CHAPTER I

THE BACKGROUND
INTRODUCTION

One-man authoritarian rule has been considered a common panacea for development in many Asian, African and Latin American countries in recent times. Nevertheless, at the time of the withdrawal of Western Colonial rule, there were ample opportunities to adopt liberal democracy based on the Western model. Burma, too, took to the parliamentary form of government since its independence in January 1948. There was a short interregnum of military rule in 1958-60. Equally short span of parliamentary government from 1960 to 1962 was, however, replaced by a military coup in March 1962. Since then, Burma has been under one-man military rule. The failure of the civilian government under U Nu, the first and last Prime Minister of a civilian parliamentary government of independent Burma, certain anomalies in the Burmese Constitution, insurgencies by minority ethnic groups, intra-party schisms, and an alien-dominated economy led to a military-engineered coup d'etat on March 2, 1962. The study of all these aspects is necessary to assess the situation which led to the 1962 military take-over. Here, certain pertinent questions regarding military-dominated one-party rule may be raised. How far would some Western scholars' view of the necessity and efficacy of a military-dominated single-party rule be relevant in Third World societies? Has military intervention in the politics of modernisation been a success
or failure bordered on tragedy? What have been the causes and consequences of military intervention for modernization and political development? To what extent has the Burma Socialist Programme Party been able to develop stable political institutions, mobilize the masses on its side, and thereby command an authoritarian, legitimate governmental machinery in Burma?

In the present-day inter-state relations, the developing nations of the world pose a challenge for the social scientists. Also, the complexity of the forces interacting in rapidly evolving societies has raised a number of issues in research methodology. Firstly, there is the problem of understanding the wide variety of influences determining the pattern of contemporary events in a newly independent state. Here, a more impressionistic and intuitive treatment of particular situations than the strict canons of scientific method is called for. Secondly, there is the difficulty of achieving cross-fertilization between macro-studies and micro-studies of a particular society. The present behaviour of a nation may be looked upon as determined by its national history and culture, its institutions, and its resources. The only sensible answer would be to build bridges between these two types. Thirdly, there is the enigma of incomplete historical materials. The researcher, perforce, has to highlight the rapid process of
transformation of a particular society. It becomes increasingly apparent that dramatic and vivid phenomena of human existence representing the quest for national identity and the process of transition from tradition to modernity cannot fully be comprehended or described by the limited technology of politics. So, in order to overcome such deficiencies, there has to be an intuitive creation of a tentative model in order to grasp fully the overtones of a total human situation.

In the context of the objective conditions in Burma before the coup, it could be said that imposition of military rule in order to contain threats to national integration was a phenomenon typical of many transitional societies which had experienced civil wars and rebellions, e.g., Thailand, the Philippines, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, South Korea and Pakistan, as also Nigeria, Sudan and Ethiopia. It is possible to work on a hypothesis that once the military has the taste of political power, it is unwilling to the extreme to go back to the barracks. In order to arrest the growing deterioration in political and socio-economic conditions in a given country, the military tends to create institutions in order to establish a permanent hold on the country. This may be considered quite relevant in the context of the developments in Burma during the period of this study.
In the first year of the coup, the military leaders formed the Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) as a vehicle to legitimize their rule. The quest for legitimacy, however, proved quite long and arduous. The persistent efforts of the Revolutionary Council (RC) for a period of twelve years culminated in 1974 in the adoption of the Constitution of the Socialist Republic of the Union of Burma, which turned the country into a monolithic one-party state.

In the early stages of its evolution, the RC enunciated the policies of the military regime in the framework of the 'Burmese Way to Socialism' (BWS), outlining long-range goals. It expressed its commitment to building a new society. One central objective was the creation of a socialist economy - the "planned, proportional development of all the national productive forces", aimed at eliminating the exploitation of man by man and creating a more prosperous and "morally better" society. 1 The BWS envisaged a clean break with the multi-party system of democracy. It stated that 'parliamentary democracy' had "not only failed to serve our socialist development but...lost sight of and deviated from the socialist aims". The RC pledged to establish "mass and class organizations" based "primarily on

the strength of peasants and other working masses who form the great majority of the nation. 2 A decade or so is long enough to assess the successes and/or failures registered under the authoritarian rule. Hence, a study of the role of the BSPP, the political organ of the RC, is in order.

As in many developing countries, where the military has assumed the role of modernizers, the role of the Burmese military as an agent of modernization becomes a significant topic of study. An effort would thus be made to show how far a military model for a developing country like Burma has proved efficacious in this process.

The year 1962 marks a watershed in the political history of Burma after independence. Since 1962 many political and socio-economic changes were affected with wide-ranging ramifications. The year 1974 is also quite significant because this year the military rulers succeeded, at least in form, in legitimizing themselves for perpetual rule through a civilian façade and establishing an authoritarian polity with a new constitution of the Socialist Republic of the Union of Burma.

After the assumption of power, the military rulers first attempted to create mass organizations including all groups. Following a marked failure registered in this field, the leadership established a cadre party with limited

2. Ibid., p.3.
membership. The object was to build modern political institutions subservient to the party, an instrument by which it could perpetuate its authoritarian rule. It would be interesting to ascertain how far the military junta succeeded in negating the democratic institutions. It is equally necessary to study the extent to which the BSPP could influence various aspects of Burmese societal life.

