



## The Rise and Fall of U Nu

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# The Rise and Fall of U Nu

Louis J. Walinsky

**T**O DISCUSS THE RISE AND FALL of U Nu, a man to whom history afforded a unique opportunity to lead his country to independence, democracy, peace, modernity and welfare, a man who in fact brought his country closer to achievement of these objectives than anyone had the right to expect of him, only to find that in the end he was not quite great enough, or perhaps too good—this, for a friend of democratic Burma, is a melancholy assignment.

Since March 1962, U Nu, the duly elected Prime Minister of Burma, has been confined without hearing or trial in a military detention camp, completely isolated from contact with the outside world. He is the prisoner of an illegal military government which seized power by force, abrogated the Constitution, dissolved the Parliament, liquidated the courts and has since ruled by fiat and terror in such a way as to convert the entire country increasingly into a military detention camp. During all this time, so far as I know, no single responsible voice in the entire Western world has been raised on U Nu's behalf, or on behalf of the other leaders of democratic Burma who have similarly been imprisoned, or on behalf of the Burmese democracy itself. This, when one thinks on it, is both melancholy and startling. It leads one to ask whether this man's fall was so deeply rooted in his character that, like the spectator who views a classic tragedy in the theater, we accept it as inevitable, and are thus purged without the inner necessity for protest?

It is something of this sense of the tragic which impels me to consider the rise and fall of U Nu not primarily in historical terms—although some brief historical background is obviously necessary—but rather in terms of the man himself, his qualities, his hopes and drives, his strengths, his weaknesses, his inconsistencies. I shall suggest some of the ways in which, it seems to me, these qualities acted upon, and were in turn acted upon by, the men and milieu around him, how they contributed to his rise and ultimately to his personal tragedy.

The facts concerning U Nu's political rise need only brief recapitulation. He first came to national political prominence during the famed University Strike of 1936. The then President of the Student Union, he had just been expelled from the University of Rangoon because of provocative speeches he had made in the nationalist cause. The expulsion of Aung San, then editor of the student newspaper, shortly followed that of U Nu. The second expulsion sparked the strike, which quickly enlisted nationwide enthusiasm

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and sympathy, and gave the youthful student leaders the opportunity to tour the country making fiery speeches, organizing supporting boycotts and sympathy strikes, and generally fanning the nationalist flame. In this activity, U Nu excelled. By the time the strike ended, he had become a well-known and important national political figure.

From this time on, his rise was swift. U Nu did not return to the University to complete his studies for the law degree. He became active in the important nationalist Dobama Asiaone party, helped found the Red Dragon Book Club devoted to independence and Socialist propaganda, wrote and translated prolifically, and even helped found a short-lived "national" college in Rangoon. When World War II broke out in Europe, U Nu and other young nationalists joined with Dr. Ba Maw in a so-called "Freedom Bloc" which sought to exact immediate independence for Burma as the price of support to England in the war. Again, U Nu made many speeches throughout the country in the independence cause. For these he was sent to prison in 1940, and thus became something of a national hero.

During the Japanese occupation, U Nu served as Foreign Minister, then in the Information Department, in Dr. Ba Maw's puppet government. But these were only cover activities which permitted him to protect his comrades engaged in the secret resistance movement which, almost from the start of the Japanese occupation, began to plot against Burma's new masters. Together with Aung San, Than Tun and Thakins Chit and Mya, U Nu participated in a so-called "Inner Circle" of Thakin leaders which demanded, and obtained, from Dr. Ba Maw the power of veto over his political decisions as the price of their support. It was at a meeting in U Nu's house in August, 1944, that the Anti-Fascist Organization (later, AFPFL) was born, the major participating groups being the Army, the Socialists and the Communists. Although directly affiliated with none of them, U Nu seemed better able than anyone else to help them get together in a common cause.

