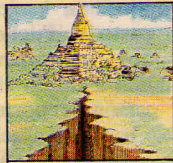


## LETTERS

**Burma Rising**

To the editors of *Asiaweek*



H.K.M. Tin of Australia says none of the ethnic insurgencies in Burma "initiated or aided the present mass movement aimed at overthrowing the government and abolishing the one-party system. They had nothing to do with it" [ALMANAC, October 28]. This argument needs study.

Mr. Tin fails to admit that successive governments have waged undeclared war against non-Burmans and that this endless civil war eats up the major portion of gross national product. The cost goes up as time goes by, so that now there is little or nothing for general welfare. This has resulted in mass unemployment, social disintegration, and frustration among the people.

It is naïve to claim there is no connection between the present uprising and 40 years of non-Burman resistance movements.

SAI MYO WIN

*Uetersen, Federal Republic of Germany*

■ Mr. Tin appears to be a victim of racist indoctrination by the Rangoon régime. He questions why "exile" U Kyaw Win of California proposes an interim council including civilians acceptable to the National Democratic Front [ALMANAC, September 2].

Mr. Tin, himself an "exile" who "left the old country to seek greener pastures," needs to be enlightened. He fails to see that Burma belongs to all its inhabitants — all Burmans, Karens, Shans, Mons, Kachins, Kayahs, Chins, Indians, Chinese, etc. He talks about restoring Burma "to a proud place among nations." But he fails to understand that political reform and internal peace must come first — before we can rebuild our country, before any economic restructuring can take place.

No one has to "heed" the NDF, as Mr. Tin fears. The ethnic minorities now realise that the Burmans they have so hated and feared are also being oppressed and murdered by the government. They're beginning to see that it's not the Burmans but the ignorant policies of the BSPP that systematically torture them. Most of us previously were not even aware of the government's cruelty towards minority tribes.

Granted, "all governments are bound to combat insurgency [and] main-

tain law and order." But it seems that insurgencies no longer exist in Burma. What is taking place now is a true people's revolution where all segments of society have united to overthrow a ruthless régime.

Past misunderstandings must be forgiven and forgotten. A truly democratic federal republic must be established. Mr. Tin should open his eyes before making erroneous statements.

MIMI MYINT-HPU  
*New York, N.Y., U.S.A.*

■ Unable to stand by and watch our people being brutally suppressed, we have formed an organisation representing Burmese Canadians across Canada.

We have called on Canada to bring Burma before the U.N. Security Council so an interim government of national reconciliation may be formed to restore peace and ensure that fair elections can be held. Our proposal, similar to the one by reader U Kyaw Win of California, also calls for a U.N. peacekeeping force.

H.K.M. Tin may like to know why we made this proposal. We made it because the régime is unable to manage Burma's affairs, determined to retain power at all costs, and capable of turning Burma into another Cambodia.

The Union of Burma came into being because all nationalities agreed to work together. When Ne Win abolished the 1948 constitution, the Union's legal basis was destroyed. To the minorities, it is not even a civil war they are fighting. Because of Ne Win, it cannot be assumed that the minorities will wish to remain in the Union.

Mr. Tin reveals a narrow perspective by saying the uprising in the cities has nothing to do with those fighting in the jungle. Except for the Karens, the minority armies fighting in the jungle did not gain much support until Ne Win took over. The various races are fighting not so much to gain independence as to overthrow the military dictatorship. They enjoy more support among their people than Ne Win ever enjoyed among his own.

Burmans today feel revolted and betrayed by the brutal behaviour of the armed men under Ne Win. The news of female students being raped by riot police has made people especially angry. Yet, sadly, this behaviour has been the norm since 1948. This was what the Karens, Shans and others were complaining about before 1962. This was the main reason the minority races were forced to take up arms.

It is typical Ne Win disinformation to brand as "exiles" people who left to

seek greener pastures. Many were sent overseas for studies or were already abroad for one reason or another before Ne Win's coup, and were not allowed to return. Others were forced to leave. Others refused to submit and left in order to continue resistance in any way they could. Some did leave for greener pastures — just as others stayed behind to benefit from the régime.