The Revolutionary Council interacted with the BSPP in order to realize its goal of legitimate military intervention and participation in civilian affairs. It would be useful to study the nature of this interaction and the formation, organisation and structure of the BSPP.

A number of questions could be raised in the course of this study: How did the military leaders attempt new elite formation and what were the sources from which they formed such elites? What was the ideology of the BSPP? Why was it propounded and how far was it relevant to the situation? How was the elite structure of the BSPP conducive to long-term legitimization of the military leadership? How did the interaction between the RC and the BSPP help in the adoption of the new Constitution of 1974? How far was multi-ethnic conflict and insurgency harmful to Burma? What were the basic problems facing the country in this regard? Here, the

behavioural interaction between the dominant Burmans and other ethnic minority groups in relation to problems of insurgency, national unity, ethnic antagonism and aspirations for sub-national identity based on religious, historical, geographical and demographic factors need to be viewed in the light of continuing insurgency in the country.

An attempt would be made to compare the one-man Ne Win military rule in Burma with the military-dominated regimes in Indonesia, the Philippines, and South Korea. The theoretical model of the "Military-rule type" could be applied to the objective situation in Burma. The theory that most modernizing countries suffer from military coups leading to an attempt to perpetuate such rule signifying authoritarianism would be applied specifically to Burma during the period of this study. ⁴

The study will have a descriptive, analytical methodology, extensively using Burmese sources.

THE BACKGROUND

Lack of political stability, especially in the third world countries, is primarily determined by the absence of

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⁴. See Table No.1 (in Appendices) showing number of Coups and Coup attempts in modernizing countries since their independence.
responsive authority, lack of social cohesion and the presence of low-institutionalized regimes. Geographical and historical features, linguistic and ethnic diversity, dormant sub-national aspirations play important parts in fomenting political crises. Burma has been a significant case in point. Burma's dramatic events prior to the military rule had their roots in anti-colonial struggle and in the rule of the pre-independence army. When, after independence, the rule of law under a formal constitution showed signs of strains and the ethnic minority groups manifested fissiparous tendencies threatening the integrity of the country, the military intervened on March 2, 1962 and took over the reins of power.

THE LAND

Burma shares boundaries with Bangladesh, India, China, Laos and Thailand. The delta Basin in the southern part is the most fertile and houses the ethnic or 'core' people, the Burmans. The peripheral regions consisting of hills and high mountains, house the minority groups, like the Shans,


6. See Map No.1 showing Distribution of Major Ethnic Groups.

7. The term 'Burman' denotes the ethnic majority as distinguished from the ethnic minorities such as the Shans, the Mons, the Karens, the Kachins, the Kayahs, the Arakanese, and so on. The term 'Burmese' denotes all the peoples of Burma.
the Mons, the Karens, the Chins and the Kachins. While in the lower part of the country, wet-rice cultivation is common, the upper part has lighter rainfall. This has contributed to the unequal dispersion of population, so that the Burmans demographically dominate the socio-economic and political aspect, and the ethnic minority groups are dependent on dryland farming and thus their resource-bases are limited.  

The ethno-centric approach of the Burman majority to submerge minority cultures has further led to the persistence of aspirations for separate and sub-national identity. Owing to the country's ethnic and ecological heterogeneity, national unity, though pursued by Burman rulers for centuries, has remained an elusive goal. Anawrahta of Pagan (1044-77), Bayinnaung (1551-81), and Alaungpaya (1952-60), all Burman Kings, achieved unity by force, and the ethnic identities of non-Burman groups remained dormant.  

**NATURAL RESOURCES**

In Burman-dominated areas, flourishing agriculture has been the backbone of the economy, whereas in the south of Burma, where tin, antimony, lead, zinc, silver and other metals are found, ethnic insurgents control vast  

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8. See Map No.1.  
9. See Map No.2 showing Pagan Dynasty Boundary.
territories. This has hindered the exploitation of these resources in a big way. This is not the case in Yenangyanung in Central Burma, and in the south-west offshore areas, where there are big petroleum and natural gas deposits, making the country self-sufficient in hydrocarbon fuels. Again, jade and other precious stones, products of Bawdwin mines in Northern Burma, are regularly smuggled out by rebel groups occupying these areas. Nearly ten million hectares of reserved teak and hardwood forests, including potentially large offshore fisheries, bordering Thailand, are yet another source of untapped resources, parts of it in the hands of ethnic minority rebel groups. 10

ETHNO-CULTURAL AND TERRITORIAL LINKS WITH NEIGHBOURS

Burma is wedged between two great neighbours, India and China. Its long time association with India has been on cultural rather than on political lines and other contacts have been mainly by sea. Mountain ranges, highlands along its borders, and in accessible mountainous terrain provide refuge to insurgent groups such as the Kachin Independence Army, Shan State Army, Wa National Army, Rohingya Patriotic Front, Naga Group, Chin Groups, Karen National Union, New

10. The various ethnic rebel groups belong to the Kachin, Shan, Wa, Lahu, Pa-O, Palaung, Karen, Kayah, Mon, Arakan, Naga and Chin sub-nationalities. Groups, factions, and alliances are continually changing. See Anti-colonial Struggle of the National Races (Rangoon, BSPP Hqrs.1977), p.20.
Mon State Party and so on. The Burma-Thailand-Laos border on the eastern and south-eastern side of the country is one of the lushest areas of the world for growing poppies, and is a big conduit for narcotic smuggling, and a haven for Nationalist Chinese (KMT) remnants and Shan insurgents. The fact that ethnic minority groups inhabit exclusive regions of their own, reinforces their separate ethnic identity.