These same elements—Army, Socialists and Communists—joined in urging U Nu to return to political life when, after the British return to Burma, he sought to retreat to a literary life. He thereupon returned as Vice-President of the AFPFL, and joined with General Aung San in the negotiations which won England's commitment to Burma's independence within one year. Now, once more, he withdrew, and again his friends required him to return, this time to the Constituent Assembly chosen to prepare the Constitution, and to serve as the first legislative body of independent Burma, until Parliamentary elections could be held. U Nu's designation as President of that Constituent Assembly in June 1947 was evidence of the great status and respect he had by now achieved. When Aung San was assassinated, one month later, there was no doubt in the minds either of the British or of the AFPFL leadership as to who Aung San's successor had to be.

This was not the pinnacle of U Nu's success. The Constitution was yet

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to be written, and approved, especially by the frontier peoples. Successive insurrections of the two Communist parties, of the PVOs and, finally, of the Karens, needed to be combatted, even when all these were compounded by a civil servants' strike and wholesale Cabinet resignations. Those were the dark days when the cause of the beleaguered young government, now confined to Rangoon with the rest of the country lost, seemed hopeless. U Nu hung on, and fought. Within a year, the back of the organized insurrections was broken, and it became clear to all that the government would survive.

It was now, in the first half of the 1950 decade, that he reached his greatest heights. On his initiative, a major, long-range, comprehensive social and economic development plan and program—*Pyidawtha*—was prepared and launched. He organized a great Synod of the Theravada Buddhist faith—only the sixth in all history. After cultivating new friendships with Yugoslavia and Israel, U Nu became a leading figure in the closer cooperation of the Colombo Powers—India, Pakistan, Ceylon, Indonesia and Burma—and remained a significant voice when this organ of cooperation was broadened to include the entire Asian-African bloc of emergent nations. His frequent travels took him to the U.S.S.R. and China, to Europe and the United States. He seemed everywhere to win esteem and friendship for his country and himself. Confidence, too, was expressed in the large-scale loans and credits and other assistance Burma was granted from many sources—India, the Soviet Union, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the United States. These successes abroad naturally enhanced his prestige at home.

It is not possible to demarcate precisely where U Nu's rise faltered and slowed, or where his political decline began. Superficially, this might be marked, as it has been by many, by the May 1958 split in the AFPFL party and government. It might equally well date from the January 1958 Congress of the AFPFL which preceded the split, or from U Nu's temporary demission from office in June 1956, or even from the preceding 1956 elections. Certainly, each of these events was an important phase in the developing drama which saw, after the party split: a threat of civil war; the first military takeover; a strange military interregnum; a smashing personal victory for U Nu and his new Union Party early in 1960; an indecisive, aimless, frustrating and factional performance on the part of U Nu and his government in the next two years; and, finally, the second army coup of early March 1962, which brought the present military dictatorship into being, and U Nu into confinement.

Whatever the superficial appearance, it appears that U Nu's political decline began really a long time before the sequence of events just recalled. Its seeds, as suggested earlier, were deeply rooted in his personality, character and background and were developing even as his political fortunes rose. Some of the harvest was being reaped even as he approached the pin-

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nacle of his success in the mid-1950s. Even by this time, issues and relationships had developed which were to lead inevitably to the sequence of public events which the histories record.

U Nu was born on May 25, 1907 in Wakema, a small town in the Myaungmya district. He was the first-born child of pious, small trader parents who sold supplies needed by Buddhist monks. His early years do not seem especially noteworthy. He attended the Wakeme Anglo-Vernacular School until the school strike of 1920 which, he has said, made him politically conscious for the first time. He concluded his pre-high school years in the Wakema National School founded in protest after that earlier strike where he, on at least one occasion, participated vigorously in a political demonstration at the age of fourteen. From 1922 to 1925, Nu attended the Myoma National High School in Rangoon, where he was a good but not outstanding student in English and Burmese language and history. Here he was a debater, he began to write plays and he boxed. What apparently most impressed his fellow students and his teachers were his thoughtful demeanor and his readiness to fight for any maltreated underdog. His undergraduate years at the University were not too different. He was not an outstanding student. He was devout, serious, withdrawn, quick-tempered and quixotic in the search for justice. His earlier interest in playwriting had by now developed into a passion. Those who wish may speculate whether the born dramatist tends, more than most, to probe into the motivations of others; whether he tends to manipulate people in life, as he does characters on the stage; whether he tends to see with more perspective; whether he tends to dramatize himself.