Let us all do our best to help rebuild Burma by keeping an open mind and exploring new solutions. Fighting one another for 40 years hasn't worked. Instead of standing on pride and fearing those who are different or who act differently, let us look at the facts and try to understand one another's viewpoints.

HARN YAWNGHWE  
National Coordinator  
Canada Burmese Federation  
*Shawville, Québec, Canada*

■ Your excellent reporting on my blighted country is a tremendous service. We have a long way to go before Burma is rid of tyranny, but we have a debt of thanks to such journalism, and it will be recorded in our history.

U KIN OUNG  
Vice-Chairman, The Committee for  
Restoration of Democracy in Burma  
*Waramanga, ACT, Australia*

■ Burmese who left their homeland, Mr. Tin, did so because they didn't want to stay under Ne Win's egocentric, uneducated and barbaric régime. Most of these people left the motherland only in body. Minds, souls and spirits remain in Burma.

The NDF is not a group of rebels fighting for their own ends, as some would have it. It was formed with the consent of all the indigenous ethnic revolutionary forces of Burma (including the Burmans). Its main objective is to solve the country's internal problems politically, not by force.

Until the military dictatorship is prepared to recognise the rights of the ethnic groups and until a democratic federation is established, the NDF's role cannot cease. Burma is a "multinational" country, collectively inhabited and equally owned by many indigenous peoples. The most effective form of government would be one along the lines of a democratic federation, like the U.S.A. and Australia.

TIN AUNG GYI  
*Perth, Australia*

■ On September 1-3 an extraordinary session of the Rohingya National Council, which is the congress of the Arakan Rohingya Islamic Front (ARIF), decided to support the democratic movement in

Burma. It was agreed that Burma should have a federal system with constitutional guarantees protecting the legitimate rights and freedoms of all races and nationalities.

This "right to an equal footing in all spheres of national activity" must include the Rohingya people — about 1.2 million of whom have been expelled from or forced to flee Burma [ALMANAC, October 7] and who want to return to their ancestral homeland.

NURUL ISLAM  
Chairman, Arakan Rohingya  
Islamic Front  
*Chittagong, Bangladesh*

■ Western democracies have protested to the Burmese régime and are largely sympathetic to the pro-democracy forces. The U.S. cut off its aid program as did West Germany. Japan, which provides about 70% of Burma's foreign aid, has suspended programs but has not ended them. Beyond that, Western governments claim there is very little they can do to influence events in Burma.

The notion that Western aid to Burma is too insignificant to make a difference is simply not true. Foreign aid to Burma may be modest in amount as far as international aid packages go, but it is crucial in the context of Burma's economic debacle.

What propelled people into the streets in the first place?

The student protests that led to the uprising began last year when the economy hit rock bottom. Exports of rice, the main foreign currency earner, dropped to 150,000 tons from a 1960 peak of 2 million tons. Burma, which used to export oil, today imports crude oil with borrowed money just to meet essential transportation needs — primarily for the troops fighting the ethnic minorities. The estimated trade deficit plus debt repayment for this year alone amounts to \$616 million while the foreign currency reserve remains at \$20 million. While food was available, 500% inflation made even rice unaffordable by many families. To add insult to injury, Ne Win twice in two years withdrew from circulation all high-denomination currency notes, wiping out people's savings.

I come from a family that has fought against the dictatorship since 1962. My father, the late U Kyaw Nyein, was deputy prime minister in U Nu's government. For opposition to Ne Win's dictatorship, my father was incarcerated for four and a half years, my mother for two and a half years. During U Sein Lwin's recent short tenure, my uncle U Kyi Han, former ambassador to Indonesia and the Phil-

ippines, was arrested along with Aung Gyi, the dissident leader. He now serves as joint general secretary of Aung Gyi's opposition front.