THE PEOPLE

The indigenous people are all of Mongoloid stock, and at least remotely akin to one another. Since the country is divided into the plains and delta, and the mountains, Burma's political, cultural and economic development has been along the valleys watered by the rivers and along the delta plains. The mountains along the borders act as barriers in the process of homogeneity of the people of the low-lands and peripheral borders.

Ethnically related to the Tibetans, the Burmans

11. Maran La Raw, "Towards a Basis for understanding the Minorities in Burma", in Peter Kunstadter (ed.), South-east Asia Tribes, Minorities and Nations (Princeton, 1967), pp.125-140. See also Map No.4 Showing Topography of Burma.

12. See "Kutch serves as narcotics conduit for Europe", Times of India (Delhi), March 23, 1984, p.17. It contains a reference to the Golden Triangle.

13. P. Sharan, Government and Politics of Burma (New Delhi, 1985) 0.2.
comprise about 75 per cent of the total population.\(^{14}\) Among the largest non-Burma group are the Karens and the Shans. The Kachins and the Chins in the uphill country are about 300,000 each\(^{15}\) although anti-Burma sentiment is historically ingrained, members of these non-Burman groups have been involved in rebellion since 1948. In addition, two different ethnic Burman Communist factions have also been in revolt since 1948.\(^{16}\)

These groups occupy strategic positions along Burma's border with India, China, and Thailand. In the plains and lower Burma are the Mons, the Arakanese, and the Delta Karens, groups of which are in revolt against the Government in Rangoon.

The dominant religion throughout Burma is Theravada Buddhism.\(^{17}\) The delta Karens of the plains, the Kachins and other remote hill tribes are Christians\(^{18}\).

\(^{14}\) According to the 1973 Census, the population was 27 million. See *Asia Year Book 1974* (Hongkong, 1974), p.41.

\(^{15}\) See Map No.1.

\(^{16}\) They are the Red Flag Burma Communist Party (BCP) and the White Flag Communist Party of Burma (CPB).

\(^{17}\) Burmese Buddhism embraces nearly all of the Burmans, Shans, and many among the Mons, Arakanese, Kayaha and Karens. See Map No.3 showing areas of domination insurgent groups.

\(^{18}\) See Table No.2 on the Ethno-linguistic composition of Burma.
These geographical, religious, demographic and other differences have created problems of ethnic integration with the result that some Kachin, Shan, Chin, Arakan, Karen, Kayah, Mon and other tribal groups have made efforts to assert their independence through secessionist movements. The multi-ethnic diversity of the Burmese people and the domination of the government by the Burman majority continue to cause strains leading to conflict. The insurgencies in Burma are the result, predominantly, of deeply rooted antagonisms between the majority and minority ethnic groups. 19

HISTORY

Historically, the efforts of the ethnic majority Burmans or "core" people residing in the fertile regions to dominate the ethnic minorities or "non-core" people of the uplands and mountainous regions, could be traced to the Toungoo Dynasty of Burma (1287-1752). In 1280 there had been established a fortified town, Toungoo, on the Sittang River. It subsequently became an important political centre of Tabinshwehti (1531-50) who established the second unified Burmese Kingdom. He conquered Pegu in 1539, extending his

control to Martaban, Tavoy and Prome, home of the Talaings [sic] 20.

Then came the British colonial era. It began with the British annexation of different parts of Burma, starting with 1826, at different times, and extended over a period of sixty years. The three Anglo-Burmese Wars of 1826, 1852 and 1885 resulted in the complete colonization of the country. 21

Following Burma's defeat in the Third Anglo-Burmese War, it was made part of the British Indian Empire. The British Government of Burma Act of 1935 separated it from India. 22 The Act, brought into force on April 1, 1937, made Burma a part of South-East Asia. This was in tune with its ethnic character, social structure, economic development, and physical geography.

As colonial rulers, the British encouraged the non-Burman groups to retain their group characteristics. The areas such as those of the Karens, Chins and Kachnis, who were predominantly Christians, were administered separately from Burma proper. Ethnic antagonisms were deepened as the British recruited the Christianized Karens, Chins and

20. The correct word is 'Mon' derived from 'Ramanya' or 'Raman'.


Kachins into the colonial army. The Shan States were brought under British rule by 1889, with the 'Sawbwas' (Feudal Chiefs) retaining their traditional powers.\textsuperscript{23}

THE EMERGENCE OF POLITICAL MOVEMENTS

The fall of the Konbaung Dynasty in 1885 and the removal of national and local elites from positions of power created a political vacuum. It was filled by Buddhist non-political organizations aiming at revitalizing faith. A Young Men's Buddhist Association (YMBA), modeled on the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), was established in Arakan in 1902 and in Rangoon in 1906. The YMBA soon had 50 branches in town throughout the country.\textsuperscript{24} A national organization, the General Council of Buddhist Associations, was set up. In 1918, a British proposal to grant a very limited system of self-government, known as dyarchy, to British India, forced the YMBA to boycott the dyarchy, reform.\textsuperscript{25} December 5, 1920, College and school students,


