

Josef Silverstein, Editor

THE POLITICAL LEGACY OF AUNG SAN  
Revised Edition

WITH AN INTRODUCTORY ESSAY

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**Southeast Asia Program Series  
Number 11**

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**Revised Edition**

**WITH AN INTRODUCTORY ESSAY**

**SOUTHEAST ASIA PROGRAM**  
**SOUTHEAST ASIA PROGRAM SERIES**  
**1993**



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ISBN 978-0-87727-128-4

Typeset by Donna Amoroso

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## Editor's Preface

The peaceful revolution against the constitutional dictatorship of General Ne Win in the summer of 1988 gave rise to a new voice in Burmese politics, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. In the months that followed the suppression of the revolution and the emergence of the brutal military dictatorship, the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), Daw Aung San Suu Kyi emerged as the leader of the people; and though SLORC did everything it could to revile and diminish her in their eyes, her trips about the country and her speeches drew thousands to her rallies even though the gatherings were illegal under martial law.

One of the attractions for her audience was the fact that her father was Aung San, the father too of Burma's independence, who was assassinated on July 19, 1947, on the eve of achieving the goal to which he devoted his life. To countless thousands at her rallies, she was the reincarnation, the reimpodiment of her father, who had picked up his fallen standard and was destined to complete his work.

As she traveled about the nation, she reminded the people of her father's words and the ideals for which he stood. She attacked Ne Win and other military leaders who claimed—almost from the moment they seized power in 1962—that they were leading the nation on the path Aung San had marked out before his death. Daw Aung San Suu Kyi accused Ne Win of perverting the things her father said and stood for, in order to aggrandize himself. For these accusations and for her other statements, she was arrested and placed under house arrest on July 20, 1989. And even though, through the award of the 1991 Nobel Peace Prize and other honors, the world recognized her courageous leadership, she still remains, at the time of this writing, a prisoner who has been denied all outside contact.

Though her voice has been stilled, thanks to the loving efforts of her husband, Michael Aris, Aung San Suu Kyi's speeches prior to her arrest have been collected and published in *Freedom From Fear and Other Writings*. (New York: Viking Penguin, 1991).

To a world unfamiliar with Aung San—his ideas and activities in Burma from the time he was a national student leader in the mid-1930s until his assassination in 1947—there was a sudden interest in finding out as much as possible about the man in order to better understand the daughter.

Unfortunately, most of what has been written and published about Aung San is out of print and difficult to find. I received many inquiries about the monograph I edited and published in 1972, which is now out of print.

So in 1991, I suggested to the editor of this series that it might be useful if a new edition of *The Political Legacy of Aung San* was issued. At about the same time, I became aware that the Burma government was publishing a series of articles on the pre-independence press in Burma in the *Working People's Daily*—the government controlled paper—and that it included several speeches of Aung San which were not available when I compiled the original edition. I suggested to the series'

editor that, if a new edition of the monograph was issued, it should include these new items. The editor agreed.

The present edition also includes a revised Introduction which takes into account the new material that has appeared, including the essay about Aung San written by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi in 1982. To my knowledge there have been no other biographical essays, biographies, or compilations of Aung San's writings since the original edition of this monograph was published.

It is hoped that the present edition will give a fuller understanding of the thought and ideas of Aung San and will make possible comparisons and contrasts with the statements and actions of Ne Win and current military interpreters of the past. Also, with the existence of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's collected speeches and writings, it will be possible to compare her ideas with those of her father and see how the democratic tradition he championed has been carried on by his daughter.

I wish to thank the editor of the Cornell University Southeast Asia Program Publications, Audrey Kahin, and others who contributed to the decision to publish a revised version of the original monograph. I also wish to thank Hugh C. MacDougall, who provided me with the new material.

Josef Silverstein  
April 1992

## Introduction

Since the end of the Second World War, the ideas and actions of Aung San, the father of Burma's independence, have dominated or influenced Burmese political thought, whether expressed by democrats or dictators, Burmans or indigenous minorities, members of the elite or just ordinary people. Aung San also has served as the nation's most important political symbol; his portrait appeared on the coins and paper currency, mounted on the walls of every government office and nearly every house. A major thoroughfare and a public park bear his name and a national holiday commemorates his assassination. But how people best remember him—whether as a student leader in the 1936 university strike, a Major General in the Japanese-sponsored Burma Army during the Second World War, the leader of the postwar nationalist movement, or as the unifier of the diverse racial groups that joined together to form a truly nationwide political movement—is not clear. For two short years, 1945–1947, he completely dominated politics in Burma. His assassination cut short a brilliant career and left the nation with no comparable figure to replace him. About this meteoric career, history and myth have intertwined making it difficult, if not impossible, to separate fact from fiction.

