a small out-of-way cluster of huts a few miles beyond the town. We stopped there for the day, for it was simply impossible to

travel except under cover of night. The whole of that day Pegu was attacked by enemy bombers and fighters, and we watched the flames rising from the town and heard the enemy bombs exploding and the exchange of machine-gun fire between the British planes above and the Japanese troops below. Meanwhile, a few Japanese soldiers could be seen trudging along on foot; they were the sick and wounded and forgotten who were unable to keep up with the general retreat and so were left behind to follow as best they could. I witnessed this tragedy in an even more heartbreaking form when a group of army trucks started to leave in the evening and some of these abandoned men became so desperate that they tried to climb by force into them, whereupon the officers in the trucks pushed and even kicked them out till they dropped and lay limp and gasping on the roadside; the most heartbreaking part of it was that not a single vehicle which passed by took the slightest notice of them. I do not know what their fate was eventually. I tried to draw the attention of a Japanese officer accompanying me to these unfortunate men, but he replied that it was not his business to look after them.

We continued our journey shortly after sunset. It was only during that night that I realised the full horror, both actual and potential, of that chaotic flight. We headed for Waw, a small town near Pegu, and from there to a river we had to cross to get to Abya, another little town on the road to Moulmein. Then our own troubles really began. Every truck or bus carrying our belongings broke down beyond repair in the treacherous paddy fields so that they had to be abandoned together with all the baggage in them. When at last we reached the river bank it was packed for miles with the transport and troops waiting to get across, and there was just a single overworked ferry boat chugging back and forth to take a few vehicles and men across at a time. I was simply aghast at seeing this utter confusion. The moon was coming out brilliantly, and a small group of enemy planes would have been enough to work wholesale havoc among that swarming mass of vehicles and troops too tired and hungry to care what happened. If the British airmen also had not been too tired and hungry themselves to come over that night in force the result would have been murderous. It was a harrowing thought.

After a long wait during which my imagination ran wild we

were ferried across and so got to Abya where the next day the British planes caught us and kept us under constant machine-gun fire. From then on they gave us no respite at all; they were either chasing us and opening their guns on us while we were on the road or they hovered around and hunted for us when we stopped, and we spent a good part of the time running like mad for cover. When we did succeed in moving ahead it was generally across rugged fields and soft, slushy paddy fields where our cars slipped and went around in circles and the men had to get out and push; and then the enemy fighters sighted us again, and the planes screeched and swooped down, and the guns blazed, scattering us in all directions. We were really living like hunted animals.

Then on the night of April 28 Tinsa, my daughter, gave birth to her baby. The daily strain of the retreat had almost snapped her nerves, and we were actually rushing along in our cars one night when she felt her first pains and had to be taken to the nearest town, which happened to be Kyaikto. We reached the town just in time for the delivery.

When the mother and child were able to travel again, three days later, we left for Katun, a large village halfway to Moulmein, and there we found the other members of the Burmese group, Dr. Ba Han, Thakin Mya, U Nu, Thakin Lun Baw, U Hla Pe, Bandoola U Sein, and their families. The secretaries who came along with us were also there. All of us were immensely relieved to see that the whole group was safe and well. But Ambassador Ishii fell seriously ill in Katun. The Japanese wanted to leave him behind, just as they did with the sick and wounded we had seen on the way, but I protested firmly and waited till he was able to travel again with us.

✓ So our long trek progressed slowly, passing through one town or village after another, which had seen so many armies come and go in the past and so many dynasties rise and fall, Waw, Abya, Nyaungkhashe, Mokpalin, Kyaikto, Thaton, Katun, Martaban, till it ended in Moulmein and Mudon. We went across rivers and streams without bridges, the great Sittang River and those near Abya and Bilin, and then the Gulf of Martaban, driving through every kind of terrain while the enemy planes chased us relentlessly. We arrived in Moulmein in country boats late at night just after the town had been bombed the whole day. The streets were

deserted and rain was pouring down when we landed. As the bombing continued for two more days we decided to move on to Mudon, a quiet little town not far away from Moulmein. At last the retreat had ended for us and we were safe and sound physically, but our minds still remained terribly shaken and scarred by the nightmare we had lived through; materially, of course, we had lost everything except what we carried in a few personal suitcases.

I must point out one crucial fact that emerged from the retreat. We left Rangoon nearly a month after the anti-Japanese resistance had started and we travelled for over two weeks through four of the largest districts in Lower Burma, passing through numerous towns and villages on the way and going across the loneliest hills and jungles. We were a very small and conspicuous group with only a few small arms, and people recognised us and knew of our presence and also knew that we were standing by the Japanese in the war and therefore against the resistance. Most of the time we were completely exposed to an ambush either on the road or while resting in out-of-way spots. If only a single resistance fighter or partisan had fired a single shot at our little group, which had so many women and children and even a new-born child in it, we would as a group have been completely thrown into a panic and even stopped from continuing our journey. Only a few partisans could have massacred the whole lot of us. But not a shot was fired, not even at the Japanese and Indian soldiers travelling in similar small and isolated units. We did not even hear of the existence of a resistance in any of those places except at Kyaikto, where the police force reported to me that some boys had attempted to burn a little wooden bridge, failed, and then vanished altogether. Nothing whatever was heard of them after that abortive attempt at a demonstration, for it was really nothing more than that.

At every place we passed through we met friends and adherents, from whom we received the greatest help and hospitality and protection, everywhere the administration went on more or less normally and law and order prevailed. In Kyaikto, for example, where the baby was born and we spent three days, the entire police force was carrying on most loyally and it even held a parade to welcome us. One night there we heard a distant commotion and a bit of gunfire, but learnt the next morning that it was the work of

criminal elements who were trying to create a general panic in order to get a chance to loot, just as they had done when the administration broke down at the time the British fled in 1942. In Thaton and Mudon some Communist workers whose names had been mentioned in certain documents seized by the Japanese were arrested. That was all the resistance in those districts.

These facts prove once more what I have said before, that the anti-Japanese resistance, unlike the one against the British in 1942, was not a national rising; it was confined to a certain section led by the Burmese army and the Communists, which operated in the wake of the British forces advancing along the main routes from north to south and it did not spread to the southeastern areas to which we had retreated. The general population in those areas remained out of it till the end, and everything went on as before till then. It was only when the Japanese began to evacuate widely in preparation for a total withdrawal from Burma that the unarmed, unprotected masses sought protection and security by joining those who had the guns and were marching to victory, and not long after that the postwar nationwide surge for independence began. The resistance forces were then the only armed and organised group in the country. They were also on the winning side at the end of the war. They inevitably captured the great postwar nationalist movement in Burma.



Within the few weeks that had passed since we left Rangoon the Axis defences in Europe had crashed completely. Hitler and Mussolini were dead, Berlin had fallen, Germany had surrendered unconditionally, and Japan was preparing to surrender in the same way. In Burma the Japanese forces seemed to be only waiting for the final surrender in Tokyo. This was the situation when we arrived in Mudon.

Our wartime independent state was now only a name and a memory kept alive by a few of us who were virtually hiding in a small faraway town in the southeast of Burma. But the important fact for us was that we were still on Burmese soil; I was still the head of an independent state and the ministers with me still con-

stituted an independent Burmese government, and we resolved to keep our flag flying to the very last. So we continued functioning as far as practicable and kept in active touch with the administration in the nearby free districts, such as Moulmein, Thaton, and the Tenasserim area. In those parts the Burmese government continued to be real and effective.

√The most crucial task was, of course, to maintain law and order at all costs till the end came and a peaceful change-over which would not cause needless loss and suffering could take place. At that juncture the Japanese army also took a similar view. The absence of any active anti-Japanese resistance in the districts still under us made it possible for the administration there to carry on as usual.

The only sign of a resistance in these parts had occurred in Mudon before our arrival there. A young administrative officer had issued a proclamation declaring a revolt against the Japanese as well as the Burmese government, and then did nothing more. It was a crazy, impulsive act which led to the exposure of his plot and the arrest of himself and his little group. The district commissioner of Thaton and some resistance workers in that district were also rounded up at the same time. They were the victims of their own confused and addled minds; they had enough will and daring to plot a revolt and make an open avowal, but not enough to follow up that action to its logical conclusion by going underground and joining the resistance forces. Instead, they remained in their homes to be tamely caught by the Japanese. We tried our best to save them, and Ambassador Ishii backed us up, but evidently without much success, for we heard no more of the foolhardy young government officer and many of his comrades. As for the district commissioner, he was killed in an air raid in Moulmein.

From Mudon the remnant government followed the progress of the battles that were spreading across the country. We were now out of it all. As we saw it from our distance, the Burmese struggle was entering a new stage, the final outcome of which no one could yet foresee except that all the old forces and alignments were dissolving under the impact of the new facts and giving way to new ideologies and words learnt and used to suit the new situation. Outwardly, the struggle had ceased to be for the basic Burmese

goal of independence and had turned into a tangle of aims and objects, for the resistance was split into groups, and each group had its own aims: for some it was revenge against the Japanese, for some it was to have a share in the British victory; yet another group was eager to see a Soviet victory and the defeat of the fascist powers; there were also many who were swept into it by more personal reasons.

We continued to fear that the anticolonial struggle was in danger of getting lost in the general turmoil, which was exactly the British objective. This fact gave our little Burmese government in Mudon a new significance. It was transformed into a symbol of that national struggle. To proclaim that fact we celebrated the second anniversary of Burmese independence with proper ceremony in an open field where we would be in full view of the enemy raiders who were almost daily flying over the area. We erected an independence monument to perpetuate the memory of the struggle and the independence we had won. All Mudon was delighted to see the monument, which consisted of three magnificent teak pillars on which was carved the Burmese peacock by the best craftsman in the locality. But a certain officer of the Burmese army posted at Mudon after the war had his own views of historical monuments; he pulled down the pillars, destroyed the beautiful carvings, and sold the timber. It happened during U Nu's regime. I was told that U Nu, who had taken such an eager part in planning that monument, was nearly broken-hearted when he heard of this act of vandalism.

We knew that the end was imminent, and yet that did not lessen its fiery impact when it actually came in August 1945. It followed a swift succession of the most shattering world events, culminating in the epic of Iwo Jima and Okinawa and a few months later in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Manchuria was also swiftly overrun by the Soviet forces. Then, while we were still trying to recover our breath, we heard that Japan was suing for peace on any terms. It was really an apocalyptic ending.

✓ Although the war was practically over the British did not forget me. They tried to get rid of me before the fighting actually ceased. On August 12, just three days before the Japanese capitulation, a British plane circled leisurely above my house in Mudon and then flew away. I did not attach any significance to the incident because

the actual fighting had ceased. On the next afternoon U Nu and I were talking in the front room when we again heard the slow drone of planes approaching the house. As I had heard the same sound the day before I took no notice of it. Just then Yan Naing rushed in and told us that he had had a dream the previous night that a host of planes came to attack us and pressed U Nu and me to go into a shelter. Mainly to please him we did so.