\textsuperscript{25} Burmese national sentiment called for a constitution for Burma separate from that of India. Later, in November 1931, it was decided at the Special Burma Round Table Conference in London that Burma would be separated from India.
and Buddhist monks organized the boycott in Rangoon University in protest against the elitist nature of the University.26 The protesters called for the establishment of 'national schools' that would teach Burmese history, literature, art and technical subjects. Thus the students' strike brought them into the centre of the political arena. Monks having political leanings were yet another force that appeared around this time. The General Council of Sangha Associations (GCSA) established in 1922, the Do-Bama Asi-Ayone (We Burmans Organization) in 1930, and the Saya San peasant rebellion of December 22, 1930, and the 1938 Oil Workers' strike were all led by Burmans and Buddhists.27 Interestingly, non-Burmans and non-Buddhists had virtually no leadership role and had limited participation in these organisations and activities. The absence of this link of the minorities with the majority Burmans was not totally unexpected. During the Konbaung period, the Shans, Chins, Kachins, Kayahs, and other minorities had been linked to the royal court in a tributary relationship. This had in no way limited the authority of

26. The boycott was a protest against the University Act of 1920 which gave opportunities only to children of well-to-do parents. For details, see Anti-Colonial Struggle of the National Races, n.10, p.184.

27. Maung Maung, Political Developments in Burma, 1962-74. (Unpublished M.Phil. Dissertation/SIS/JNU), p.20. The Dobama Asiayone was stated in 1930 with a song exhorting citizens to respect and love the Burman race, religion and language. The members called themselves 'Thakins' or Masters.
the local rulers. The British policy was to separate the administration of the minority groups from that of Burma proper. In the 1937 constitution, the rationale behind the separation of Burma Proper and the border areas was that the lower peoples needed a period of political tutelage. The effect of the policy, however, was to exacerbate divisions in the country that would persist long after independence.28

Meanwhile, the Thakins had gained national prominence through the medium of Rangoon University. In 1935, Maung Nu29 and Thakin Aung San were elected and Secretary of the Rangoon University Students Union (RUSU), respectively. Both of them had a fairly high degree of political consciousness and were later to play a central role in Burma's struggle for independence.

JAPANESE OCCUPATION

Japanese propaganda appeals for a common Asia struggle against "White imperialism" struck a responsive chord in many Burmese. The issue for the Thakins was not a choice between Britain and Japan but about the courses of action


29. Maung Nu or U Nu as he came to be known later, assumed the name Thakin Nu as a member of the Do-Bama Asiayona. He was also the first Prime Minister of independent Burma, but was deposed by General Ne Win in the coup of March 2, 1962. Aung San, later known as General Aung San, became the principal architect of Burma's Freedom.
which would lead most quickly and surely to full independence.\textsuperscript{30}

In August 1940, the Japanese smuggled Thakin Aung San out of Burma to Tokyo, who, together with other men formed the Thirty Comrades to receive military training in Japan. They formed the Burma Independence Army (BIA) and organized underground movements within Burma. One of the Thirty Comrades, Thakin Shu Maung, infiltrated Rangoon in 1942 and organised sabotage activities. It was he who later came to be known as Ne Win, the Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces, after independence. On August 1, 1943, the Japanese granted nominal independence to Burma.\textsuperscript{31} Aung San soon lost his illusions about Japan's obligation to respect Burma's independence. His new Burma National Army (BNA)\textsuperscript{32}, Socialists, Communists and Thakins started a secret anti-Japanese resistance movement, the Anti-Fascist Organization. This United Front later became the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL). Aung San played the central role of co-ordinating diverse groups, such as the Karen National

\textsuperscript{30} Ba Maw, \textit{Breakthrough in Burma} (New Haven, 1968), p.16.

\textsuperscript{31} Dr Ba Maw was designated 'Adipati' or Chancellor. Japanese military authorities treated the Burmese harshly, putting thousands into forced labour. The Kempeitaï, or military police, was universally dreaded.

\textsuperscript{32} Under Japanese Rule the BIA was forcibly de-mobilized, but a smaller military organisation, the Burma Defence Army (BDA) was retained, and renamed the Burma National Army (BNA). See Thakin Nu, \textit{Burma Under the Japanese} (London, 1947), pp. 74, 96, 98.
Organisation. Former associates from Dobama Asiayone, and the leftists, Karen officers in the BNA who had connections with British Officers still in Burma, served to collaborate with the British. This helped in smoothening the process of independence. After the British re-occupied Rangoon in May 1945, following a revolt by the BNA on March 27, led by Aung San, Clement Atlee, then Prime Minister of the Labour Government in London, signed an agreement in January 1947, for granting independence to Burma.

There had been ethnic discord between the majority Burmans and the ethnic groups, which the British had sought to reinforce, long before the grant of independence. Karen identity was in part developed through Christian missionary activity, for proselytization fostered a common ethnic bond contrasting with that of Buddhist Burmans. The Karen National Organization was designed to promote Karen unity and consolidate the establishment of British Colonial rule. The Karens' role in the British armed forces in Burma also prompted them to identify their interests with those of the British. Naturally, Karens were treated harshly by the BIA during the Japanese takeover, a large number of them having been executed as British sympathizers. This still reinforced

33. The Karen National Organization was an affiliate of the AFPFL.
34. Maung Maung, n.27, p.25.
the Karens' sense of separate ethnic identity. After the second world war, a number of Karen leaders agitated for the establishment of a Karen state separate from Burma.