Thus far, no official or authoritative biography of Aung San has been written and no systematic and complete collection of his speeches, writings, and papers has been published. This is not because the necessary documents do not exist or are difficult to find; indeed, through the efforts of Col. Ba Than and his successors at the Burma Defence Services Historical Research Institute (BDSHRI) in Rangoon, much of what Aung San said and wrote has been stored in its air-conditioned archives. But, although a few scholars have used some of these papers, neither the Government nor any independent agency—such as the now-defunct Burma Research Society—has sponsored or published research on Aung San. So long as the BDSHRI remains open only to government officials seeking an occasional quotation or document to bolster a particular policy,<sup>1</sup> and the government in Burma does nothing to encourage indigenous and foreign scholars to use the Institute's resources, there is little likelihood that a clear and complete picture of Aung San will emerge. Nor will his full impact upon the nationalist movement and subsequent period of independence be completely understood.

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<sup>1</sup> A good case in point is the recently published long essay, Shwe Kalaing, "A Review of Pre-Independence Press (1945–47)," *Working People's Daily*, July and August 1991. This essay reproduced several of Aung San's speeches in order to show what happens when there are several newspapers in existence, each interpreting the speeches in its own way for its own purposes. The purpose of the series was not to write a better history of pre-independence Burma, but to demonstrate how disruptive and confusing free competitive speech can be.

## I

From the evidence at hand it seems clear that, although in his personal life Aung San was a shy person who sought privacy, this did not affect his public actions. In every way he was a public man who moved freely among all the peoples of Burma and made himself available to any who sought him out. He commented frequently on domestic and foreign issues, and left an extensive record of his thoughts. Before his assassination he was in the process of collecting what he considered to be his most important speeches, which shed light on the "conditions, problems and aspirations of contemporary Burma."<sup>2</sup> To this collection he added a short biographical essay in order to acquaint his readers with those portions of his background which were not widely known at the time. The collection was published initially in December 1946 by the New Light of Burma Press, Ltd. Only a relatively small edition was printed and the copy was not properly edited. After his death, it reappeared in a hastily assembled typewritten and mimeographed form with an additional important speech on the future federal union. But this edition, too, had limited circulation. Today, only a few copies of the original printed edition exist and almost no copies of the mimeographed version are available.

Although Burma and its modern history have commanded the attention of both Burmese and foreign scholars, only one, Dr. Maung Maung, has attempted to discover, interpret, and relate the ideas of Aung San to the march of events in his nation during the initial two critical years following the end of the Second World War. In a slender volume entitled *Aung San of Burma*, Dr. Maung Maung, as editor and contributor, combined excerpts and selections from Aung San's speeches and writings with a variety of appreciative essays by persons who either knew or worked with Aung San. Although Dr. Maung Maung had access to all the papers and documents at the BDSHRI and to many in the possession of individuals who had known Aung San, he chose to include very few in his collection. Those he selected, he either edited or rewrote extensively. While the Dr. Maung Maung collection offers some insight into Aung San's character and ideas, it must be treated as an interpretation and tribute rather than as a scholarly and authoritative study of the man.

In her essay on her father,<sup>3</sup> Aung San's daughter, Aung San Suu Kyi, offers a very personal view. He died before she was old enough to remember him and, therefore, she had to rely on his speeches, writings, and other information "to give an honest picture of my father as I see him." Her work, too, must be seen as interpretative and as a tribute to her father.

To become acquainted with Aung San, to assess his place in the history of Burma and as a political leader in a period of great change, it is necessary to examine the actual record of his speeches, documents, and interviews against the background of the events of the time. In this way it will be possible to construct an accurate picture of the Burmese leader, based primarily on the facts rather than on the myths which have attached themselves to his memory.

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<sup>2</sup> See below, Document 16, p. 74.

<sup>3</sup> Aung San Suu Kyi, *Aung San* (Queensland: University of Queensland, 1984). In this book, she drew upon the collected speeches reproduced in the original edition of the present monograph and a collection produced in Burma, *Bogyoke Aung San Meingun Mya [The Speeches of Bogyoke Aung San]* (Rangoon: Sarpay Beikman, 1971).

From his autobiographical essay, it is clear that Aung San thought of himself as middleclass and modern. He described himself as “a son of well-to-do rural gentry and a distinguished line of patriotic ancestors.”<sup>4</sup> He was born on February 13, 1915 in Natmauk in central Burma. Daw Aung San Suu Kyi adds that Aung San’s ancestors, on his maternal side, had served in high positions under the Burmese kings. His mother’s uncle, U Min Yaung, had been a leader in “one of the earliest resistance groups against the British until captured and beheaded.” The memory of this man “was a source of great pride and inspiration to his family and to the people of his region.”<sup>5</sup> Aung San’s father was “of a somewhat taciturn nature and so sparing of words that he had no success in his profession as a pleader (advocate) in spite of a brilliant scholastic record.”<sup>6</sup>

Aung San began his education at a vernacular school and ended it at the University of Rangoon. He believed that he had been a student with “promise of a brilliant academic career” but he allowed student and national politics to interfere with and finally displace his scholarly interests and pursuits.<sup>7</sup> Following the award of a Bachelor’s degree, he began to study law but never completed his studies. Politics, to which he had been attracted early in his years at the university, came to dominate his life. He emerged as one of the key leaders of the student strike of 1936. His prominence led the Governor to appoint him to a committee responsible for recommending changes in the University Act. Also during his student days, he took the leadership in forming the All Burma Students’ Union—an organization which sought to bring all students into a single political structure.