✓ Just as we jumped into a shallow little ditch nearby, one of the planes dived low over the house and sent a stream of bullets into it. Then the other plane dived from another direction and opened fire similarly. This murderous crossfire went on for some time, the bullets raking every part of the house and blasting the roof to pieces. All of us were huddled together almost on top of one another in that tight little shelter, which was no more than a large mud hole, while the bullets tore past and riddled the ground around us. The attack stopped for a few minutes to give us the impression that it was over, but, refusing to take risks, we sought for better shelters and waited. In his hurry to get as far away from the house as possible, U Nu ran into a barbed-wire fence, with devastating consequences to his trousers. As we expected, the planes returned and repeated their crossfire till they nearly brought the whole house down. They were making absolutely certain that no one in the house or anywhere near it would remain alive.

After the attack the Japanese came to examine the damage. They estimated that there were over 200 bullet holes in the building. The whole town believed I was dead. To convince them that I was not I went to the football match that evening and took a walk through the town afterwards. The same night I removed to another house. The British were unable to repeat the attack, for two days later Japan had formally surrendered and the war was over.

It was on the evening of August 14 that Ambassador Ishii brought me a message from the Japanese government asking for my view of their decision to surrender, since the war was definitely lost. Without any hesitation I expressed my agreement with it. That same evening I called a meeting of the ministers and secretaries and passed on the information to them. All equally agreed that it was the right decision in the circumstances and

looked much relieved that the long mass ruin and misery was at last over.

Two days later I left Burma by the Thai-Burma railway in order to seek refuge in Japan. It took us two days to get to Thailand because we stopped for the night at a small labour settlement, as I have already related. I was sure that the little village and the Burmese labourers there would be my last sight of Burma, but I was too drained out to be sentimental about it.

Very early the next morning our train moved out of the settlement, yet a crowd had assembled to see us depart. It was then that I nearly broke down. In the state of mind I was in then it was a terribly tense moment for me. I tried to smile and say something, but could not. So I waved to them till I could no longer see them and they waved back. It was raining hard.

CHAPTER 15

Departure and Return

FLIGHT FROM BURMA

I found Thailand almost undamaged by the war. Except for a broken bridge or two in the heart of Bangkok there was hardly anything to show that the country had been for several years in the most devastating conflict in history. The Thais appeared to be completely carefree and unconcerned with the tremendous new storms already beginning to loom over the region around them. That, of course, has always been the way they have met and overcome every crisis that has overtaken the Southeast Asian region. They have a definite talent for riding a storm and emerging from it none the worse for having been in it. When all the great neighbouring nations were once crushed and enslaved by Western colonial nations the Thais alone succeeded in saving their freedom. It seemed now that this priceless talent for survival had saved them again. In fact, it did even more; it gave them a singular confidence in the future.

✓Saigon was entirely different. I had my first glimpse of the shape of things to come after the war in Vietnam, or Indo-China as it still was then, and I gathered that it was the same in Indonesia. From all accounts, those two peoples were maintaining the anti-colonial purpose of their national struggle and not allowing any of the enemy's talk of Japanese fascism to cloud it. They had more or less collaborated with the Japanese till the end of the war, and now the Japanese were collaborating with them by arming them to resist the return of the old imperialist powers to their lands.

On the day I stopped at Saigon a huge demonstration took place in the main square with people carrying innumerable signs and

banners and shouting all sorts of slogans. There were also among them armed men who marched in military formation. Compared with a Burmese political demonstration they were less emotional and more disciplined, and that in itself showed that their store of will and endurance was likely to last longer. You could see something already smouldering in the endless throng of people who marched into the square and joined in the demonstration and marched out again. I saw during those hours the beginning of the war against the French in Indo-China, which ended only nine years later with Dienbienphu.

After visiting my family, who were then staying in a French plantation in Chup in Cambodia, to bid them a last farewell I was flown on August 22 to Taiwan. We were racing against time so as to get to Japan before the 25th, when the American air occupation of that country would commence, after which no Japanese plane would be able to land there without the permission of the American forces.

We flew across a perfectly peaceful sea and were soon making our way through great masses of white foam-like clouds that seemed to fill the whole dazzling sky. I was dead tired and was on the point of falling asleep when I noticed vaguely a large shadow pass over our plane. A few moments later our plane dropped and rolled and a stream of small fiery objects streaked past just over it. Someone then shouted out that they were tracers fired at us. By now I was wide awake, but I remained absolutely frozen and convinced that the end had come. All my senses had gone cold and numb. Our plane kept losing height and limping till it got very close to the sea, but when the other plane flew away and the danger was over, it slowly rose again and continued its flight as if nothing had happened. I do not know whether it was the clever way in which our pilot had dodged the bullets that had saved us or whether the enemy plane just wanted to scare us and no more, but I went through all the sensations of having one of the narrowest escapes of my life.

We got to Taiwan the same afternoon. Soon I was informed of Netaji Bose's death in an air crash a few days before. My mind was so tired and blunted that I did not take in the full meaning of what I had heard. It was only later that I felt the whole force of the blow.

That evening I was nearly at breaking point both mentally and

physically. I had not had a real night's rest for weeks; I had left behind everyone and everything in Burma with the certainty that I should never see them again, and also left my family behind in a remote rubber plantation with the same certainty, and I had just heard that Bose was dead. The whole of my world was crashing around me and I was more certain than ever that I too should be dead very soon. The reason I am describing all this at such length is that I am going to relate a psychic experience I went through that night. To understand, it is essential to know the physical as well as mental state of the person having the experience.

Quite honestly, I do not think I was afraid to die; at any rate, I was not conscious of having such a fear. It may be that I was too used to the fear, having had so many close and incredible brushes with death or injury during the war. Moreover, I was seized by a sudden depression which made me feel that there was nothing left for me to live for. So that night I was like a man whose senses were deadened if not already dead, and whose mind was functioning almost somnambulistically. I was standing outside myself, as it were, and watching myself as I would someone else. One has to have such an experience personally to understand it.

Curiously enough, I enjoyed that evening in Taipeh, the food, the drinks, and the company. Most of all I enjoyed the hot Japanese bath I had before retiring; I regarded it rather macabrely as my last, funeral ablutions, knowing the terrible risk I would be running in flying to Japan the next day in defiance of the American order that all Japanese planes were to remain grounded. The Americans were already closing in around a good part of the main island. Relaxed physically as well as mentally by the boiling bath, I retired early, thoroughly tired out and thinking of nothing in particular, and soon I was in a deep and dreamless sleep.

Then the thing happened. I do not know whether I was dreaming or not, but suddenly I became aware of something bright and warm passing before my eyes. As I gazed at the softly glowing patch of light in a sort of half-dream, I saw my mother, who had died many years ago, standing in that light and gazing back at me. It is necessary to mention that I have a strong mother fixation. She was pointing at a big luminous clock. I looked at it and saw that the time was exactly half past twelve. Then slowly the apparition faded away and I awoke.

In the morbid state I was in then I could think of no other

explanation than that my mother's spirit still watching over me from somewhere had actually come to warn me that I should die at half past twelve the next day while flying to Japan. My inner upheaval was so violent that no other explanation occurred to me then. Now, of course, psychoanalysis offers one.

Next morning I got ready for the worst. The pilot of my plane told me of the peril of trying to go across to Japan, but in the true *bushido* tradition he added that he was ready to take me with some others if I had really decided to go. I replied almost mechanically that I had decided to take the chance whatever might happen.

And so our singular journey began. To avoid the American airplanes we took a roundabout route, hugging the Chinese coast all the way as far up as Korea, and then swinging around towards Japan from the north. It was very much like something out of an adventure story.

After a scrappy meal on the way I still felt so tired out that soon I was fast asleep. Judging from the distance we covered I must have slept for a long time; more accurately, it must have been a state of torpor resulting from utter exhaustion. Then suddenly I felt a succession of sharp bumps, the sort which occur when a plane flying across water first reaches land. I woke up to hear Kitazawa, the wonderful man who had accompanied me all the way from Rangoon and looked after me most diligently, shout in great relief and excitement that we had got safely across to Japan. Thoroughly awake now, I looked out and saw the gleaming fields and hills below us as the plane began to steady itself. Then something flashed across my mind and I looked at my watch. The time was half past twelve, exactly the hour that my mother had pointed out to me on the clock.

We landed on a military airfield close to Tokyo late in the evening.

IN HIDING

I was driven directly to the Imperial Military Headquarters. We could just crawl along because the streets were almost in darkness and swarming with trucks and military vehicles loaded to the brim with goods which were being carried away hurriedly from the city. I was eager to see the condition in which Tokyo and its inhabitants had come out of the war and also how they were taking their

defeat. During the greater part of the way I saw only an unending stretch of virtual emptiness on all sides, and I asked Kitazawa if we had not yet reached the city. He replied that we were passing through it. It was a horrifying sight. Until we got near the hub of the city it was just a charred, burnt-out wasteland with small groups of buildings separated by great gaps and bent shadowy figures carrying large loads in various directions. Everything in those streets looked as if it was going to break down at any minute, but that minute never came. The inborn strength of the Japanese character held firm and prevented a collapse, or even a general disorder. That evening I saw a great and proud nation in its first hours of utter defeat.

Even with the skies falling all around, Foreign Minister Shigemitsu remembered me and my plight as a fugitive in Japan. Under his personal instructions the Foreign Ministry took charge of me, and two days later Kitazawa, Kai, and one or two others took me in a jampacked train to Muikamatchi, a town in Niigata Prefecture in the north. There I was handed over to Imanari, an influential local youth leader, who had undertaken to shelter me with the help of a group of demobilised young army officers. That very night I was taken to Ishiuchi, an out-of-the-way little village near a thickly wooded hill. The village cemetery lies at the foot of the hill, and there is a Buddhist temple called Yokushoji within that cemetery. I was lodged there. It proved to be a perfect hide-out, and the Oshosan, or temple priest, and his family, who lived in the temple, looked after me in a way I shall never forget.

owing to my utterly foreign appearance and still more to the fact that my Japanese was positively shocking, while the villagers did not know any other language, I was strictly enjoined not to try to meet or communicate with anyone outside our little set. Meanwhile, the story was spread that I was a Manchurian scholar whose entire family and home had been destroyed in one of the bombing raids in Tokyo and I myself had partially lost my power of speech and also my sanity. This was such a dramatic and touching story that the greater part of the locality heard it with the utmost compassion for me. They were asked to respect my suffering and leave me alone, and they did so. The people who came to worship at the temple watched me from a distance and smiled to show their

sympathy, and I smiled back rather ritually. Thus throughout the days I spent there I was known in the neighbourhood as the dumb and queer-headed foreign war victim who had come to spend the rest of his life in the shadow of a little village temple. I am sure they saw in my plight a partial reflection of their own and thus I became a part of their own searing story. This was revealed by the way they behaved whenever they caught sight of me during my lonely walks in the woods. They would smile and bow and show in many ways that they felt bound to me by a common grief and loss.

As for Imanari and his group, they were tireless in their care for me. The Oshosan would go out regularly to procure somehow the things I needed and he generally succeeded. In the evenings he would teach me Japanese, and in turn I would teach him English. He wanted badly to improve his English because he ran the village school and was anxious to cut a big figure among the local people. As for the young army officers in the group, at least one of them would visit me every other day or so, bringing me the newspapers and discussing with me the latest events and their implications.