Aung San was aware of the divergence in view between the majority Burmans and the minority non-Burman groups on the issue of independence. The AFPFL did include minority groups, but most of them remained unconvinced of the advantages of becoming part of an independent Burma rather than retaining a British promoted separate identity. Aung San argued that nationalism was not based on race or culture, but a feeling of oneness as different peoples are together in weal and woe. But his concept of nationalism and nationhood met with general suspicion among the Shans, Karens, Kachins and Chins. The clan-oriented and tribal Arakanese, Nagas and Kayahs had their own concepts of self-rule. Eventually, at the Panglong Conference on February 12, 1947, General Aung San and the Kachin, Chin and Shan delegates signed the Panglong Agreement and adopted a compromise constitution. The agreement provided the establishment of Kachin State in the north of the country.


37. J.S. Furnivall, The Governance of Burma (New York, 1960), p.95. The question of the Karens remained unresolved, as the AFPFL rejected the proposal of the Karen National Union for a separate Karen State in Thaton, where Karens were in a minority.
recognition of the autonomy of the Shan Sawbwas, or Feudal Chiefs within the Shan States, and on promise of material assistance, the willingness of the Chins to join independent Burma. The question of whether the Karenni (or the Kayah) would join independent Burma was till left open. The Karens of the Salween District, the Chins of the Arakan Hill Tracts, the Hagas, and the Was (an ethnic group of the north-eastern part of Burma) were not represented in the Panglong Agreement. It could, therefore, not be considered a united people's struggle for independence, but one led and dominated by Burmans only.

Within six months of the Panglong Agreement, on July 19, 1947, General Aung San and six of his Cabinet colleagues were assassinated. The leadership void thus created was subsequently filled by Thakin Nu, President of the Constituent Assembly (elected in 1947). He signed the Nu-Attlee Agreement of October 17, 1947 making Burma a fully independent, sovereign state. 38

Just before independence, therefore, three major events took place to shape the destiny of Burma. These were (i) the Panglong Agreement which gave the right to the Shan and Karenni (which became Kayah State in 1948) states the right to secede from the Union after a period of ten

years\textsuperscript{39}, (ii) refusal to grant the status of a state to the Chins for which only a special division was created, and (iii) the death of Aung San which created a political void filled by U Nu whose inability to amend the clause on secession and use of religion for political purposes led to the military take-over.\textsuperscript{40}

PROBLEMS OF INDEPENDENCE:

THE DECADE OF PARLIAMENTARY RULE, 1948 - 58

Burma started its career under a parliamentary democratic constitution enacted and adopted on September 24, 1947. But there was trouble ahead. The Red Flag Communist faction under thakin Soe, who had broken away from the AFPFL in July 1946, had gone underground.\textsuperscript{41}. As the October 17, 1947 agreement between Burma and Britain was signed, the White Flag Communists, led by Thakin Than Tun, accused U Nu

\textsuperscript{39} Article 201 of the 1947 Constitution states: "Save as otherwise expressly provided in this Constitution or in any Act of Parliament made under Section 199, every state shall have the right to secede from the Union in accordance with the Constitution hereinafter prescribed." Article 202 says: "The right of secession shall not be exercised within ten years from the date of which this Constitution comes into operation". See The Constitution of the Union of Burma, (Rangoon, 1947), Chapter X, p.50. But Article 178 did not allow the Kachin state to exercise this right.

\textsuperscript{40} On August 26, 1961, under the sponsorship of U Nu, the Burmese Parliament passed a law making Buddhism The State religion. See Guardian (Rangoon), August 27, 1961, p.1.

\textsuperscript{41} Than Tun, \textit{People's War, People's Power} (Rangoon, 1946), pp.12-16.
of settling for "sham independence". The Communists organized strikes and demonstrations. In March 1948, a reconciliation with the communists was attempted, but when the attempt failed, Thakin Than Tun left Rangoon and The White Flag insurrection spread through the Sittang-Pegu-Yoma region in Central Burma. In July 1948, the pro-communist White Band faction of the People's Voluntary Organization (PVO) rebelled against the Government, threatening the Capital. A number of Karens, embittered by what they perceived as desertion by the British and uncertain of the future under Burman rule, took advantage of the chaotic state of affairs to initiate their own armed resistance. In 1947 the Karen National Union had demanded that a Karen state be established with the right of secession and that its territory should include large portions of Tenasserim, Pegu, and Irrawaddy divisions. An armed group, the KNDO (Karen National Defence Organisation) was established. The Government's failure to resolve the question of establishing a Karen State and increasing communal violence between Burmans and Karens pushed the KNDO into insurrection in January 1949.