Between 1929 and 1934, when U Nu returned to the University to study law, he had engaged to some extent in politics, taught school, and been married. He decided to take a law degree, apparently convinced that this was indispensable for a political career, upon which he had by now determined. It was not long before he was in the thick of nationalist politics at the University, together with Aung San, Kyaw Nyein, Thein Pe, Raschid, Ohn and others, to most of whom he was of course senior by several years. He became President of the Students' Union and embarked by design on a course which soon led to the strike previously described.

In making the provocative speeches which brought about his expulsion from the University, U Nu displayed a courage, a gift for leadership and a disregard for whatever consequences might follow what he considered a rightful action, which contributed greatly to his political fortunes. He was an inspiring leader. But even in those days certain weaknesses were apparent to his friends and colleagues. He was highly superstitious, to the point even of believing that the counting of his beads and the writing of appropriate numbers on the University wall had contributed to the success of the strikers' cause. And he could be mentally lazy. He was capable of representing positions without troubling himself to learn what was behind

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them. Thus, on one occasion, while on a speech-making tour in Henzada with U Raschid on behalf of the strike, U Nu inveighed at length against the University Act, the iniquities of which the strikers had fixed upon, *ex post facto*, as the cause of the strike. When he was asked by someone in his audience just what was wrong with the Act, and in what respects it should be amended, he was unable to reply. With a candor which was also characteristic of him later on, he admitted he did not know but would have to get the answer from U Raschid.

The U Nu of the Japanese occupation period some years later is obviously much more matured, both as man and politician. Of special interest is his conduct during his last weeks in jail, after he had once more paid a stiff price for his speechmaking on behalf of independence. In April 1942, after the Japanese invasion, Nu was in prison in Mandalay, then still held by the British. Desiring Thakin support, the British offered U Nu release, if he would go to China, and support from there the fight against Japan. Nu's reply was that he would do so only on two conditions: that Britain promise independence after the war; and that his Communist friends, who were also in jail, be permitted to accompany him. These were bold demands for a young man to make, but also principled and courageous.

The role Nu later played in the Ba Maw government, in which he represented his Thakin comrades, obtained information for them and protected their resistance activities, also required great courage and a steady nerve. And it seems especially noteworthy that he was trusted by the Army, the Socialists and the Communists—the major independence fighter groups—to a degree which permitted him to serve as a cementing force which helped amalgamate them in the Anti-Fascist Organization. On the Japanese withdrawal from Burma, Nu once again showed leadership, principle and courage in accompanying Dr. Ba Maw and the Japanese on the retreat, when he could have gone underground instead, and when it was clear that in going along he would in effect be serving as a hostage for friends who had already taken up arms against the Japanese.

Finally, in this pre-independence period, it is impressive that when Nu sought twice to withdraw from politics after the British return, his comrades of different political complexions both times insisted on his return. Clearly, U Nu had long impressed his fellow leaders with his daring, energy, patriotism, sincerity, tolerance, sagacity, honesty, trustworthiness, ability to act as honest broker between conflicting personalities and views, and, in general, with his leadership abilities.

I can confirm most of these, and other qualities, from my own observations in the later years. Observing him, in relation to his colleagues and developing events, it seemed to me that Nu's greatest strengths as a political leader were his magnificent courage, his buoyant optimism, his simple goodness, his humility and tolerance, his humanity and wisdom, his quick intelligence and imagination, his charismatic appeal and his gift of leader-

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ship. Space does not permit me here to document these qualities, but I have often seen U Nu in meetings with his ministers when issues both large and small were under consideration, and it was almost always he who stood out by virtue of these qualities; who would better envisage the shape of coming events; who would seek to view an issue from all sides; who would probe out, with keen questions, the related and sometimes reluctant facts; who would think who, other than those present, should be heard, before decision on the issue; whose thought processes were generally one or more steps ahead of those of his colleagues. They waited for, and deferred to, his judgments, because almost always they had no better proposals to offer.