I must mention a fact which perhaps added to my good fortune. It happened that I was the only important foreign war fugitive in Japan who had not yet fallen into the hands of the occupation authorities. The young officers protecting me came to regard this fact as a personal triumph for them, and they were determined that I should not be caught while I was in their keeping. Now that their lives had been emptied of almost everything, this small matter of protecting me seemed to fill that emptiness a good deal and give them something to work for; moreover, it was one way of beating the Americans.



It is an elementary fact that, as in the case of individuals, nations also have what might be loosely called their moments of truth; that is, they reveal their total collective character at such moments, either a moment of victory or one of defeat or of some similar crisis. I had known the Japanese during their victory, and now I was seeing them in an utter state of defeat and nakedness. I was seeing it in the very heart of the country, in a village where

that heart was most visible. Thus I was able to observe it closely and learn a few facts. There was nothing new or profound about those facts; I just happened to discover in their behaviour something I had never seen before—something directly in conflict with all I had seen among their military men in Burma. In the bewildering transformation occurring in the Japanese behaviour patterns, which was of course inevitable in a time of defeat, there was a common basic change which led to all the other changes. In itself, the change was a simple one, but its effect was to transform the whole national outlook and policy. Putting it in the simplest way, the Japanese revealed for the first time since they had become a great power a capacity to face facts and to accept them totally. Anyone who had dealt with them during the war as I did will know that they never showed such a capacity then. It was their refusal to face Burmese facts which led to their disastrous relations with the Burmese.

During the war the Japanese armed forces, convinced of their power, lived in a perpetual fantasy and tried to shape reality to fit that fantasy instead of shaping the fantasy to fit reality. They were never able to understand that every nation lives in accordance with its own facts, and what are facts in Japan may prove to be sheer nonsense in Southeast Asia. That was one of the causes of their failure in the whole of that region.

Now the military defeat had swept away the militarist clique which had committed those blunders and the people were at last free to judge for themselves the new facts. They accepted all of them, their own as well as those of others, Japanese as well as American and British and Russian, whether they liked them or not, and adjusted to them, the fact of their total defeat and the American occupation with all the consequences openly, totally, and some would even say servilely.

I saw from my faraway nook a great people turning themselves into something a little better than serfs in their own country without the slightest sign of mental or moral conflict. I will mention one event which shocked me particularly. Soon after my arrival I heard that the Japanese government had allotted ten million yen to set up a recreation centre in Hibiya Park for the use of the occupation forces, and that five thousand hostesses would be employed to entertain those forces. My immediate reaction was

that the Japanese had lost even their last shred of self-respect as a result of the defeat. The centre, however, never came into existence.

√ Even in the little village nearby this sense of total surrender and submission existed. For instance, when the occupation authorities ordered all weapons to be turned in at the nearest police station, the Oshosan, looking very humiliated and indignant, told me that the whole of our village rushed at once to the station to hand over every article they owned which could be regarded as a weapon, right down to kitchen knives and sticks, till the police persuaded them to take back the articles intended for domestic use.

The Oshosan also had a momentary lapse once. One evening he asked me to compose for him an English speech to be delivered at a reception the village school intended to give some visiting American education officers. He wanted a glowing speech in praise of the Americans and the way they were teaching democracy and other Western concepts to the Japanese and so on. I refused to write so servilely for his own sake, and instead gave him the usual sort of formal welcome address. He agreed with me in the end.

It was the same story everywhere, the conquerors imposing their will implacably on the conquered and the conquered submitting to it almost masochistically. The Emperor was humiliated, all the Japanese including the Emperor were vilified and treated with the utmost scorn and contempt by the American press, streets were cleared and all traffic stopped at certain hours for the use of the highest occupation officers, and all the rights and privileges of conquest were claimed and received by the conquerors. The Japanese submitted without a qualm to these facts of their new life.

This unspeakable humiliation went on as long as I was there. It was only many years later when the result of such utter realism on the part of the Japanese appeared in the miracle of their postwar economic recovery and the great leap forward that has taken them to the final stage in their total recovery by opening the way to a political and military comeback that the world realised the far-sightedness of their postwar policy. At times I wonder whether, in the long view, the Japanese defeat in the war was really a defeat in the historical sense, or whether, by teaching them a new realism

and destroying the stranglehold of the militarists, it has not led them to their true greatness and place among the nations.

✓ I spent most of the long days in that far-off village temple in complete isolation, without books except for a mouldy bible the Oshosan had brought from somewhere, with no real companionship and absolutely nothing to do or to look forward to. In course of time the feeling of being in hiding but free wore away, and another feeling crept over me, that of being not really free but leading a buried existence, for I was cut off from everything and forever as long as I remained in hiding, and there was no end to those days as a fugitive that I could see. I could not continue to hide indefinitely, for apart from its physical impossibility it made no sense at all; as time passed it lost its purpose and meaning and became only a burden to me as well as to those who were looking after me.

✓ With such thoughts in my mind I felt more and more its corrosive effects. Our group discussed the situation thoroughly. All of us realised that I could not go on forever living in a hole like that, but the majority were against any surrender to the Americans, which, as we saw it then, would straightaway lead me to the gallows. I told them that I would be in British hands, and there was now a Labour government in Britain and a Burmese ministry in Burma, and these facts might soften the blow a bit for me. Some suggested that I should escape to China, from which I might either make my way back to Burma or join up with one of the other Asian revolutionary struggles. But after playing with this idea for a while I rejected it.

The interminable emptiness and monotony of my existence in hiding was nearly driving me mad, and I finally made up my mind to put an end to it somehow. It was in the last week of December that Kai, from the Foreign Office, came to see me. After talking the matter over for a whole night we agreed that the best course in the circumstances was to surrender myself to the British section of the Occupation Authorities in Tokyo. The young officers heard this decision with mixed feelings. However, it had been made, and the next day we held an uproarious farewell party, which went on till the moment of departure.

Imanari and I left by train for Tokyo that evening, and the next day I surrendered to Colonel Figsse, of the British Occupation

Forces. By then I was completely worn out by the many months I had spent as a fugitive in hiding. I expected to be roughly treated and insulted, and I had a strong dose of poison hidden in the inner lining of my cap to be used should the situation become intolerable. Figsesse discovered it and took it away.

Things, however, turned out very differently as long as I was in British hands. To use the British phrase, Figsesse proved to be a perfect officer and a gentleman, and he showed me great courtesy and consideration. Eventually I was made over to the American intelligence section, which sent me to Sugamo Prison. It happened just before the end of 1945.

I wish also to mention with gratitude that the British treated with similar generosity my family, whom they found and kept under detention for a short period in Bangkok at the end of the hostilities. After having searched them thoroughly for any hidden possessions, such as weapons, secret documents, illegally gained gold or jewelleries, and having found none, the family were supplied with every need and shown every courtesy due to their position. When at last they were sent back to Rangoon two large planes were put at their disposal so that they could take away with them every piece of their property. "You had better take away whatever you can," the officer reminded them with genuine solicitude. "You will need all of it desperately in Burma." They did so, right down to their bedding and pots and pans, and they found that they did really need them later. In Rangoon also, Rev. Appleton, whose office of information was occupying the house where we had lived before, vacated it at once and handed it back to my wife. The memory of such acts of consideration shown so spontaneously during a helpless hour lingers on.

SUGAMO PRISON

So my long wartime journey, which began in a prison in Burma, came to an end in a prison in Japan. Sugamo was the largest and most modern Japanese prison, and the Occupation Powers in Japan turned it into a detention camp for all whom they regarded as war criminals. It was run in the American way. This happened particularly in the section allotted to the *détenus* who were not Japanese, with the result that we who were kept there derived many material gains from it. Thus we were given an American

officer's rations, which, needless to say, were remarkably good; I had never seen so much good food brought from thousands of miles away and fed daily to people at the other end of the earth, nor had I seen so much thrown away as leftovers. There was also a library with quite a number of excellent books and periodicals; this was the greatest compensation most of us got out of our long ordeal. There were also smaller compensations—a weekly motion picture show, cheap and abundant cigarettes, clean sanitary conditions, and so on. All these made Sugamo during the occupation years different from any other prison in the East.

All the same, it was very much a prison. The rules were strict, harsh, and numerous, the gaolers often arrogant and very conscious that they had won the war; the cells were narrow and cold, the lights too dim for reading at night, the periods of confinement long and claustrophobic, the prisoners being permitted to leave their cells only for their meals and an hour of exercise when we walked in pairs around and around in a circle and had a chance to talk to the one walking with you and occasionally with someone nearby. On the whole, however, and taking into account the feelings running then, life in Sugamo was not too unbearable. One slowly learnt to take the punishment for having lost the war, and for me there were the library and a new kind of fellowship forged out of a common fate to make up somewhat for the deprivations. A good number of the other prisoners were men of wide learning and sensibility, and we called our section Sugamo University. I learnt there about many new contemporary facts while I also on my part contributed what I knew of the East. This deeper, more inward kind of life, which I had missed for years, had a curiously liberating effect on me.

But there were also the grim days. For me the worst of them occurred when I was put on menial duty in the kitchen and made to wash all the plates and trays after each meal for a whole day at a time. I objected to it on principle, for it was a discriminatory act, some other racial groups being exempted from this sort of work, and there were even some who were not given any work at all. I refused to put up with such discrimination, pointing out that, as the Supreme Commander of the Burmese army, I was clearly exempted from such duty by the Geneva rules. The result was that I was at once placed in solitary confinement in a cold, bare, book-

less little cell and fed with gruel or something similarly revolting up till the very day I left the prison.

Yet even those last gloomy periods had some small breaks now and then. For instance, late one evening an American on the prison staff who happened to be passing my cell told me in a whisper from outside not to be down-hearted because they were setting free a lot of people held in detention. I thanked him for his words of encouragement. Guessing from my voice that I was not a Japanese, he asked where I had come from.

"Burma," I replied.

"In which state is that?" he continued. At first I did not know how to answer that question. Then recovering I said, "In its own state, which is in Southeast Asia." The man laughed heartily, and saying "Good, good, you'll be back there soon," walked away. It was quite a revealing encounter in the dark.

Another American on the staff, who was about to leave the prison to return home, actually came to see me in my cell before he left. When he heard me raging against the whole lot of them, he replied almost apologetically, "Don't misunderstand us. We are only carrying out our military duty. Now I'm glad this duty is over for me."

There was also the young officer, whose name I believe was Lt. Bernard, on whose report I had been put into solitary confinement. He did his best to show that he personally had nothing against me. These few individual gestures in a war prison reveal much of the universal human condition, particularly the human heart in its most human moments, which no war can completely obliterate. Those three men came to see and speak to me at such a moment.

At the end of July 1946, Colonel Figesse took me away from the prison. We went to the British embassy, where the ambassador read out to me an order from the British government pardoning all my wartime offences. From then on Figesse treated me in a way consonant with my former position. I received similar treatment throughout my entire journey to Burma. On August 1, I landed in Rangoon and was back again with my family and everything I had once thought I had lost forever. For me the war was at last over, leaving only its dreams and a few fading shadows to haunt me.