A new threat arose in 1949 when the Chinese civil war spilled over Burmese territory. After Yunnan Province in Southern China was taken over by the Chinese Communists, The PVOS had, in December 1948, refused to hand in their weapons and be absorbed into the regular armed forces. Ibid., p.6.
Nationalist (Kuomintang) Forces crossed into Burma, entrenched themselves in the Shan State and subsequently built up a profitable opium export business in the Golden Triangle.\textsuperscript{43}

There were also too many political parties and factions in the country. The AFPFL itself was composed of a number of affiliated bodies.\textsuperscript{44} Despite these difficulties, in the general parliamentary elections of 1952, the AFPFL won by an overwhelming majority, gaining 200 of the 239 seats. The AFPFL again won in the next general elections in 1956, but with a reduced majority garnering 173 seats. The opposition National United Front (NUT) scored almost 20 per cent of the seats in the Chamber of Nationalities, the Upper House of the Burmese Parliament.\textsuperscript{45} Soon after the election U Nu stepped down from the prime ministership in order to devote his attention to revitalizing and reunifying the AFPFL. Three of U Nu's Ministers U Ba Swe, (who was now the Prime Minister), U Kyaw Nyein, and Thakin Tin-each took the

\textsuperscript{43} See n.12.

\textsuperscript{44} These included a broad array of ethnic and vocational associations: The Burma Muslim Congress, the Karen National Congress, the Chin Congress, the All-Burma Teachers' Organisation, the All-Burma Women's Freedom League, the All-Burma Federation of Trade Organisations, The Socialist Party, the Trade Union Congress, and the All-Burma Peasants' Organisation.

\textsuperscript{45} The NUF was formed in 1956 by the Union of the Marxist-oriented Burma Workers' and Peasants' Party (BWPP) and the Justice Party - to oppose the AFPFL. The chamber of Deputies had 250 seats, and Chamber of Nationalities 125, in the bicameral Parliament, as of 1958.
opportunity offered by U Nu's temporary retirement to mobilize personal support for himself as eventual heir to U Nu's primacy.

Despite all his efforts, however, when U Nu resumed the prime ministership in February 1957, the AFPFL was less unified than before. At the AFPFL Congress in January 1958, U Nu asserted that the League must be a unified political party with its own ideology, which he sought to formulate as socialist but non-Marxist. This was perceived by the socialists in the league as an attack on their independent and dominant position. A split in the AFPFL occurred in March. The 'Clean' AFPFL was headed by U Nu and Thakin Tin, and the Socialist Party leaders, U Ba Swe and U Kya Nyeing, led the "Stable" AFPFL. The 'Stable' AFPFL was the larger faction, and it moved into the opposition. In the circumstances, U Nu had to win over some members of the parliament belonging to the NUF in order to remain in office. This prompted U Nu to adopt a more conciliatory policy towards communists and other rebel organizations. This led to his offering them a complete amnesty and the legalization of their organisation, on condition of renunciation of the use of violence.

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On the other hand, the Burmese Army had been fighting the Communists and other insurgent groups ever since independence. The Army leaders were apparently alarmed that U Nu was not only carrying on his government with the support of Communist members in Parliament, but also offering favourable terms to them, inviting them to surrender and return to the legal fold. Besides, in the civil and administrative departments of the government, indiscipline and negligence of duty had been making serious headway. The insurgent forces, which had been losing ground throughout the mid-1950s seemed likely to benefit unless a strong government took charge. U Nu himself, in a broadcast to the nation on September 26, 1958, said his recent travels throughout Burma had shown him that elections in November, as originally intended, could never be free and fair. Nu also declared that he had invited General Ne Win, the Armed Forces Chief of Staff, to form a government to ensure the holding of free and fair elections by April 1959. Subsequently, on October 28, 1958, U Nu put forward a motion in the Chamber of Deputies that General Ne Win be


offered the prime ministership of a caretaker government. 50

Parliament voted unanimously for the formation of a
Caretaker Government by General Ne Win, charging him with
the mandate to restore law and order in the country and also
to create the conditions that would be conducive to the
holding of free and fair general elections as soon as
possible. 51

THE CARETAKER GOVERNMENT, 1958-1960

In his acceptance speech before Parliament on September
28, General Ne Win called on the armed forces "to maintain
strict discipline" and declared: "My task is to arrange for
free and fair elections within six months if the insurgency
and crimes are brought to an end within the period.
Clarifying his role and position, he stated: "My undertaking
to form a Cabinet has nothing to do with politics, and I
will neither serve party interests nor work with any
political party. 52

In the meanwhile the split in the AFPFL had led to
armed struggle between political rivals in the small areas,

50. "Burma's New Prime Minister" - General Ne Win takes

51. Burma, The Nine Months after Ten Years (The Caretaker
Government) (Rangoon, Ministry of Information),
November 3, 1959, p.2.

52. See "General Ne Win not a party man: Appeal to Burmese
Armed Forces", Times (London), September 29, 1958, p.7.
each side seeking to gain control of the village defence forces set up by the Central Government to help loyal villagers in repelling insurgents. But neither side had won much popular support and confidence. Most of these defence forces were composed of the chosen men of one leader or another and that in itself contributed to the split. Each side was trying to get its man in and disarm its rivals.

In the circumstances, the government seemed to be losing its nerves. This became obvious when a budget session slated for the end of August 1958, had been cancelled, apparently, because it could not be sure of its majority.53

Obviously, despite its alliance with the leftist National United Front (NUF), the 'Clean' AFPFL was not sure of its own strength. At the beginning of September, when a consultative conference of the 'Clean' faction was held under U Nu's leadership, several members of Parliament denounced some troops stationed in the sandoway, Hanthawaddy, Moulmein and Toungoo district as being partisan to the "Stable" faction. An Army Commander in Toungoo thought it fit to clarify his position by launching a poster campaign against the local politicians saying that his men were not prepared to die for any political opportunist.