In the early 1950s one often heard it said that U Nu held the Prime Ministership only by virtue of the consent of U Ba Swe and U Kyaw Nyein, because they found it convenient for him to do so. But whatever differences they had, even in those days, they recognized that he was the best man among them. And, as often before, it was U Nu who made it possible for the rival personalities and conflicting interests of his fellow leaders—Kyaw Nyein versus Ba Swe, Kyaw Nyein and Ba Swe versus Thakin Tin and Thakin Kyaw Tun, Burmans versus Hill Peoples, and so on—to hold together and to work together.

What were the weaknesses and the inner contradictions which played so important a part in U Nu's fall? Some of these weaknesses he shared with his colleagues. They were not an immediate cause of difference or friction between them, although their consequences later were. Others did result in dissension and friction, and in issues, both substantive and personal, which contributed greatly to his subsequent failure.

U Nu's most serious weaknesses were his lack of practical experience and executive-administrative ability; his failure to recognize the need for delegation of responsibility and authority; his failure similarly to recognize the need for priorities, or the need to follow through on the many projects, programs and policies he initiated; his imperfect appreciation of the essentials of a functioning democratic society; the polarity which led him alternately to seek the hurly-burly and limelight of political action and the withdrawn meditative or creative life; and, finally, the corruption that came with power.

U Nu's lack of practical experience and executive ability, need not have been terribly damaging, had a modicum of such experience and ability been present among his colleagues, and had he been inclined to delegate authority reasonably commensurate with the responsibilities assigned. Neither of these was the case. Of all U Nu's colleagues, only U Raschid had any experience worth mentioning in the world of affairs, and even his was not great. Below ministerial level, the civil services unfortunately were also weakly staffed, even when measured only by the requirements of traditional government activities. But the socialist and development drives had burdened the government apparatus with a host of new, non-traditional re-

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sponsibilities constituting an almost impossible burden for even an experienced, first-class civil service to which an appropriate degree of authority had been conveyed. U Nu simply could not recognize the need for administrative reorganization to improve the quality of the public services and their managements, or to remove the bureaucratic shackles inherited from the colonial administration so that the services could at least perform up to the level of their limited capabilities.

Because of Nu's lack of practical experience, he had little understanding of what was involved in getting a practical job done. He could request that an intensive analysis be made of the operating efficiency of all Burma's far-flung public enterprises—the railways, waterways, airways, electric companies, trading companies, manufacturing enterprises, development companies, and so on—and quickly lose interest when told that this could not, as he desired, be carried out within the space of a few weeks. He could give an order for thousands of tons of heavy materials and supplies to be removed from a supply dump, where they had lain for months, so that excavation for a new building could be started on the site, and expect that within a day or two the work would have been completed. He scolded a loyal and able minister for not starting the excavation work within that time, and refused to believe, until he saw with his own eyes, that the supplies had not yet been moved. It would have taken longer than that for the necessary paper orders to be prepared, and even longer for alternative storage arrangements to be made. One other incident which illustrates this same point concerns his old friend U Thant, who for several years served as U Nu's most intimate Secretary, with responsibility for speech-writing, international correspondence and confidential matters. When U Hla Maung, the Prime Minister's economic secretary, was relieved as Executive Secretary of the Economic and Social Board, which had virtually final authority over all economic plans, projects, programs, policies and implementation for the entire government, U Thant was designated to replace him. When I reported to U Thant, to brief him on some of the more urgent matters requiring his attention in his new post, he told me that he felt uncomfortable in this new assignment, for which he lacked background, and that he had expressed himself to this effect to the Prime Minister. U Nu's response, he told me, was unsympathetic. "What's so difficult about it?", he demanded. "It's only an administrative job."