A TESTAMENT OF FAITH

Extraordinarily, Sugamo by some strange catalysis widened my outlook. It did so largely by giving me an opportunity to appraise the forces that were reshaping the new postwar world. I learnt to see things more globally, if I may put it that way, a fact which is proved by a sermon I delivered at a Sunday service held in the prison. This sermon will make a good conclusion to my story, for it will show better than anything else I have said so far the perspective I gained finally out of the war. It might even be regarded as a testament of global faith.

Before those Sunday services started we had been allowed to attend on Sunday mornings either a Catholic or a Protestant service or both. Nearly all of us attended both just to get out of our cells for an hour or so. Soon the Protestant service ran into a crisis. We kept away from it, or rather from the clergyman who conducted it, and he also decided to keep away from us. He was that kind of clergyman, the sort who believes that God, like the Babbitts, lives on an American Main Street. We arranged to take over the services ourselves, and by great luck were allowed to do so. All of us, Christian, Buddhist, Mormon, atheist, or anything else, joined in with a will; someone, a Zen Buddhist as I remember, played the organ; a Mormon took charge of the hymn books; yet another, whose religion I never discovered, led the singing—at least his voice was loudest—while all sang or tried to; and passages from some sacred writing were reverently read. At the end a few of us were asked to deliver the Sunday sermon. The new service gave us a great sense of release and comfort, so when I was asked to speak I readily agreed.

First I thought of my subject. I should be addressing a rather unusual congregation. It would be a mixture of East and West, men who had already learnt a lot in the hard way, as they say, and were tense and unresponsive and decidedly inclined to believe that there was nothing more left worth believing in. Also, the way the Japanese were being kicked around by the Occupation Powers, who were clearly carrying out a policy "to teach the Asians by teaching the strongest among them," coming as it did soon after what had happened in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, made many Asians think more about race relations and wonder whether it was

the Japanese guilt or the Japanese skin that was being punished so savagely. After weighing all these factors I decided to speak about the relations between the East and the West in an abstract way and leave it to the congregation to follow it up concretely for themselves. Here is the sermon as I wrote and delivered it:

The earth is round. Consequently, its inhabitants going about on it do so with their feet turned towards the earth's centre, which means that to those living on one half of it those on the other half are standing upside down. My geography teacher at school used to explain this fact in a way I have never forgotten. If a man, he said, were to dig a hole in Piccadilly Circus in London and kept on digging till he reached the other side of the earth, he would come out feet first somewhere at the furthest edge of Asia or in Australia; in other words, standing on his head there.

This physical phenomenon of a round polarised globe with its halves facing opposite ways is the right starting point for all our fundamental thinking on matters connected with our earthbound existence. To begin with, it establishes the fact that, like the earth itself, nothing on it, if one takes a total view, is flat and the same everywhere; that, again taking the same total view, all things are round and consist of opposites balancing each other at the two ends; that truth itself is round in that sense, and so is life, and so on. If, as Lenin says, dialectics is the science of opposites, then the world and all it contains are dialectically built.

Starting that way, we begin to understand the kind of world we are living in; for instance, that all truths in one part of the world have their opposites in some other part, and it takes two or more such opposites to make up the complete rounded thing which alone is the whole truth everywhere. Another important fact which follows is that, just as the West sees the East standing with its wrong end up in most things, the East also is certain that it is the West that is ridiculously upside down in those things. We must understand this mutual view clearly; and we must not stop there, but know that really both are standing the right way and according to their place in an orange-shaped, black-and-white world. The difference is part of the law of opposites which keeps our world bal-

anced and right, and something in it goes wrong only when we meddle with that law by expecting those on the other side of the globe to walk or live or think generally in the way we do. When those on one side try to do this sort of thing, it is really they who are standing on their heads and not anyone else. They are the narcissists, as André Gide would say, seeking their own reflection everywhere.

It follows that West and East are in a fundamental sense made to think as they live geographically, that is, facing opposite ways. And this line dividing the two is not always geographical, but crisscrosses all over, for the Western or the Eastern man is really a psychological product who may exist either in the West or in the East. It is essentially a question of the mind and how it works. Again, East and West have become two opposites in a world composed of opposites and kept balanced by them. These are the simple facts which, if only remembered a little more often, would end most of our racial problems. If forgotten, however, or if we try to change them, both our two worlds are, by all the immutable logic of history, doomed. They will go on being the lopsided things they now are, wobbling and colliding eternally because each is a half acting as if it were the whole globe; or worse still, as if the other half were not real and separate, but only a shadow trailing behind it across half the earth. It is actually an attempt to flatten the earth at the sides and change its laws.

I have put the matter squarely by describing the two hemispheres as opposites held together in tension. Like what they are geographically, like the thesis and antithesis they are dialectically, their faces are turned in opposite directions mentally too, each evolving an opposite and complementary truth. Every truth in this round world has its opposite somewhere.

I will now give some instances of these opposite truths. Three basic ones will do. Being basic they will deal with those first truths with which man starts to do all his wider thinking. The East mentioned in them will actually mean the Buddhist and to an extent the Hindu portion of it, because that is the East I belong to and know.

✓ The first of these three truths is metaphysical and is about man's relations as a personalised being with the infinite im-

personal reality outside. The opposites here are that while for the West, man or the individual exists in the centre of reality with the whole cosmos and everything in it revolving round him and the single issue of his fate, for the East the self or the individual is the great illusion existing only as a shadow and a snare to obstruct our vision of that reality. For the West man is the central fact, "the heir to all creation," and a God dies to save him, whereas for the East man exists at the edge of reality and he often has to die in order that God should live. Again, the West sees reality as a being, changeless and individual, and the East sees it as a transcendental ever-changing flow and becoming.

✓ The second truth is evolutionary and relates to God or the absolute in any form it may take. Here as opposites we have the Western concept of God who creates man, whereas in the East it is man who creates God, either by becoming one through infinite renunciation and enlightenment, or by mystical realisation, or just pantheistically.

✓ The third set of truths appearing as opposites concern man's relations with his categories, with life and death, time and eternity, and so on. Reality for the West exists in time, in life here and now, and in a future which hangs on life in the present so that man must live all of it to the utmost in time in order to live it still more abundantly in eternity. These are the categories that rule him. For the East eternity far outweighs time, so that the importance of death as the road leading to eternity and its realities far outweighs that of life. Just as the life urge dominates and drives the West headlong, the death urge explains a great deal of the Eastern behaviour.

✓ I have dealt with a very big subject in a very broad and hurried way, and much therefore has been either generalised or left out altogether. My last words at this moment are that we should not go awhoring again after those false gods who have clearly messed up the world and our lives too, but to search the atlas diligently and reverently and learn the truth from its maps and facts, especially from the greatest fact of all, that the earth and its truths are round, that nothing is true by itself but only as part of a whole, and that whole is made up of opposites that balance and complete each other.

APPENDIXES

by Theda Maw

GLOSSARY

- Adipadi** *see* Naingandaw Adipadi
- AFPFL** Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League
- Anashin** title given to Dr. Ba Maw when he was elected "total leader" of the Sinyetha Party for the duration of the war, at the June 1940 Mandalay conference
- Aphwe** organisation
- Asiayone** organisation
- Arakanese** one of the national races of Burma
- Azad Hind** (Hindi) Free India government, proclaimed by Netaji Bose, October 21, 1943
- Azad Hind Fauj** (Hindi) Free India Army
- Bama Khit** *Burmese Era*, official government newspaper
- BDA** Burma Defence Army, pre-independence, 1942-43.
- BIA** Burma Independence Army, pre-BDA, 1942.
- BNA** Burma National Army, post-independence, 1943-45.
- Bo Bo Aung** legendary mystic with supernatural powers
- Bo** military title for officers
- Bogyoke** commander-in-chief
- Boh** military officer
- Bo-hmu** colonel
- Burma Baho Government** BIA administration formed by Bo Mogyo, March 23, 1942
- Chalo Delhi** (Hindi) "To Delhi," Azad Hind patriotic slogan
- Chettyar** Indian money lender, landowner
- Chin** one of the national races of Burma
- Chindits, Wingate's Chindits** Chin troops under Major-General Wingate
- Chwe Tat** "Sweat Army"; labour contingents
- Coolies** manual labourers, mostly South Indians imported by British as cheap labour
- Dacoit** bandit. **Sea dacoit** pirate
- Dai Toa Kyoeiken** (Japanese) Greater East Asia Co prosperity Sphere
- Dama cap** cloth cap designed by Dr. Ba Maw, as Sinyetha Party symbol
- Dama Tat** "Army of Knives"; Sinyetha party youth organisation

- Daw** title used before the names of older women
- Dobama** "We Burmese"; patriotic slogan of the Dobama Asiayone
- Dobama Asiayone** widely known as the Thakin party, one of the major pre-W.W.II political organisations
- Dobama Sinyetha Asiayone** national political coalition set up in mid-1942
- Dobama song** national anthem
- Freedom Bloc** wartime nationalist alliance of the Sinyetha party, Dobama Asiayone, and All-Burma Students Organisation, created October 1939
- GCBA** General Council of Buddhist Associations
- Gandhiji** Mahatma Gandhi (-ji is an augmentative suffix)
- Hintha** mythical and heraldic bird; the national bird of the Mon Kingdom of Pegu
- Htwet Yat Gaing** "Association of the Way Out"; the Burmese name of the Freedom Bloc
- INA** Indian National Army (the English name of the Azad Hind Fauj)
- Jai Hind** (Hindi) "Long Live India"; patriotic slogan of the Azad Hind government
- Jan Baz** (Hindi) suicide squad of the INA
- Kachin** one of the national races of Burma
- Kai Butai** (Japanese) civil defence corps created and controlled by the Japanese
- Kamikaze** (Japanese) pilots dedicated to perform suicide attacks
- Karen** one of the national races of Burma
- Kempetai** (Japanese) military police
- Ko** title used before names of younger men
- Let-yone Tat** "Strong-arm Force"; pre-W.W.II political volunteer organisation of the Dobama Asiayone, later title of wartime labour force
- Mahabama Asiayone** Greater Burma Organisation; expanded from Dobama Sinyetha Asiayone in 1944, as a national united front. Dr. Ba Maw's postwar party also used this name.
- Minami Kikan** (Japanese) secret organisation created by the Japanese Imperial Army to carry out their Burmese project, headed by Bo Mogyo, whose code name was Matsuo Minami
- Mon** one of the national races of Burma
- Myochit Party** Patriot Party, one of the major pre-W.W.II political organisations
- Nagani** Red Dragon Book Club, a youth group and study circle with socialist ideas, established December 1937