This and other similar incidents tended to create ill feelings between the Army and politicians. 54

It was in this situation of impasse in the country when U Nu had called upon General Ne Win to take over as Prime Minister. The NUF had dissented claiming that General Ne Win's accession was the work not of U Nu but of the Opposition group led by J Ba Swe and U Kyaw Nyein. 55 But the impulse had, most likely, come from all three sides, for it was clear enough to both government and Opposition that the electoral manoeuvres in which each was engaged could lead only to competitive intimidation rather than to a free election. The conflictual situation of the past few months had brought disorder to many areas - an insidious disorder that was not the work of Communists or other rebels, but of local bosses with rifles at their command. 56

In his autobiography, U Nu mentions that he was "sick of hearing how Members of Parliament were wooed and solicited". If he lost in the cut motions he would have "to face the gamut of dissolution, protests and threats of


55. The NUF accused the two leaders of using Army Officers to help them return to power and of forcing General Ne Win to fall in line with their plans. See "NUF demonstration", Nation (Rangoon), September 29, 1958, p.1.

violence. So with the advice of the Attorney General, U Nu used the Emergency Provision Act to pass the budget estimates. The "Stable" AFPFL appealed to the army to seize the government for acting ultra vires of the Constitution. The army agreed. While this was taking place, U Nu was on a steamer between Mandalay and Rangoon. On his return, he was told of the conspiracy by Home Minister Bo Min Gaung. He ordered Bo Min Gaung to seek out Brigadiers Aung Gyi and Maung Maung and have them brought to him. It was also brought to his knowledge that a coup would soon take place. When the Brigadiers presented themselves U Nu told them to call off the coup. It would only give the army and the country a bad name. U Nu said he was prepared to hand over power to the army on condition that a general election, free and fair, and conducted by the army, he held in six months. He himself would propose General Ne Win's name for Prime Ministership and would call Parliament into session for this purpose. He put this in writing and handed the document to the brigadiers, who went off to consult the general. They returned later and said General Ne Win agreed to the proposal. These developments, therefore, lent credence to the rumours of an intended coup d'etat. The decision by

57. See "The first coup d'etat, 1958", in U Nu, Saturday's Son (Bombay, 1976), pp.325-327. Brigadier Aung Gyi later became a prominent figure after the 1962 coup. He resigned in the early stages of the military rule, due to differences with Ye Win. Brigadier Maung Maung was later sent as Ambassador to Israel.
U Nu to hand over power to General Ne Win for the sake of free, fair and peaceful elections by April, 1959, had led to conjectures which suggested that the proposed change was forced upon the Government by the Army. Three days before the official transfer of power to the caretaker regime, Burmese troops were reported to have taken over control of strategic points in and outside Rangoon as a security measure. For several days until the Prime Minister's announcement on September 26, newspaper offices had been receiving messages about troop movements in several important towns, including Mandalay. In this sense, it is right to point out that U Nu's prompt decision to install a caretaker regime was a show of statesmanship that saved that country from a situation more difficult than in 1949 when the newly-independent nation faced numerous rebellions.

In his formal letter accepting U Nu's invitation to take over, General Ne Win made seven reassuring commitments: (1) to endeavour to the utmost to establish conditions of free and fair elections before the end of April 1959; (2) to exclude from government, active leaders of political parties; (3) to keep the army away from politics; (4) to control and punish acts of violence by military personnel; (5) to suppress crime; (6) to strive for internal peace; and (7) to maintain the country's foreign policy of neutrality.

These assurances notwithstanding, there soon appeared a degree of disillusionment. It resulted from U Nu's allegation that "many members of the 'Clean' AFPFL were arrested, and there were acts of oppression aimed at disrupting the AFPFL organization". As army officers openly sided with the 'Stable' AFPFL, the 'Clean' AFPFL decided that resistance in the form of non-violent civil disobedience would be offered against the caretaker military regime. 60

On February 13, 1959, General Ne Win resigned from premiership. He attributed his resignation to indications of lack of confidence in his government from U Nu's faction of the AFPFL, and his own awareness that free and fair elections were not possible before April. "But now U Nu's party has accused me of arresting its members," he said. 61 In his speech before the Chamber of Deputies, on February 13, 1959, he stated he was not prepared to hold elections in April as originally pledged. If, however, Parliament wished him to serve, and the constitution could be amended to extend his tenure, he would be willing to hold office until

60. A consultative conference of the 'Clean' AFPFL was held in Rangoon on September 2, 1958, where several MPs denounced the Army as being partisan to the 'Stable' faction.

security conditions were achieved adequately for free and fair elections. Almost immediately, the 'Clean' AFPFL, unwilling to force elections against Ne Win's direct opposition, agreed to support the constitutional amendment. On February 27, General Ne Win was unanimously re-named Prime Minister. This amendment was needed to allow General Ne Win and his Cabinet Ministers, none of whom were members of Parliament, to serve legally as the Government for more than six months. 62

