

BURMA

TODAY

By

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*A free English rendering by Dr. Ba Maw
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I have a lot to say but have not the time to say it all here. So I shall have to give you a very basic picture of events, or rather their trends, with only the most important angles and edges touched and sharpened.

I am going to deal with the year that has passed. It has been a very crowded year, and very bleak on the whole unless, of course, you take the revolutionary view that the worse it is the better it is. But I am not concerned just now with such a subjective view, nor does it apply to all historical situations and times. I want to look at the matter objectively and as it appears to all at this moment.

First of all, let us look at the whole picture. Let us have no illusions at all. Things certainly look dark; what's worse, they show signs of becoming darker still and no one can say when the skies will clear either here or anywhere else.

But for those who have learnt how to wait and watch there are great tangible signs here and there. For instance, the situation abroad seems tragic on the surface, but just down below forces are stirring and gathering together which will soon change the world enormously. For the first time in history the peoples of Asia and Arabia and Africa are joining hands in a common struggle—and that marks a very big stride forward in the world revolution to free all peoples. This is the historical perspective of the past year.

Now, let us come to our own selves and take up the Burmese picture piece by piece.

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First of all, there is the general situation which, in spite of all the propaganda and pves and the whole orgy of spending and shouting that is now going on, still remains very much the same as it has been for the past six years, with a few at the top very well-off and well-provided for a long time and the rest struggling hard to keep alive as best they can in almost jungle conditions. In a real sense, much in Burma has gone back to the jungle. A few miles away from Rangoon and the big towns, and you can see it actually happening in thousands of villages. You all know this as well as I do; in fact, better, because for many of you the struggle has been much closer to that jungle. Go anywhere nowadays, go to any office or shop or eating stall where people talk out freely, and you will hear the same story, how all except a very few in power are having the worst struggle of their days in everything.

A bit of the rot and duplicity that is turning our very lives upside down was pointed out by Louis Fischer in an article he wrote after his recent visit to Burma. After meeting the more important A.F.P.F.L. men—and incidentally none who disagreed with them—Louis Fischer has described Burma as a happy golden land where there are socialists but no socialism, Marxists but no Marxism, politicians but no politics in, I suppose, an international sense. That is what he says in effect. He has added that even Churchill's Tory England is more socialist than socialist Burma. And so, like a good, healthy American, he went away very pleased with the Burmese and particularly with the more important ministers who had helped him to come to those conclusions.

We can add a lot more to Louis Fischer's list of our amazing contradictions. Here are some of them.

Agriculturists are not given all they have earned for fear that they would spend it and so cause inflation while the government, who deny the agriculturists their right to spend their own earnings, take it all and spend it all without any fear of inflation; traders do not get their fair share of licences and other trading opportunities while politicians get most of them; capitalists have very little capital while anti-capitalists or socialists, as they call themselves, and those connected with them have succeeded in getting and hiding away most of it; business and industry are stagnating for want of capital while the government have locked away unused a huge portion of this badly needed money; religion and politics have become business—almost the only big business now in the country—while business has become thoroughly mixed up with religion and politics; there is a whole mass of workers without work while at the same time there is a whole mass of work without workers; service people with most of the responsibility have very little power while politicians with a lot of power have very little responsibility; for six years, as the school-going population rapidly went up, the number of schools and school teachers and available school books went down almost as rapidly; for six years, as the health problems grew and the deathrate became the highest in the world, hospitals and medical men and medical supplies became fewer and fewer; for six years, as reconstruction problems multiplied, service technicians and experts with long experience of Burmese conditions and problems were relieved and sent away. As Louis Fischer observed, there is less socialism in socialist Burma than in most capitalist countries. In the name of nationalisation for the good of the many, control and profit are openly concentrated in the hands of a few party politicians, in the name of democracy all faith in democratic justice and honesty is being destroyed, in the name of peace the domestic wars continue, destruction spreads, and foreign

peace breakers, both actual and potential, roam the countryside; in the name of neutrality the clearest partisan acts are being done; and so on and on endlessly. This is Burma as she is today, a country torn and paralysed by the worst contradictions in all her history.

Now I must speak of two or three things in particular.