- Naingandaw Adipadi** "Head of State", official title of Dr. Ba Maw, 1943-45
- National Liberation Council** a coalition of non-Communist, anti-totalitarian, Burmese and other nationalities' organisations, leading armed resistance against the Ne Win military regime, 1965 to present
- Netaji** (Hindi) title of Subhas Chandra Bose (neta, leader; -ji, augmentative suffix)
- NUF** National United Front
- Oka** (Japanese) rocket-propelled piloted aircraft bombs, used in kamikaze attacks
- Oshosan** (Japanese) temple priest
- Paddy** unhusked rice
- Pa-O** one of the national races of Burma
- PBF** Patriot Burmese Forces
- PVO** People's Volunteer Organisation
- Pandal** marquee made of bamboo, for temporary use at any crowded occasion
- RUSU** Rangoon University Students Union
- Saya** doctor, teacher, master; title used before men's names
- Sayadaw** Buddhist presiding abbot, also religious title
- Saw** title used before Karen men's names
- Sawbwa** hereditary ruler of a Shan state
- Sepoy** Indian mercenary in British army
- Shan** one of the national races of Burma
- Shutsu-jin-shiki** (Japanese) leaving-for-the-front ceremony, in accordance with Japanese military tradition
- Sinyetha** proletarian
- Sinyetha Party** Proletarian Party, Dr. Ba Maw's party, one of the major pre-W.W.II political organisations
- Tat** army
- Talaing** synonym for Mon
- Tenno Heika** (Japanese) Emperor
- Thabye** Eugenia leaves, which have ceremonial and religious significance
- Thakin** master; originally a personal title referring to British colonials, then adopted as an anticolonial title by members of the Dobama Asiayone
- Thakin Party** *see* Dobama Asiayone
- Thanmani Tat** "steel corps"; RUSU youth corps organised by Yan Naing, 1938
- Thingyan** Burmese New Year, three-day ceremony including April 12, also called Water Festival

Thwe Tat "blood army"; regular military units

Thwe thauk blood-drinking ceremony; an ancient Burmese warrior's oath and communion

U prefix used before the names of older men

Wunthanu "racially faithful one"; patriotic title used by members of the GCBA and the Sinyetha Party

YMBA Young Men's Buddhist Association, formed after the pattern of the YMCA, later became a full-fledged nationalist movement

HISTORICAL OUTLINE

1824, 1852

British conquer Lower Burma.

1885

NOV-DEC 3 British annex Upper Burma, seize King Thibaw and take him to Madras, India, where he later died in exile.

1886

JAN 1 Conquest of Burma officially proclaimed by Lord Dufferin, Viceroy of India. Burma declared to be part of the British Empire, to be administered by officers appointed by Viceroys and Governors-General of India.

1897

Upper and Lower Burma constituted as a single Lieutenant-Governorship, with Provincial Government and Legislative Council.

1906

Young Men's Buddhist Association (YMBA) founded.

1917

JUNE Antifootwear campaign started (as anti-British protest) by U Thein Maung, Secretary of the YMBA.

1918

U Ottama starts nationalist campaign.

1920

SEPT General Council of Buddhist Associations (GCBA) founded at YMBA Annual Conference: President, U Chit Hlaing; Vice-president, U Ba Pe.

DEC Students' strike begins at Rangoon University and spreads throughout the country.

1922

GCBA splits over the questions of Dyarchy and boycott of the elections to the first Burma Legislative Council.

Twenty-one Party formed by U Ba Pe.

1923

JAN 2 Dyarchy, or Montagu-Chelmsford, reforms inaugurated. Burma becomes a Governor's Province with a Legislative Council.

1925

Soe Thein GCBA formed by U Soe Thein.

1926

Home Rule Party formed by Tharrawaddy U Pu.

1927

Soe Thein GCBA organises movement for non-payment of taxes among peasants.

1930

Dobama Society formed as a student nationalist group.

MAY Race riots between Burmese and Indians, and Burmese and Chinese.

DEC 22 Saya San rebellion begins in Tharrawaddy district.

1931

Saya San captured, imprisoned in Tharrawaddy Jail, and brought to trial. Dr. Ba Maw is chief defence counsel for Saya San and other leaders.

NOV 16 Saya San and other leaders executed.

NOV 27–JAN 12 Burma Round Table Conference held in London to discuss and draft new constitution for Burma.

1932

NOV General elections contested on the issue of separation from India.

1933

NOV 29–DEC 20 Delegation goes to London to discuss separation and new constitution.

1934

Dr. Ba Maw becomes Minister of Education.

1935

Government of Burma Act passed; new constitution created.
Dobama Asiayone formed, a union of Dobama Society and All Burma Youth League.

1936

FEB Rangoon University Students Union (RUSU) strikes.
Socialism and Marxism begin in Burma.
Sinyetha Party formed by Dr. Ba Maw.
Marxist groups formed by Thakin Soe and Thakin Than Tun, and contacts established with the Communist Party in India.
Nga-Bwint-Saing (Five Flowers) Party, or United GCBA, is formed and led by U Ba Pe.
Nov General elections held.

1937

APRIL 1 Dr. Ba Maw becomes first Prime Minister of Burma. Constitution of 1935 comes into operation. Burma officially separated from India.

1938

Myochit Party formed by U Saw.
Japanese first approach Dr. Ba Maw politically.
JULY Burmese-Muslim race riots. Oilfield workers strike.
DEC RUSU strikes.

1939

JAN Students' demands refused by Dr. Ba Maw.
Japanese again approach Dr. Ba Maw politically.
FEB Dr. Ba Maw's government falls. U Pu becomes Prime Minister.
SEPT Thakin Ba Hein and two students propose to Dr. Ba Maw a wartime alliance of the Sinyetha, Dobama, and Students organizations.
OCT-NOV Burma-Japan Society formed in Tokyo; President, Dr. Thein Maung; Secretary, Bo Mogyo. Dr. Thein Maung returns with firm assurances of Japanese aid for Burmese independence campaign, and secret contacts begin in earnest.
OCT Freedom Bloc officially formed: Dr. Ba Maw, President, and Aung San, Secretary.
NOV Freedom Bloc request for special legislative session to consider the war situation turned down by Government.

DEC Freedom Bloc becomes full-fledged national movement, holds mass meetings and demonstrations throughout Burma.

1940

JAN Freedom Bloc solidly united.

Aung San speaks to Dr. Ba Maw of a secret Thakin group's desire for foreign military aid.

Defence of Burma Act promulgated to extend arbitrary police powers of the Government. Governor announces British war policy for Burma.

Sinyetha Party, Thakin Party, and Communist wing of Thakin Party issue statements on war and independence. Myochit Party issues less strong statement.

FEB 23 Burma Legislature session on war and independence.

APRIL Dr. Ba Maw informs Japanese of Freedom Bloc readiness to organise armed uprising.

MAY Mogyo arrives in Rangoon.

Ramgarh session of the Indian National Congress, attended by Aung San, Yan Naing, Thakin delegation.

Thakin Party conference in Tharrawaddy district.

JUNE Sinyetha Party conference in Mandalay. Dr. Ba Maw elected Anashin.

Aung San talks to Dr. Ba Maw about plans for going abroad.

JULY Freedom Bloc leaders arrested. Thakin Than Tun, Thakin Soe, Thakin Nu, Dr. Thein Maung.

Dr. Ba Maw resigns from Burma Legislature.

Freedom Bloc transformed into underground movement.

Governor makes statement on dominion status for Burma.

AUG Dr. Ba Maw arrested in Rangoon, taken immediately to Mandalay; goes before Criminal Court, to be tried under Defence of Burma Rules; sentenced to imprisonment.

Aung San leaves secretly for Amoy.

SEPT Dr. Ba Maw transferred to Rangoon Central Jail.

Mogyo meets Let Ya, arranges for Aung San transfer to Tokyo.

U Pu's government falls. U Saw becomes Prime Minister. Arrests all opposition leaders under Defence of Burma Rules.

OCT Dr. Ba Maw transferred to Mogok Jail.

Nov Aung San meets Mogyo in Tokyo.

Minami Kikan formed under Mogyo.

1941

MAR Aung San returns to Burma to recruit more comrades.

Let Ya, Yan Naing, La Yaung, Bo Mo, leave with Aung San.

Japanese decide Burma is an inseparable part of their planning for Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere.

MID-YEAR Thirty Comrades begin training on Hainan Island.

SEPT Thirty Comrades complete training on Hainan Island.

Let Ya, Yan Naing, La Yaung, Zeya, Min Swe leave for Tokyo for final training.

OCT Let Ya, Yan Naing, and others leave Tokyo and arrive in Bangkok.

Yan Naing and Bo Mo sent back immediately to Tokyo.

JUNE Governor issues declaration on Burma's constitutional advance.

AUG-SEPT Atlantic Charter appears. Churchill denies its application to the British colonies.

OCT-NOV U Saw visits London.

NOV British Secretary of State for Burma makes an official statement on Dominion Status for Burma.

DEC Japanese S.E. Asian invasion begins.

Thirty Comrades assemble in Bangkok. Minami Kikan dissolved, BIA formally created.

1942

JAN Yan Naing's BIA unit lands at Victoria Point.

U Saw arrested in Haifa. Sir Paw Tun becomes Prime Minister.

FEB Mogyo and Aung San's BIA unit cross Thauung-yin river.

Fall of Martaban. British retreat begins.

MAR Fall of Rangoon. Mogyo and BIA enter Rangoon. Mogyo announces creation of the Burma Baho Government, Rangoon. Thakin Tun Oke appointed Chief Administrator.

Battle of Shwedaung. Bo Yan Naing and his forces win major victory over British.

APRIL Dr. Ba Maw escapes from Mogok Jail.

Allied commanders meet in Shwebo to plan final retreat routes to China and India.

APRIL-JUNE BIA reign of terror.

MAY British officially terminate Burma campaign.

Dr. Ba Maw comes out of hiding, meets Japanese troops, goes to Mandalay.

JUNE Dr. Ba Maw and Aung San hold meetings with Japanese Army Command in Maymyo. Burmese Provisional Administrative Committee formed. Dr. Ba Maw appointed head.

BIA and its administrative creations dissolved and BDA formed.

BIA reign of terror ends.

Mogyo leaves Burma.

JULY BIA disbands officially.

AUG Burmese government established with Dr. Ba Maw as head.

Dobama Sinyetha Asiayone formed.

BDA officially comes into existence.

1943

JAN 28 Prime Minister Tojo announces to Japanese Diet that Burma will be recognised as independent state within year.

MAR Dr. Ba Maw leads delegation to Japan and meets Emperor Hirohito and Prime Minister Tojo.

MAY 8 Formal announcement of formation of Independence Preparatory Commission.

JULY Dr. Ba Maw meets Netaji Bose and Prime Minister Tojo in Singapore; Shan States are returned to Burma.

MID-JULY Independence Preparatory Commission approves final draft of new constitution, and unanimously elects Dr. Ba Maw first Head of State.

AUG 1 Declaration of Burmese Independence, promulgation of the new constitution, inauguration of the Naingandaw Adipadi, Declaration of War on Britain and the United States, and signing of the Treaty of Alliance between Japan and Burma.

Burma's New Order Plan published.

SEPT-OCT Dr. Ba Maw informed of anti-Japanese resistance movement by its leaders.

OCT 21 Netaji Bose proclaims establishment of the Azad Hind Government.

NOV 5-6 Greater East Asia Conference in Tokyo. Dr. Ba Maw leads Burmese delegation.

1944

JAN 6 Netaji Bose moves Azad Hind Government and INA to Rangoon.