As a leader of the protests in Burma at the time of U Thant's funeral in 1974, I spent five years in Ne Win's jail along with 56 fellow students including my younger brother BoBo Kyaw Nyein. Without prior notice, legal representation or public witness, we were put before a military tribunal convened inside the prison. Subsequently I spent a total of two and a half years in solitary confinement.

TUN KYAW NYEIN  
*Maryville, Tennessee, U.S.A.*

■ In "Let's Make a Deal, Says Ne Win" [INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS, November 4], you say: "The standard payment for porters is 8 kyats (\$1.30) a day, but many never see any wages." I interviewed some who had been rounded up by soldiers in the streets of Rangoon and forced to become porters for the army. They were not given time to notify their relatives. They were made to carry excessively heavy loads through jungle terrain for seven days and nights with very little rest. They were given no food, let alone wages. It rained a lot and they had to stay in their wet clothes. They were beaten and kicked by the soldiers. At least ten of them fell exhausted by the track and were abandoned.

When I saw them they had run away from the soldiers. One was so thin and weak he could hardly walk. Two were limping

heavily. Several had sores on their backs and shoulders from carrying heavy loads.

This agency has been investigating human rights violations on a massive scale, perpetrated by Burmese soldiers against members of such groups as the Karens, Kachins, Mons and Karennis, for the past three years. The government in Rangoon seems prepared to go to any length to retain power, including the beating, torture and murder of its own citizens and the use of its own people as slave labour.

H. WOOD  
Chairman, Tribal Refugee Welfare  
*Mae Sot, Thailand*

■ As a doctor, I take this opportunity to do a post-mortem on recent events.

How did Ne Win manage to hold power from 1962 till now? Because of his "pocket army" — Military Intelligence (MI). This branch of the military consists of a group of hoodlums hated and feared not only by the people but by other military personnel and BSPP members. In recent months it was MI that set up the

"counterstrike group" under Ne Win's daughters and MI chief Khin Nyunt and his subordinates. Their hoodlums, paid lavishly by MI, infiltrated demonstrators and strikers, even going into the jails to pose as prisoners. Posing as Buddhist monks they disrupted otherwise peaceful demonstrations and made the army shoot the people. Some were given the task of assassinating opposition figures. MI is the only force on which Ne Win can rely 100%. That is why the secretary of the army coup committee is Khin Nyunt.

Experience suggests only a moron would believe that Ne Win's hangmen will bring in democracy. They will stage an election, of course — but only for parties led by BSPP and military persons. One example is the National United Party.

What must be done? First, it should be made clear to Ne Win and his associates that "the time is not far off when they shall pay back corpse for corpse, flesh of their own flesh." Second, all Burmese opposition groups must unite without preconditions. Do not let down those young students who sacrificed their lives! Third, no democratic country should give any official recognition to the present criminal régime. Let all foreign economic, social and cultural ties be cut till the military stops its power-grabbing. Finally, let all Burmese people at home and abroad unite to oust Saw Maung's puppet government, to bring the criminals of the past 26 years to justice, and to bring democracy to our motherland.

DR. TIN SOE  
*Thimphu, Bhutan*

■ Your continuous and unbiased coverage for the past several months is greatly appreciated by Burmese here. There was a lot of news about Burma in the U.S. media while the shooting and bloodletting were going on — and that was about it. The media were too busy with the presidential election. Thank God we discovered Asiaweek. Your interviews with U Nu, Aung Gyi and Min Ko Naing have kept us really informed. By reading your Aung Gyi interview very carefully, we were able to receive much "inside" information. On the face of it Aung Gyi gave the impression he still revered Ne Win — but told us that about 8,000 people were killed in August alone and that many beheadings were carried out.

U HLA SHWE  
Secretary, Federation for Human  
Rights and Democracy in Burma  
*Long Beach, California, U.S.A.*

Write Letters Dept., Asiaweek, 22 Westlands Road, Hongkong. All letters intended for publication must include the writer's name & address, though names will be withheld when necessary. Letters are subject to editing as clarity and space require.