The same factors were responsible in part for U Nu's failure to recognize the need for priorities and the need for executive follow through on the actions he initiated. If it was necessary only to give orders, these could be given prolifically, and the Prime Minister was fertile with ideas. It was not necessary to stop and consider whether organization, management, administration and skills were adequate and available to do the job well and in time, or whether new projects could be undertaken only at the cost of slowing down and neglecting others already initiated. If only the money

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was available, that was all that was required. This, of course, was an implicit, rather than an explicit, attitude on U Nu's part. But it was operative for all that. It was a factor in many impulsive, spur-of-the-moment decisions to initiate new projects, whether the Prime Minister was on tour in the districts, or in high-level international conference, or in a private meeting with one of his ministers or subordinates. The consequence was the initiation of far more than could efficiently be executed, the less important along with the more important, and without effective supervision or follow-up. The result was therefore an increasing inefficiency and waste in the use of manpower, material and financial resources which seriously damaged the development program, increasingly disenchanted the country (especially the military), and cost U Nu and his government dear, in political as well as economic terms.

It may occasion surprise to suggest U Nu's imperfect appreciation of the essentials of a functioning democracy as a major weakness which contributed to his fall. The world knows U Nu as a democrat, and so, by belief, he was. But it is not quite enough to believe in democracy; it is necessary also to practise it. This U Nu and his government did not adequately do. First, while suffrage was universal, so far as parliamentary elections were concerned, it was only at the village level, and in the case of a few larger cities, that self-government functioned. Most towns, districts and larger divisions were administered precisely as they had been under the British by a chain of command that started in Rangoon and worked its way down. A half-hearted attempt was made to democratize local administration, for a time, in the case of a few selected districts, but the effort was soon dropped.

Second, the Parliament, though popularly elected, was a farce. Party hacks were designated to stand for Parliament. It was understood that, when elected, they would rubber-stamp decisions of the leadership. An August-September budget session of some six weeks, and a short session of two to three weeks in February-March, chiefly to act on supplemental appropriations, constituted the chief Parliamentary activity. U Nu seldom dignified the Parliament by presenting to it significant issues for debate. Government was largely by executive decree. Lacking status or serious function, Parliament did not attract serious or able men, and over the years the lack of a critical, responsible opposition enabled Nu and his government to become increasingly slothful, nepotistic and smug. Lacking accountability, they became in a true sense irresponsible.

Finally, democracy was not practised within the Party itself. The National Congress of the AFPFL held early in 1958 was the first, incredibly, since the early post-war years, and this one was convened only because of the fight for control which was shaping up within the top leadership. If the Party ran the government, it was a small clique at the top who controlled the Party. Again, lacking accountability, the leaders were irresponsible except internally to one another. Only every four years could this leadership

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be said to have been responsible, and then only to a poorly informed, apathetic, semi-controlled electorate.

The polarity which led U Nu to seek retreat from political life, periodically, in favor of meditation and spiritual self-renewal was understandable, even worthy of respect. But it was not always in accordance with the nation's needs and interests, especially in a political and administrative set-up which made it almost impossible for important decisions to be made in the Prime Minister's absence or unavailability. It too often happened that the nation's business stood virtually still, while U Nu spiritually refreshed himself at his inner springs. It was perhaps as much the artist-creator as the religious devotee in him who required from time to time these escapes, to permit him to muse and re-establish contact with his essential self. But with this element in his personality, the Prime Minister came at a heavy price to the nation.

Corruption came with power. Increasingly, over the years, power worked subtly to change the man. He became increasingly impatient with subordinates, colleagues and criticism, his geniality and calm self-control turned more often and more easily into irritability and scolding, he relied more and more obviously on sycophants and he indulged increasingly in impulsive and arbitrary personal actions, sometimes of a quite major character. For example, in a conference with Mr. Mikoyan in 1956 U Nu accepted the invitation to request from Russia whatever gift-projects Burma might desire, and promptly named—in addition to the technological institute previously committed by Krushchev and Bulganin—a hospital, a hotel, a sports stadium and complex, and industrial and agricultural exposition buildings and fair grounds. When Mikoyan at once agreed, U Nu on the spot undertook to return the favor with gifts of Burmese rice.