Mahabama Party formed.

FEB INA begins Indian invasion.

Japanese Army attempts to assassinate Dr. Ba Maw.

MAR-APRIL INA breaks into Kohima and plains of Imphal, but fails to take Imphal.

SEPT Allied armies open offensive on Katha sector.

Anti-Fascist Organisation (AFO) is formed.

NOV Allies open general offensive.

Dr. Ba Maw invited to Tokyo.

DEC Crisis deepens. Wartime anticolonial unity dissolving.

1945

- JAN Thakins switch to side of British.
- FEB 1 Mahabama War Government issues statement of policy.
- MAR British attack Mandalay.
BDA front-leaving ceremony takes place in Rangoon.
Patriot Burmese Forces formed.
- APRIL Japanese retreat from Rangoon; Dr. Ba Maw and cabinet, with families, leave with them.
Netaji Bose leaves Rangoon.
British recapture Upper Burma.
- JUNE 20 Governor Dorman-Smith announces British postwar policy for Burma. Governor's Executive Council created.
- AUG Ambassador Ishii informs Dr. Ba Maw of Japanese surrender.
Dr. Ba Maw leaves Burma.
Aung San, Than Tun, U Ba Pe, and others meet Mountbatten in Ceylon.
PBF disbanded, Burma Army created.
AFPFL formed from AFO.
Dr. Ba Maw arrives in Tokyo and is taken to Muikamatchi, in Niigata prefecture.
- OCT Governor Dorman-Smith returns to Burma.
- DEC Dr. Ba Maw surrenders to British occupation forces, and is imprisoned in Sugamo Prison.

1946

- JAN AFPFL conference elects Aung San President and Than Tun General Secretary.
Thakin Ba Sein returns from Singapore. Becomes President of Dobama Asiayone.
Thakin Tun Oke returns from Java, helps reorganise Dobama Asiayone.
U Saw returns from Uganda, becomes President of Myochit Party.
- MAR Political turmoil throughout Burma.
- JULY Government outlaws Thakin Soc's Red Flag Communist Party.
Dr. Ba Maw pardoned by British.
- AUG Dr. Ba Maw returns from Tokyo. Aung San and other AFPFL leaders invite him to join AFPFL and accept office, but he refuses. Forms Mahabama Party and leads independent opposition to British.
Sir Hubert Rance becomes Governor.
- SEPT 17–OCT 4 General strike leads to resignation of Governor's Executive Council.

New Executive Council created.

OCT Thakin Than Tun expelled from the AFPFL, with White Flag Communists.

DEC British Parliamentary debate on Burma.

Prime Minister Atlee invites Burmese delegation to London for talks.

1947

JAN Aung San-Atlee Agreement signed. U Saw and Thakin Ba Sein refuse to sign and resign from Council. Dr. Ba Maw's party opposes Agreement.

Communist-supported rebellions erupt in various parts of the country.

FEB 12 Panglong Agreement signed by leaders of Burmese and frontier races, agreeing to join Union of Burma.

APRIL General elections take place. Dr. Ba Maw, U Saw, and Thakin Ba Sein form alliance and boycott the elections.

JUNE 9 Constituent Assembly votes to cut all ties with British Empire.

JULY 19 Aung San and entire cabinet assassinated by U Saw's gunmen.

U Nu invited to form new government; he becomes President of AFPFL.

U Nu imprisons opposition leaders; held for several years until Supreme Court orders release of Dr. Ba Maw, Thakin Ba Sein, Bo Yan Naing, and others, since no evidence presented against them.

U Saw arrested for assassination of Aung San.

SEPT 24 New Constitution adopted by Constituent Assembly.

OCT 17 Nu-Atlee Agreement signed in London.

1948

JAN 4 Declaration of Independence. First President of the Union of Burma, Sao Shwe Thaik; Prime Minister, U Nu.

MAY U Saw found guilty of Aung San's assassination and executed.

1948-58

The postwar AFPFL government lasted for a decade, during which constitutional remedies were suspended, opposition leaders imprisoned, and Communists, PVOs, Karens, Pa-Os, and Arakanese led sporadic rebellions. Finally the political system broke down and the Army took over.

1958-60

Ne Win led a military caretaker government.

1960-62

Elections took place, U Nu returned to office, but factionalism continued and the militarists returned.

1962-67

Ne Win seized power in a military coup, suspended the constitution, abolished Parliament, and imprisoned members of the government and Supreme Court, and political, religious, and student leaders. A total military dictatorship was established resulting in political and economic deterioration and opposition all over the country. At present, the National Liberation Council, led by Brigadier Kya Doe and Bo Yan Naing, is leading the major non-Communist opposition against the Ne Win regime. The Burma Communist Party, led by Thakin Than Tun and Bo Zeya, is also active.

WHO'S WHO

Burmese names are alphabetized according to the first syllable of the actual names, omitting the title. The titles, which are defined in the Glossary, are: Bo; Bogyoke; Bo-hmu; Daw; Ko; Saw; Saya; Sayadaw; Thakin; U.

The Thirty Comrades are listed separately, at the end of the main listing.

Aung Ba, U Chief of Mainglon State.

Ba Dun, U A founder of YMBA; Burma Legislative Council; Secretary of Burma Legislature.

Ba Han, Dr. Brother of Dr. Ba Maw. B. 1890, Rangoon. Educ: B.A., M.A., Cambridge Univ., 1922-24; Bar-at-Law, Lincoln's Inn, 1925; D. Litt., Bordeaux Univ., 1924; Ph.D., Freiburg Univ., 1925; jurist; Head of Burma Special Research Commission, 1944; Dean of Law, 1947-50; Attorney General, 1957-58.

Ba Hein, Thakin B. approx 1910; died 1946. A founder of Burma Communist Party and Anti-Fascist Organisation; President, All-Burma Student Union; a leader of Dobama Asiayone, Freedom Bloc; imprisoned by British, 1941-42.

Ba Maw, Dr. B. Feb 8, 1893, Maubin. Son of U Kye, nationalist leader, official of court of Kings Mindon and Thibaw, and Daw Thein Tin. Educ: B.A., Rangoon College, 1913; M.A., Calcutta Univ., 1917; Cambridge Univ., 1922-23; Bar-at-Law, Gray's Inn, London, 1924; Ph.D., Bordeaux Univ., 1924. Schoolmaster; lecturer in English, Rangoon Coll., 1917-20 (first Burmese to be appointed); advocate, 1924; leader of the parliamentary wing of GCBA (Anti-Separation League), won landslide victory in 1932 elections, but joined government only after his party changed its policy, when he became Minister of Education and Public Health, 1934; formed and led Sinyetha Wunthanu Party, 1936; won in general elections, 1936; first Prime Minister of Burma, 1937-39; formed and led Freedom Bloc, 1939; imprisoned by British, Aug 1940; escaped from Mogok Jail, April 1942; Head of Burmese Provisional Administrative Committee, 1942; Head of Independence Preparatory Commission, 1943; Naingandaw Adipadi and Prime Min-

ister of Independent Burma, Aug 1, 1943-45; imprisoned by Allies, Sugamo Prison, Tokyo, Dec 1945-July 1946; formed and led Mahabama Party, 1946; imprisoned by Nu regime, Aug 1947-July 1948; retired from active politics, 1957; arrested by Ne Win regime, May 1966 to present.

Ba Pe, U B. 1883. A founder of YMBA and GCBA. Deputy President, Legislative Council; Cabinet Minister; Provisional Administrative Committee, 1942; delegate to Aung San-Atlee Talks in London, 1946-47; resigned from AFPFL, formed opposition party, 1947; imprisoned by Nu regime, 1954-58, then resigned from active politics.

Ba Sein, Thakin B. 1910; died 1964. Leader, RUSU; President, Dobama Asiayone, 1935-36; imprisoned by British, 1940-42; Provisional Administrative Committee, Independence Preparatory Commission, 1942-43; Cabinet Minister, 1943; representative to Java, 1943-46; Governor's Executive Council, 1946; delegate to Aung San-Atlee Talks, 1946-47; joined AFPFL, resigned, went into opposition; imprisoned by Nu regime, 1947-48; changed Dobama Asiayone into Burma Democratic League, 1948; President, Anti-Communist League; imprisoned by Nu regime, 1961.

Ba Thi, U B. 1899; died 1950. A leader of YMBA, GCBA; Legislative Council; moved the famous "war and independence motion," Feb 23, 1940, session of the Legislature; Cabinet Minister, 1939, 1940; imprisoned by British, 1941; Privy Councillor, 1943; member of Peace Mission that negotiated between government and PVO, 1948; reported killed by insurgents.

Ba U Gyi, Saw Karen leader. B. 1905; died 1951. Associated with Aung San, 1944-45, Anti-Fascist Organisation; Governor's Executive Council, 1946; formed Karen National Union; responsible for Karen-Burmese Agreement, Sept 1948; led KNDO rebellion, 1949; fell in battle.

Ba Win, U B. 1897; died 1956; Legislator; Mayor of Rangoon, 1939; a leader of Sinyetha Party, Freedom Bloc; imprisoned by British, 1941-42; Provisional Administrative Committee, 1942; Independence Preparatory Commission, 1943; Cabinet Minister, 1943-45.

Be Me Sayadaw Leading Buddhist presiding abbot; GCBA leader.

Bose, Rash Behari Indian leader (no relation to Netaji Bose).

Bose, Netaji Subhas Chandra Indian leader. B. 1879; died 1945. Educ: Cambridge Univ. Entered ICS, resigned, 1921; joined noncooperation movement; manager, *Forward*, Calcutta, 1922-24; Chief Executive Officer, Calcutta Corporation, 1924; Bengal Legislative Assembly Council, 1926; imprisoned, 1926-27; President, Bengal Provisional Congress

Committee; leader, Simon Commission Boycott; imprisoned during Satyagraha movement, released and exiled; formed Forward Bloc, 1939-40; led militant civil disobedience campaign; disappeared from India, Jan 26, 1941; became first Head of the Azad Hind Government, Oct 31, 1943; reported killed in plane crash, Aug 19, 1945.

Chit Hlaing, U B. 1879; died 1952. A leader of YMBA; first President, GCBA, 1920; Speaker, House of Representatives; Independence Preparatory Commission, 1943; Privy Councillor, 1943-45; President, Legislative Council, 1947.

Cochrane, Sir Archibald First British Governor of Burma, 1937-40.

Figesse, Lt. Colonel British Occupation Forces, Tokyo, to whom Dr. Ba Maw surrendered, Dec 1945.

Hiraoka, Colonel Japanese Army, Burma; chief liaison officer in charge of Burmese-Japanese relations, 1942-45.

Hirayama, Lieutenant (Bo Moke Seik) Japanese Army; Minami Kikan, BIA; attached to Bo Yan Naing's unit, fell in Shwedaung battle, Mar 31, 1942.

Hirohito, Emperor Reigning Emperor of Japan. B. 1901. Acceded to the throne, Dec 1926.

Hla Min, U B. 1897. A leader of Sinyetha Party, Freedom Bloc; Cabinet Minister, 1943-45.