THE GENERAL ELECTION

About the recent general election. You know only too well how it was conducted and how the party in power fought and won it, and so became a 'seven per cent government', as they have been called because that was all the vote they really obtained. It has turned out to be the same in Burma as in all the newly-established "democratic" countries in Asia. Democracy in these countries has proved to be only what the people in power say it is, and a democratic election is always won by those in power and so are able to arrange the election as they like; to make the laws and the rules, to prepare the electoral rolls, to keep the tokens before the voting and the ballot boxes afterwards, and to use the state forces and the state funds at will. It all works out by a simple arithmetic after that. Power means private armies, and guns, and subsidies, and the whole state treasury and machinery, and rules and decisions of your own making; and these added together mean votes; and votes mean fresh power; and so the great democratic foolery goes round in a circle. But there is a saying that you can't fool all people all the time. The British and the Japanese learnt this lesson a bit too late. I would very sincerely warn the AFPFL government to learn it in time. The British in their days fooled the people with so much talk of law and order and reform that these excellent words came positively to stink among

the Burmese. Now democracy and democratic elections are beginning to stink just as badly if not more. It is most dangerous to try to fool all people all the time. Those who do it, even the smartest of them, finally end by fooling themselves and no one else. And if the people's faith in the ballot box is destroyed they are bound to think of something else, of the barricades and the jungle, for example. This is the teaching of history. I speak quite objectively and bluntly, for the good of all and by way of a warning for all. The extremely poor voting at the general election in spite of all sorts of pressures and the fact that so many seats went uncontested are ominous signs that something is happening below.

THE WELFARE STATE SCHEMES

As for the welfare state schemes they are, of course, excellent in principle. All planning for the people's welfare is, in principle, excellent and praiseworthy. Every country is doing it; most countries started doing it years back; the AFPFL government have at last decided to do it after six years of absolute power and opportunity during which nothing was done. But it is better late than never at all.

We, however, still have our fears in this matter. We have seen so many good things put to the dirtiest use in the past six years, heard the welfare of the people so often invoked as a means to gain the ends of a few at the top and seen those few get richer while all the rest got poorer, that we want to see what is done before we believe it at all.

At this juncture I will give my views in a very general way. A scheme is only as good as the people

who work it and the way they work it, not a bit more nor less. So the real question is not whether these welfare schemes are good or bad, but whether those who are going to put them through are good or bad, honest or dishonest, really mean what they say or don't; whether they have, during all the past years of absolute power, shown any real interest in the people's welfare, or in planning and working for it; whether these belated schemes are really for the welfare of our own people and their interests or to further other people's interests and policies.

Besides these general considerations, there are the more tangible ones. For instance, there are too many holes in the schemes themselves, too much party politics and propaganda and objectives and too little that really gets down to the job itself; in short, too much of personal and party welfare and too little of the people's. And, as Louis Fischer has said, there are a lot of socialist phrases in them but nothing that really constitutes socialism. It's only a welfare state, the Anglo-American synthetic substitute for socialism.

Incidentally, I must say a good word for the American aid team. They have succeeded in doing what the most shattering events all round us failed to do; they have made the AFPFL government start to think of the people's welfare and to plan for it. After six years the AFPFL government have started to look around and think of doing something to clean up the biggest and worst rubble heap in all Asia.

FOREIGN POLICY

Then, there is the extremely sensitive question of our foreign policy. The AFPFL government call it

neutrality. They call it so, but neither of the two great blocs does. For instance, Allison, speaking for the American state department, openly said that this sort of neutrality is more neutral in words than in action. He was very satisfied with our neutrality when he visited Burma recently, and so has been every important American visitor who has come to study the situation in Asia. They all like it because it can be very useful to them in certain tight corners, like the one at the time of the recent Indian resolution on Korea. They are quite, quite sure of one thing, that this policy is but words as everything else is with the AFPFL government. So they go back and write nice, back-patting things about the government. Everyone on their side is nice and wonderful.

On the other hand, Russia and China have used the strongest language to tell all what they think of this sort of neutrality and government. They denounced India's Korean resolution, which neutral Burma so faithfully supported, as being completely American-engineered, as a sly and secret way of working for America. The whole communist press has used even stronger language about this resolution.