U Nu was perhaps too innocent to realize that what he had just concluded was not a reciprocal gift arrangement but a barter deal. Almost certainly he failed to recognize that, since the country's development program already in being had counted upon every possible resource, the U.S.S.R. projects could be implemented only by the elimination of other projects, or by a slowdown of the entire program, or by inflation. But it is significant that U Nu could undertake to make on the spot, and without clearance or authorization of any kind, a "gift" of rice which, it was only later estimated, would amount to some \$45 million for the six projects.

This was not a unique instance of its kind, even on a major scale. His actions in connection with the giant pharmaceutical plant years before had been similarly capricious, as were some of his actions in connection with his well-known "directives" of June 1957. Connecting all these were many others of a similar nature, though fortunately on a lesser scale.

It was perhaps this growing corruption of power, exacerbated by the growing discovery that power alone was not a sufficient condition of success in all he undertook, which gradually accentuated the inner contradic-

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tions in U Nu's nature. Now often irritable, though sometimes sweet tempered; impetuous, as well as reflective; headstrong, but judicious; secretive, yet candid; suspicious, as well as trusting; self-deceiving yet self-critical; volatile and yet steadfast, U Nu increasingly perplexed, frustrated and alienated those who trusted and loved him best. The reactions of those who did not trust him naturally went much further. And in the course of all this, serious substantive as well as personal differences naturally arose.

For example the dreaded Bureau of Special Investigation (BSI), controlled directly by the Prime Minister, was intended originally to root out and prevent corruption in government, yet almost everyone agreed that an excess of zeal and suspicion and an insufficient regard for the privacy and motives of the individual, as well as disregard of due process of law, made the BSI more a menace than a help. So fearful were government servants that the making of an honest mistake might land them in jail that decision-making at lower levels, and much of the government's business, slowed to a crawl. Kyaw Nyein and others in the Cabinet deplored this development. Some of them saw it as a pistol pointing at their own heads and wondered whether the BSI's proper function was not being abused, by design, for political purposes.

Similar was the issue of centralized versus decentralized government procurement. Normally, governments have a central procurement agency which buys so-called "common-user" items for all agencies of the government which require them. The procurement of specialized supply items is generally left to the specialized agencies which require them. Again to assure honesty, U Nu for a long time insisted that all supplies, both common-user and specialized, be procured by the central procurement agency. This may have been somewhat more honest, but it was horrendously less efficient, not only because of protracted delays and mistakes in procuring new equipment items, but also because much equipment already on hand went out of operation because minor spare parts were lacking. But for an official, even for a minister, to object to centralized procurement would evoke U Nu's suspicion. This was especially irritating to those colleagues of the Prime Minister who had already been made highly sensitive to the BSI issue—most notably, to U Kyaw Nyein, one of whose lieutenants had been summarily arrested, and held for a long time without hearing or trial, on BSI charges.

These, together with the unilateral, program-disrupting Soviet gift-project arrangements, were perhaps the most serious substantive issues—internal party politics apart—of the period ending June, 1956, when U Nu stepped down from office. Others developed on his return, such as his preemptory, again program-disrupting directives of June 1957, which stressed the need to consolidate and strengthen the development program, but which at the same time, quite unconsciously on his part, threatened to explode it. Even the ever-faithful U Raschid was quite distraught by this development, which

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threw the entire government into a state of near hysteria and shock. There was the stubborn refusal of the Prime Minister, later that year, to adjust Burma's rice export prices appropriately upward, because of a sharply reduced crop, for those countries which had no forward price contracts with Burma. This U Nu, quixotically, refused to do, although the country's finances required it, and Burma's customers had not hesitated to cut their contractual purchase prices remorselessly when Burma's bargaining position was weak. These and other substantive issues belie those who assert that personal differences and rivalries were the sole cause of the AFPFL split, even when it is conceded that the substantive issues tended to take on a personal coloration.

Was U Nu motivated, consciously or unconsciously, by resentment of his presumed dependence on his colleagues' political support, by virtue of their (again presumed) control of the mass organizations which comprised the AFPFL? Did he relinquish office in 1956, fortified by the disappointing election results of that year, to reorganize and purge the AFPFL organizations in the districts—the apparent motive—or rather to demonstrate to his colleagues that they could not get along without him? The truth is, I fear, that they did not miss him very much, during this absence. In many ways, the business of government steadied down, and operated more smoothly. His colleagues did discuss the possibility of moving him up to the Presidency before very long. But I think that by then even many of his friends thought such a move would be in the best interests of the country. And not even his presumed enemies sought to deter him when he announced his intention to return to the Prime Ministership before his year of leave was out.