Hla Pe, U Pa-O leader. B. 1910. Provisional Administrative Committee, 1942; Cabinet Minister, 1943-45; led Pa-O rebellion, 1948-58; M.P., 1960; arrested by Ne Win regime, 1963 to present.

Iida, Lt. Gen. Shojiro B. 1888. The "Conqueror of Burma"; Commander-in-Chief of the Japanese Army in Burma; led Japanese advance in Burma; helped establish Provisional Administrative Committee, 1942.

Ikeda, Lieutenant (Bo Kwe Belu) Japanese Army; Minami Kikan, BIA; attached to Bo Yan Naing's unit; fell in battle of Shwedaung, Mar 31, 1942.

Imamura, Lieutenant (Bo Ngwe Da) Japanese Army; Minami Kikan, BIA; in Bo Yan Naing's unit.

Ishii, Itaro B. 1887. Japanese foreign service; Ambassador to Burma, 1944-45.

Isomura, Maj. Gen. Takesuke Deputy Chief-of-Staff, Japanese Army, Burma; head of political section, Military HQ, Rangoon; military head of Burmese-Japanese relations, 1943-44.

Kawabe, General Torashiro B. 1890. Chief of General Staff, National Defence, General H.Q., 1941-43; Commander-in-Chief, Japanese Army, Burma, 1943-44.

Kawashima, Captain (Bo Aye) Japanese Army; Minami Kikan; commandant of the Hainan camp; general and second-in-command of the BIA, with Bo Let Ya's unit.

Kimura, General Heitaro B. 1888. Succeeded Kawabe as Commander-in-Chief, Japanese Army, Burma, 1944-45.

Kinmama Maw, Daw Wife of Dr. Ba Maw. B. 1902, Rangoon. A leader of Sinyetha Party, Freedom Bloc; helped organise Thirty Comrades; President, All-Burma National Women's League, 1943-45; active in Mahabama Party, 1947-57.

Kitajima, Colonel (alias for H. Takahashi) Japanese Army; Minami Kikan, BIA.

Kodaw Hmaing, Thakin B. 1875; died 1964. Patron of the Thakins; Provisional Administrative Committee, Independence Preparatory Commission, 1942-43.

Koiso, Kuniaki B. 1880; died 1964. Overseas Minister, 1939-40; Governor General, Korea, 1942; Prime Minister of Japan, 1944-45; tried as war criminal by Allied Military Tribunal, sentenced to life imprisonment.

Kya Doe, Brigadier Saw Karen leader. B. 1907. Educ: Royal Military College, Sandhurst (first from Burma). British Army, BDA; Brigadier, Burma Army; Vice-Chief-of-Staff, resigned 1954; organised armed resistance against Ne Win military regime, a founder and first Chairman, National Liberation Council, 1965 to present.

Kyaw Nyein, Thakin B. 1915. A founder of All-Burma Students Union and leader of Students Strike, 1936; Dobama Asiayone; Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs, 1943-45; a leader of AFPFL, Socialist Party; Deputy P.M., 1948, 1958; arrested by Ne Win regime, 1962 to present.

Laurel, José P. B. 1891; died 1959. Senator, 1925-31; President of the Philippines, 1943-45; Senator, 1955-57.

Lun Baw, Thakin B. 1898. Dobama Asiayone; legislator; Cabinet Minister, 1943-45; Deputy Prime Minister, 1959-60.

Matsuoka, General Head of Kempetai, Japanese Army, Burma, 1942.

Maung Gyi, Sir "M.A." B. 1886; died about 1964. A founder of YMBA, GCBA; Counsellor to the Governor of Burma, 1940; Supreme Court Justice, 1943-45.

Maung Maung Ohn Gaing, U B. approx 1890. A founder of YMBA, GCBA, Twenty-one Party; legislator.

Mizutani Japanese Army, Minami Kikan, BIA.

Mogyo, Bo (alias for Keiji Suzuki) Creator of the BIA; organised and led Minami Kikan, 1939-41; created BIA, 1941; General and first

Commander-in-Chief of BIA; formed Burma Baho Government, 1942; forced to leave Burma, June 1942, when BIA was disbanded.

Mya, Thakin B. approx 1900; died 1947. Organised Peasants and Workers Party, 1938; a leader of Dobama Asiayone, Freedom Bloc; imprisoned by British, 1940-42; Provisional Administrative Committee, Independence Preparatory Commission, 1943; Deputy Prime Minister, 1943-45; Executive Council, AFPFL, 1946; President, All-Burma Peasants Organisation, Socialist Party, 1946; Governor's Executive Council, 1946; delegate to Aung San-Atlee Talks, 1946-47; assassinated July 19, 1947.

Mya Bu, Sir B. 1885. Chief Justice of Supreme Court, 1943-45.

Myint, U B. 1892. Supreme Court Justice, 1943-45.

Nasu, General Head of Political Section, Japanese Army, Burma, 1942-43.

Nu, U B. 1907. President, RUSU; a leader of Students Strike, Dobama Asiayone, Freedom Bloc; imprisoned by British, 1940-42; Minister for Foreign Affairs, 1943-45; Vice-President, AFPFL, 1946; Speaker, Constituent Assembly, Governor's Executive Council, 1947; President, AFPFL, 1947; signed Nu-Atlee Agreement, 1947; Prime Minister, 1948-58, 1960-62; arrested by Ne Win regime, 1962-66.

Nyo Tun, Bo Arakanese officer. BIA, BDA; Anti-Fascist Organisation; AFPFL; Cabinet Minister, 1948.

Ottama, U Religious and political leader. Participated in Indian National Congress movement; a leader of YMBA, GCBA; imprisoned by British, 1920s; responsible for many Buddhist monks entering politics; died 1939.

Ozeki Chief of civilian political section, Japanese Army, Burma, 1943-44.

Paw Tun, Sir Arakanese leader. B. 1883; died 1955. Cabinet Minister, 1937; Prime Minister, 1942; Advisor to Governor of Burma, Simla, 1942-45; Governor's Executive Council, 1946.

Pe Tha, Saw Karen leader. Legislator, Cabinet Minister, 1937-42; murdered by Thakins, June 1942.

Po, Sir San C. Karen leader. B. approx 1885; died 1946. Legislative Council, Senate, 1937-42; first Karen knighted by British; Privy Councillor, 1943-45.

Po Thin, San Burma Army, 1940; associate of Aung San, 1944; Cabinet Minister, 1947-48; Brigadier, 1949; leader Democratic Party, 1964 to present.

Pu, "Magwe" U Legislative Council; a leader of Freedom Bloc.

Pu, (Tharrawaddy) U B. 1881; died approx 1964. A leader of YMBA, GCBA, Home Rule Party; President, Legislative Council; Cabinet Minister; Prime Minister, 1939-40.

Sakurai, Hyogoro B. 1880. Chief civilian adviser to Commander-in-Chief, Japanese Army, Burma, 1942-43.

San, Saya Nationalist leader of Peasant Rebellion, 1930-31; a leader of Soe Thein GCBA; captured and tried by British, executed Nov 16, 1931.

Saw, "Galon" U B. 1901; died 1948. Leader, Myochit Party, 1938; GCBA; defence counsel for Saya San followers; Cabinet Minister, Prime Minister, 1940-42; imprisoned, Uganda, 1942-46; reorganised Myochit Party; Governor's Executive Council; delegate, Aung San-Atlee Talks, 1946-47; masterminded assassination of Aung San and Executive Council, July 19, 1947; arrested, tried, and executed, May 8, 1948.

Sawada, Renzo B. 1888. Ambassador to Burma, 1943-44; Ambassador to UN, 1953.

Sein, "Bandoola" U B. 1900. Editor and publisher; a leader of Sinyetha Party; Cabinet Minister, 1943-45.

Set, U B. 1884; died 1965. Mayor of Rangoon, 1941-42; Independence Preparatory Commission, 1943; Cabinet Minister, 1943-45; AFPFL Executive Committee, 1946-47.

Shigemitsu, Mamoru B. 1887; died 1957. Foreign Minister, 1943-45; signed surrender instrument; tried by Allied International Military Tribunal as war criminal, imprisoned, 1947-50; President, Progressive Party; Foreign Minister, 1954.

Shimada, Admiral Shigetaro B. 1883. Commander-in-Chief, Japanese Fleet, China, 1940; Navy Minister, 1941; Chief of Naval General Staff, 1944; tried by Allied International Military Tribunal as war criminal, sentenced to life imprisonment, 1947.

Soe, Thakin B. 1905. A leader of Communist Party, All-Burma Students Union, Dobama Asiayone, Freedom Bloc; imprisoned, 1940-42; a leader of anti-Japanese resistance; joined AFPFL, 1944; leader, Red Flag Communist rebellion, 1946 to present.

Soe Thein, U B. approx 1895. Leader of Soe Thein GCBA, 1925-31; responsible for Saya San Rebellion.

Sugii, Mitsuru Japanese Army; Minami Kikan; Colonel in BIA.

Sugiyama, Field Marshal Gen. B. 1880; died 1945. War Minister, 1937-38; Supreme War Councillor, 1939-40; Commander-in-Chief, Mainland Defence Forces, 1943-45.

- Suzuki, Akai** Japanese Army; Minami Kikan, BIA.
- Suzuki, Dr.** Personal physician to Dr. Ba Maw; chief liaison between Freedom Bloc and Japanese consulate.
- Takano, Genshin** Chief Japanese Adviser to Burmese Government, 1942-43.
- Tanaka, General Shizuichi B.** 1887. Chief-of-Staff, Japanese Army, Burma, 1944-45.
- Tanaka, Lieutenant** Japanese Army; Minami Kikan; attached to Ne Win's BIA unit.
- Terauchi, Field Marshal Count Hisaichi B.** 1879; died 1945. Supreme War Council, 1939; Supreme Commander, Japanese Southern Army (South East Asia Command), 1942-45.
- Than Tun, Thakin B.** 1911. Secretary, Dobama Asiayone; a leader of Freedom Bloc; imprisoned by British, 1940-42; Provisional Administrative Committee, 1942; Independence Preparatory Commission, 1943; Cabinet Minister, 1943-45; a leader of anti-Japanese resistance, 1943-45; head of Burma Communist Party, 1945; Secretary General, AFPFL, 1946; leader, White Flag Communist rebellion, 1948 to present.
- Theda Maw, Daw** Daughter of Dr. Ba Maw. B. 1931.
- Thein Maung, Dr. B.** 1891; died 1946. YMBA, GCBA; Legislative Council; Cabinet Minister, 1937-38; President, Burma-Japan Association, 1939; imprisoned by British, 1940-42; Cabinet Minister, 1943; first Ambassador to Japan, 1944-45.
- Thein Maung, U B.** 1890. Advocate General, 1938-41; Independence Preparatory Commission, 1943; Cabinet Minister, 1943-45; Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, 1952-57; Cabinet Minister, Deputy Prime Minister, 1958-60.
- Thein Pe Myint B.** 1914. Executive Committee, RUSU; Dobama Asiayone, AFPFL; a leader of anti-Japanese resistance, Burma Communist Party, NUF.
- Thet-Pan Sayadaw** Leading Buddhist presiding abbot; GCBA leader.
- Thwin, Sir U B.** 1878. Burma Senate, 1937-41; Independence Preparatory Commission, 1943; Privy Council, 1943-45.
- Tin, Thakin B.** 1903. President, All-Burma Peasants Organisation; Dobama Asiayone; BIA; political secretary to Head of State, 1943; District Commissioner, Tharrawaddy, 1944-45; Cabinet Minister, AFPFL, Socialist Party; arrested by Ne Win regime, 1962-64.
- Tinsa Maw Naing, Daw** Eldest daughter of Dr. Ba Maw; wife of Bo Yan Naing. B. 1927. Arrested by Ne Win regime, 1966 to present.