The Caretaker Government was composed of distinguished civilians, drawn mainly from the civil service. The cabinet was small, with members holding several portfolios. In each ministry, military officers held important posts, and were often the real decision makers. The Caretaker Government's programme of national cleanliness and discipline was extensively implemented. Citizens and soldiers joined hands in cleaning up towns and cities. Heavy fines and prison sentences were imposed on those breaking the law. The armed forces were called upon to strive hard to put down insurgency and lawlessness. Administrative efficiency was also toned up. No special power was used by decree or ordinance during this period. Necessary draft laws were

62. "Burma's Cabinet is revised", New York Times, February 28, 1959, p.2. On February 27, the Chamber of Deputies passed the Amendment to the Constitution. This Amendment allowed General Ne Win to remain as Premier up to April 5, 1960. On February 28, 1959, the Chamber of Nationalities also passed the Amendment.
first placed before joint meetings of parliamentary leaders of the two AFPFL factions. Then the Bills were moved in parliament with ample notice and ample time for debate on those draft laws which could not obtain adequate support from the parliament leaders, and those that fell outside the Caretaker regime's mandate were dropped.63

General Ne Win had thus won his point and the elections planned for April 1959, were postponed for a year. U Nu, anxious not to widen the breach with the army, accepted the decision to extend General Ne Win's tenure as Prime Minister. It seemed now that the 'Stable' AFPFL had forced U Nu's hand in October 1958 and left him with no choice but to appoint General Ne Win. It might have been pressure from the same group that once again deferred the elections.64

THE RETURN OF U NU TO POWER
AND THE MARCH 2, 1962 COUP D'ÉTAT

In the 1960 elections, U Nu's 'Clean' AFPFL which had taken the new title of Pyidaungsu (Union) Party, won 159 seats against 41 by the rival "Stable" AFPFL.65 It was a

64. See "Waiting for new leaders", Times (London), March 2, 1959, p.6.
massive mandate in favour of re-establishment of civilian rule. U Nu had fought a successful campaign on the issue of democracy versus fascism and on a promise to establish Buddhism as the state religion. The establishment of Buddhism as a state religion had serious implications for the non-Buddhists. Hence it alarmed and tended to alienate the non-Buddhist minorities. 66

It had been U Nu's resolve that in the event he won the 1960 general elections, he would enter into consultation with the leaders of the states and bring about constitutional reforms that would strengthen the union. 67 It was put to the Cabinet that since the government now had more than two-thirds majority in both chambers of Parliament, it could make the necessary changes in the constitution. The state government would be asked if they desired any Constitutional changes, on receipt of proposals from the state government, a national conference of representatives of the union and state governments as well as the Opposition parties would be held. 68 On receiving from the government an open invitation to put up proposals for constitutional reform, the states responded in a


68. Ibid., pp. 338-341, op. cit.
positive manner. With the Shan State Government acting as host, a conference was held in Taunggyi. The main item on the agenda of this conference was the "Federal Principle". It was an adaptation of the constitution of the United States. It had three main features:

1. Burma Proper would be turned into a constituent state of the union, bringing it into parity with all other constituent states.
2. The two Chambers of Parliament would be invested with equal powers.
3. All constituent states of the union (regardless of size and population) would have equal representation in the House of Nationalities. 69

The Federal Principle was to be proposed as a resolution and passed by the Conference, following which it was to be laid before the Prime Minister's Conference. The moment the resolution was passed at the Taunggyi Conference, it rumoured that if the Prime Minister's Conference should reject the Federal Principle all the minority groups would go into rebellion. 70

69. The Shan minority had been expressing dissatisfaction over the budget appropriations since 1958. A Shan MP had coined the slogan, "For every Kyat the Burman gets, the Shan expects one Kyat".

U Nu, however, refused to place any credence on these rumours as he himself had put forward the proposal for constitutional amendment. The authors of the Federal Principle were not insurgents but men of considerable political experience. With Nu's party in majority in Parliament, any legislation could be carried out. The only factor which U Nu could not disregard was Articles 201 and 202 in Chapter 10 of the Constitution which conferred upon the states the right to secede. If the Shan and Kayah states raised the demand for secession, U Nu could do nothing to prevent it from happening. In February 1962, U Nu called leaders of the states to Rangoon to discuss minority problems. They considered the possibility of replacing the existing constitution with one that provided "pure federaism". Also, quite disturbingly, factionalism had manifested itself during the National Congress of the Union party in January 1962. In addition, the business community of Rangoon was unhappy with the announcement of the government to nationalize all foreign trade on March 1, 1962. 71 In this highly disturbed situation, on March 2, 1962, the Armed Forces, led by the Commander-in-Chief General Ne Win, seized power in a bloodless Coup d'État.

Dr Ba Maw, wartime Adipati or Chief of State of Burma, ascribed U Nu's failure to four causes. According to him,

U Nu lacked political interest, he had no firm political faith, he confused democracy with license, and he "exhibited an inability to impart the necessary drive in the people for sustained progress". 72

Observes believed that economic as well as political factors were the real reasons behind the coup. The Bill to set up an imports monopoly was extremely unpopular among the business community. The Army also felt it would be economically disastrous for the country. 73

Minority groups had also started pressing for a federal government with Burma Proper as one of the States. The Army opposed federation strongly, but U Nu was believed to be giving it serious consideration and the minorities hoped a Bill would be presented during the coming parliamentary session.

Thus, while economics provided the spark for the coup, the desire for Federation probably played an equal if not greater part in the Army's decision to stage the coup. 74