I have always felt that U Nu's June 1957 directives, issued soon after his return, were motivated by a deep inner desire to demonstrate to the country that his colleagues had not been proceeding along the right path during his absence—that they could not, in fact, do so without him. The subsequent events, when U Nu took sides in the inner party conflict, and thus forced the split in both party and government, may have reflected his perhaps unconscious need to destroy the historic relationships which had prevailed within the AFPFL, so that he might end up with a mass political base and undisputed power of his own. If this supposition is correct, U Nu used, rather than was used by, the Thakin Tin-Thakin Kyaw Dun faction, for his own emotion-driven purposes. But this such a man as U Nu could not admit, even to himself. Neither could he resist or overcome such powerful inner drives.

Thus came the AFPFL split—the first military “Caretaker” period—and then U Nu's smashing return, with his new Union Party, in 1960. The pity is that U Nu should have come back with a most important lesson, wrongly learned. He had decided, rightly I think, that the most serious error of the past had been the failure truly to practise democracy. I think he was de-

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terminated now to practise it, but he did not really understand its essence. If democracy means anything, it means majority rule, and acceptance by the minority of decisions of the majority, provided only the basic rights of the minority are not infringed, and provided it retains the opportunity to seek to win a majority for its positions. But within these conventions, the majority must have the courage and the will to make the decisions needed. U Nu, on his return, construed democracy to mean universal consent. This, of course, was utterly unrealistic. It condemned his new government to indecision, weakness and dissension. It threatened fragmentation and opened the door, for the second time, to the rule of the military. If I am right, democracy did not fail in Burma; it did not receive a fair trial.

I resist the temptation to speculate at this point on the implications of this experience for some of the emerging, one-party governments in Africa, or for the prospective role of the military in these newly developing countries. Nor will I speculate on the possible return of U Nu to the leadership of Burma. One may well ask, how far, and for how long, can a man have fallen, when the apparently all-powerful rulers of the country fear either to bring him to trial, or to release him, or to permit him visitors who could carry his messages to the outside world. In a sense, Ne Win is as much the captive of U Nu as he is his captor, and I suspect that the terror in which Ne Win lives is much greater than that he has been able to inspire in his captive. But this is a question for another day.

One final comment is merited on the noteworthy absence of expressions of sympathy in the Western world for U Nu in captivity, or of responsible criticism of his captors. Granted the tragic and seemingly inevitable course of past events in Burma which has silenced us till now, can outside friends of the Burmese nation afford to continue to remain silent about the unhappy state and trend of affairs in that country? We may uphold the right of all peoples freely to choose their own form of government, free of interference from the outside. But does this principle properly apply to constrain us when the government freely and overwhelmingly chosen by the people of Burma has been ousted by force, and when their present illegal rulers show no intention to submit themselves, or their policies, to the electorate? If representatives of a free Burma solicit outside understanding and aid for the cause of democracy in that country, is it appropriate to deny them even a hearing, for fear of what the military rulers in Rangoon might think?

Current Western policy is no doubt based on the appraisal that, despite the repressive and regressive character of the Ne Win regime, it represents the best hope, in the face of the Communist Chinese danger, for an independent, non-Communist Burma. To me this is tired, timid and superficial analysis, soiled and shopworn even before Syngman Rhee in Korea and Diem in Vietnam last exposed its specious character. It is time for the friends of a democratic Burma to speak up. Even if we cannot affect substantially the course of our government's policy towards the Ne Win regime,

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our words will be noted by those who rule in Rangoon. Despite all censorship, they will eventually reach and bring comfort and courage to those who alone can restore democracy in Burma, and who today feel themselves unaccountably abandoned by the Western world.

*Chevy Chase, Maryland*