Tojo, General Hideki B. 1884; died 1948. Minister of War, 1940-41; Prime Minister, 1941-44; tried by Allied International Military Tribunal as war criminal, executed, 1948.

Tun Aung, U Arakanese leader. B. 1893. Legislator, 1937-42; Freedom Bloc; Cabinet Minister, 1943-45.

Tun Pe, U B. 1900. Newspaper editor; Cabinet Minister, 1948-53.

Wang, General Chief of the 7th Chinese Army; Chiang Kai-shek's personal representative in Burma, 1942.

Ye-U Sayadaw Leading Buddhist presiding abbot; GCBA leader.

Zali Maw, U Eldest son of Dr. Ba Maw. B. 1928. Educ. B.A. (Tripos) Cambridge Univ., 1951; M.A., Yale Univ., 1954; Bar-at-Law, Gray's Inn, London, 1957. Advocate; Lecturer in law, Rangoon Univ.; organised armed resistance to Ne Win military regime, a founder and General Secretary of the National Liberation Council, 1965 to present.

The Thirty Comrades

Each is listed under his nom de guerre except Aung San and Tun Oke.

Aung, Bo-hmu (Thakin San Hlaing) B. 1910, Pegu Dist. All-Burma Peasants Organisation, Dobama Asiayone, BIA, BDA, BNA, PBF; Commander, PVO; Vice-president, AFPFL, 1947; Deputy P.M., 1958; Defence Minister, 1961; arrested by Ne Win regime, 1962 to present.

Aung San, Bogyoke (Bo Te Za) B. 1915, Natmauk; died 1947. President, All-Burma Students Union; President, RUSU; General Secretary, Dobama Asiayone, Freedom Bloc, 1939-40; All-Burma Peasants Organisation; a leader of the Thirty Comrades, 1940-41; Major General, BIA, 1942; Defence Minister, 1943-45; President, AFPFL, 1945-47; Deputy Chairman, Governor's Executive Council, 1946; negotiated Aung San-Atlee Agreement, London, Jan 1947; assassinated, July 19, 1947.

Ba La, Bo (Thakin Tun Lwin) B. approx 1918, Kyonemangei. Dobama Asiayone, BIA, BDA, BNA: Union Party M.P.; arrested by Ne Win regime, 1962 to present.

Hpone Myint, Bo (Thakin Tin Aye) B. approx 1918, Letpadan. Dobama Asiayone, BIA, BDA, BNA.

Htain Win, Bo (Ko Saung) B. approx 1918; died approx 1945. BIA, BDA, BNA.

Kyaw Zaw, Bo (Ko Shwe) B. 1919. BIA, BDA, BNA, PBF, 1941-46;

Commander, North Burma Command, South Burma Command, 1948–56; Brigadier, 1955; forced to resign in 1956.

La Yaung, Bo (Thakin Ba Gyan) B. 1911, Minbu. Dobama Asiayone; a leader of the Thirty Comrades, BIA; Military Secretary to Head of State, 1943–45; a leader of the PVO rebellion, 1949–50; NUF, 1956–58; Trade Ministry, 1963 to present.

Let Ya, Bo (Thakin Hla Pe) B. 1911, Pyinmana. A leader of Rangoon University Students Union, 1936 Students Strike, Dobama Asiayone, Freedom Bloc, the Thirty Comrades, BIA, BDA, BNA, PBF; Chief-of-Staff, BNA, 1943–45; Brigadier, 1947; Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Home and Defence, 1947–48; signed Let Ya–Freeman Defence Agreement with U.K., 1947; retired from Army, 1948; arrested by Ne Win regime, 1963 to present.

Lin Yone, Bo (Thakin Tun Shwe) B. approx 1918, Toungoo. Dobama Asiayone, BIA, BDA, BNA.

Min Gaung, Bo (Thakin Saw Lwin) B. 1920, Gyobingauk. A leader of Students Strike, 1936; a leader of the Thirty Comrades, BIA, BDA, BNA; Adjutant to Defence Minister, 1943–45; General Secretary, PVO, Clean AFPFL, 1958–60; Burma Socialist Party; Cabinet Minister, 1950–60; arrested by Ne Win regime, 1962 to present.

Min Yaung, Bo (Ko Hla) B. approx 1920, Rangoon. BIA, BDA, BNA.

Mo, Bo (Thakin Aye Maung) B. approx 1920, Rangoon; died 1942; Dobama Asiayone; a leader of the Thirty Comrades; fell in battle, Pugyi, 1942.

Mya Din, Bo (Thakin Than Tin) B. approx 1920; died 1941. Dobama Asiayone; died on Hainan Island during training.

Myint Aung, Bo (Thakin Soe) B. approx 1920, Prome Dist.; died 1945. Dobama Asiayone, BIA, BDA, BNA.

Myint Swe, Bo (Thakin Tun Khin) B. 1912, Prome Dist. A leader of Dobama Asiayone, 1931–36; BIA, BDA, BNA.

Ne Win, Bo (Thakin Shu Maung) B. 1911, Prome Dist. Dobama Asiayone; a leader of the Thirty Comrades, BIA, BDA; Commander-in-Chief, BNA, 1943–45, PBF, 1945; Brigadier, 1947; Deputy P.M., 1949; General, 1956; P.M. and Defence Minister, 1958–60; seized power in a military coup, Mar 1962 to present.

Nyana, Bo (Thakin Maung Maung) B. approx 1916, Rangoon; died 1942. Dobama Asiayone, BIA; fell in battle, Papun, 1942.

Saw Aung, Bo (Thakin Ngwe) B. approx 1916, Rangoon; died 1942. Dobama Asiayone, BIA; fell in battle Shwegyin, 1942.

Saw Naung, Bo (Thakin Thit) B. approx 1920, Rangoon. Dobama Asiayone, BIA, BDA, BNA.

Set Kya, Bo (Thakin Aung Than) B. 1916, Rangoon. Dobama Asiayone; a leader of the Thirty Comrades, BIA, BDA, BNA; Deputy Defence Minister, 1943; Military Attaché, Tokyo, 1943-45; a leader of the Socialist Party, AFPFL, 1947-52; Parliamentary Secretary to Home Minister, 1947.

Taya, Bo (Thakin Khin Maung U) B. 1923, Pyinmana. Dobama Asiayone; organiser of All-Burma Peasant Organization, 1937; a leader of Student Strike, 1938; BIA, BDA, BNA; Burma Communist Party, 1945; Union Party M.P., 1960.

Tauk Htain, Bo (Thakin San Mya) B. approx 1910, Pyinmana. Dobama Asiayone, BIA, BDA, BNA, AFPFL; arrested by Ne Win regime, 1964 to present.

Than Tin, Bo (Thakin Than Tin) B. approx 1920, Tharrawaddy; died 1942. Dobama Asiayone, BIA; fell in battle, Chiangmai, 1942.

Tun Oke, Thakin B. 1907, Prome Dist. A leader of Dobama Asiayone; imprisoned by British; a leader of the Thirty Comrades; Head of Burma Baho Government, 1942; Provisional Administrative Committee; Independence Preparatory Commission, 1942-43; Minister for Forests and Mines, 1943; representative to Singapore, 1944-46; reorganised Dobama Asiayone, 1946; Governor's Executive Council, 1946; opposed Aung San-Atlee Agreement, led opposition party; retired from politics.

Yan Aung, Bo (Thakin Hla Myaing) B. approx 1920, Svriam. Dobama Asiayone, BIA, BDA, BNA; underground with Than Tun, 1948; Central Committee, Burma Communist Party, to present.

Yan Naing, Bo (Ko Tun Shein) B. 1918, Aunglanmye, Prome Dist. B.A. General Secretary, Rangoon University Students Union, 1938-41, All-Burma Student Union, 1939-41; a leader of RUSU Strike, 1938; organised Thanmani Tat, 1938; a leader of the Thirty Comrades; led 3rd Invasion Column, BIA; hero of Battle of Shwedaung, 1942; Commander Rangoon Garrison, 1942; Military Secretary to Head of State, 1943-44; Chief of Operations, War Office; first Commandant, Military Academy, Mingaladon, 1944-45; a leader of Mahabama Party, 1946; arrested by Nu government, 1947-50; retired from politics, 1960; organised armed resistance against Ne Win military regime; a founder of the National Liberation Council, leader Burmese National Liberation Army, 1965 to present.

Ye Htut, Bo (Thakin Aung Thein) B. approx 1922, Rangoon. Dobama Asiayone, BIA, BDA, BNA; underground with Than Tun, 1948; Central Committee, Burma Communist Party, 1948-64; Central Committee, Burma Socialist Program Party, 1964 to present.

Zeya, Bo (Ko Hla Maung) B. approx 1920. A leader of Mandalay riots, 1939, Rangoon University Students Union, 1940-41; a leader of the Thirty Comrades, BIA; Chief-of-Staff, BDA, 1942-43; Commanding Officer, 3rd Burma Rifles, 1947-48; underground with Than Tun, 1948; Central Committee, Burma Communist Party, and Commander-in-Chief of their armed forces, to present.

Zin Yaw, Bo (Thakin Than Nyunt) B. approx 1920, Rangoon; died 1942. Dobama Asiayone, BIA, BDA; killed in air raid, Mandalay, 1942.

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BREAKTHROUGH IN BURMA

Memoirs of a Revolution, 1939-1946

by Ba Maw

In the long struggle for Burmese independence from British rule, Dr. Ba Maw was the key figure, the man who developed the ideology, planned and implemented the campaign, and molded disparate groups into an effective political force. These memoirs not only give us an inside view of the revolution he led but provide the most complete account of Burma's role in World War II. No other Southeast Asian leader has published a comparable description of the events of that period.

As the author says in his Preface, it was during these years that "the seeds of the Burmese future were sown . . . [seeds] that have exploded into the harvest the country is reaping at present, for better or for worse." A knowledge of the wartime story is vital to an understanding of Burma today and, indeed, to a complete perception of today's events throughout Southeast Asia.

Tracing the rise of Burmese nationalism from British colonial days through the Japanese occupation of Burma and the final achievement of independence, Dr. Ba Maw presents a vast panorama of the men and the events that made up the drama of those years. Modern Burmese leaders, all at one time or another influenced by Dr. Ba Maw, began their careers during this era: Bo Aung San, who became a martyr and national hero; Bo Yan Naing, now one of the leaders of the National Liberation Council fighting the present military regime; Bo Ne Win, head of that regime; Thakin

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