Then again, the Burmese socialists have jointly declared with some other socialist parties their definite opposition to the cominform countries. The coming socialist conference will bring together parties and men who, no matter in what else they might disagree, are passionately agreed in opposing the communist bloc and preparing for war against it. Attlee, Lobia, Sjarhir, the Japanese socialists, the recent Yugoslav mission, the American aid missions, and the rest are all a part of the hard core of the anticommunist bloc. The only difference between them and our socialist government is that while they call themselves by their real name

and would scorn to do anything else, our socialists try to straddle and work under cover. They have done so before and succeeded; and they think it can be done again. But let me warn them that the historical situation is entirely different now, and that they will find both the big blocs a little cleverer and a little quicker than themselves.

How true this is can be seen from the way the situation is developing in Burma. Take, for instance, the American-inspired welfare plans. The parts that really stand a chance of being fulfilled have all a clear military perspective, like foodgrowing; communications by land, sea, and air; hospitals and medical staff, equipment, and stores; schools and other large buildings; manpower census, and all sorts of other strategic surveys.

Next, there are the well-equipped KMT forces entrenched in just the critical areas, and the links they are forging with the KNDO. This shows that whatever power is equipping and maintaining these forces is not taking very seriously the AFPFL's neutral policy, or at least they know what it really means. Also, this neutrality has not prevented China from keeping strong forces along the Burmese border, and Vietminh and Thai forces from trying to make secure their own borders with Burma. And India's concern for the Naga country, Pakistan's for the Muhajid areas, Thailand's for some of the border Shan States, all show that our present neutrality is not reassuring them very much.

Again, look at all the pacts and contractual and other relations with foreign powers as well as business concerns which the AFPFL government have accepted. Every single one of them takes Burma, either directly or indirectly, into the western bloc.

Perhaps I might be misunderstood. I would not blame the AFPFL government for choosing one bloc in preference to the other, for having a positive policy. I might not agree with them, but I should respect them for it. I blame them for having no positive policy at all, or at least, for not having the conviction and courage to declare it and stand fast by it openly. I blame them for trying to be half-fish and half-frog as we say, for trying to be on the winning side in all circumstances, and by this very act and motive making it certain that Burma would lose and be kicked around no matter which side won. No country can be on both sides these days; and there can quite definitely be no third force, something armed with phrases and not much else, as Lenin once scornfully described certain political struggles; and also equally definitely there wont be any third force when the shooting starts. The less we fool ourselves with such double talk and unreal phrases the better shall we be prepared for the realities. Even India is visibly reorientating her foreign policy. There are signs that it is hardening into something sharp and positive, and neutrality is being seen to be a snare.

A last word about this neutrality. In the present desperate power struggle a small and naked country like Burma must try to learn a few hard facts.

The first is that if war should come the question of her neutrality in it would not be decided in Rangoon but in Washington or Moscow or Peking. Only a fool would believe that once these great war machines start moving they would change their plans in order to suit the socialists here or anywhere else.

Next, if shooting should begin, no policy would be worth anything which could not shoot back effectively or get someone else to do so.

Next, neutrality is not a one-stage thing or an object which one could pick up and put down again to suit the moment. Like everything else, it has a clear history and sequence; it has different stages, and in order to be neutral one has to be so from an early stage and at every stage that follows. One cannot be neutral by suddenly declaring that one is neutral after a long history of co-operation with one side.

Next, neutrality is an impracticable policy for a country whose material and strategic values would be needed by both the sides at war. That has been particularly the fate of all the small rimlands possessing such values.

And finally, to say that it is neutral when it is not will, in the long run, hurt much more than it will help a country.

FOR THE WORLD REVOLUTION

Burma's foreign policy must take into account all those hard facts. It must also take into account the great fact of our own national revolution and of all the other national revolutions now pushing ahead in Asia and Africa. It must be a positive policy boldly orientated towards these revolutions. In this revolutionary period we must choose like revolutionists—I don't say at once and without giving the matter full thought, but certainly before it is too late.

So we must make up our minds about our national revolutionary objectives, and we must declare them clearly, positively, before all, and choose the cause that will promote them. We cannot accept anything less. That is the revolutionary way.

We must be clear and unwavering in order that there should be no misunderstanding either abroad or among our own people. Unless we ourselves are so, our people cannot be clear about our objectives and obligations; and if they are not clear regarding such basic matters there would be nothing to hold them together as a people when the blow should fall. They would be scattered like cattle and used also like cattle by other people who would be firmly united by objectives they understand and accept. Only a positive policy based upon clear positive revolutionary objectives will preserve our people in the present revolutionary age.