In 1938, he joined Dobama Asiayone (We Burmans) and became its Secretary General. For the next two years he served on the Working Committee of the All Burma Cultivators’ League and helped organize the Freedom Bloc—a political party which combined a wing of the Dobama Asiayone with Dr. Ba Maw’s Sinyetha (Poor Man’s Party).<sup>8</sup> He was arrested in 1939 for “conspiring to overthrow the Government by force” but was released without being prosecuted. The British tried to arrest him again the next year, this time as a subversive, but they failed to find him. He escaped arrest by going to India and participating as an official delegate to the Ramgarth meeting of the Indian National Congress. He traveled around India and then returned secretly to Burma, where he helped organize the Rangoon University Students’ Union campaign against the war in Europe and imperialism. Friends persuaded him to leave Burma again to avoid arrest. With a companion, Thakin Hla Myaing, he slipped out of the country and emerged in Amoy, China, where they hoped to make contact with the representatives of the Chinese Communist Party. Instead, they were intercepted by Japanese agents and taken to Japan, where they were drawn into the schemes of Col. Suzuki of the Japanese Army for the overthrow of British rule in Burma.<sup>9</sup> In his autobiographical essay, Aung San gives a good

<sup>4</sup> See below, Document 16, p. 75.

<sup>5</sup> Aung San Suu Kyi, *Aung San*, p. 1.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> See below, Document 16, p. 75.

<sup>8</sup> See Ba Maw, *Breakthrough in Burma: Memories of a Revolutionary 1939–1946* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1958), chap. 3, for a discussion of this period and his own version of his early contacts with Aung San.

<sup>9</sup> For Aung San’s account of his first contact with Japan and the Japanese, see below, “The Resistance Movement,” in Document 16, p. 77. For information about early secret Japanese contacts with Burmese nationalists, see J. Silverstein, “The Minami Organ: A Bridgehead in

picture of his initial negotiations with the Japanese and some insights into his thoughts and ideas as he encountered, for the first time, an Asian culture and value system different from his own.

Aung San's career as a national leader really began at that point. He returned to Burma in 1941 and recruited several of his fellow Burmans to undertake military training from the Japanese. As World War II opened, these young revolutionaries were in the process of developing a Burmese Army, called the Burma Independence Army (BIA), mainly from among their countrymen living in Thailand. When the Japanese attacked the British in Burma, the BIA was a part of the invading force.

Both Japanese and Burmese political leaders bestowed honors and responsibilities upon Aung San. He was a Major General in the Japanese Army and was decorated by the Emperor. Dr. Ba Maw chose him as Minister of Defense in the government of Burma created in August 1943. Despite these and other awards, he never committed himself to the defense and support of Japan's New Order in East Asia. As early as mid-1943, he and a few others began to formulate plans for an underground movement against the Japanese. On March 27, 1945, he led his army into an open revolt. His forces joined the Allies and participated in the final battles to expel the Japanese from Burma.

Following the end of the war, the British offered Aung San the post of inspector general with the rank of brigadier in the new national army they planned to create in Burma. Aung San declined in favor of a political career as head of the nationalist coalition he had secretly formed during the war, the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL). In this role he led Burma to the threshold of independence.

The road he chose was not free of obstacles. The British had their own ideas about Burma's future and who should lead the country. Within the AFPFL itself Aung San had political rivals who sought to displace him as the nation's leader. While trying to force the British to alter their plans and timetable, Aung San at the same time waged battle against the Communists and his other rivals within the AFPFL to hold the movement together and lead it down a peaceful road to independence—if that were possible. From the end of the Second World War until mid-1946, the British Government authorized policies in Burma which directly challenged Aung San and the AFPFL. Then, following the appointment of a new governor, Hubert Rance, British policy changed in a way which enabled the AFPFL to work with the government. Under the new governor, Aung San accepted the position of deputy chairman of the Executive Council and head of two departments, Defence and External Affairs. In December 1946, Prime Minister Attlee invited a Burmese delegation, headed by Aung San, to London to discuss Burma's future. The successful conclusion of the talks in England led to the signing of the Aung San-Attlee Agreement on January 27, 1947. The Burmese delegation returned home, and during the following months Aung San achieved, in rapid succession, a series of successes. He won the support of the ethnic minorities for a united and independent Burma; he led his party to an overwhelming election victory for the Constituent Assembly; he helped devise the principles upon which the new Constitution would

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Burma-Japanese Relations," *United Asia* (Sept.-Oct. 1965): 361-66; Won Z. Yoon, *Japan's Scheme for the Liberation of Burma: The Role of the Minami Kikan and the "Thirty Comrades"* (Athens: Ohio University Center for International Studies, Southeast Asia Program, 1973). For a Japanese view, approved by the Burma government, see Izumiya Tatsuro, *The Minami Organ* (Rangoon: U Soe Myint Universities Press, 1981).

be based; and, while the assembly was in session, he convened a national conference on the economic future of the country. On July 19, 1947, while attending a meeting of the executive council, he and eight others—members of the council and guards—were assassinated.<sup>10</sup> With his death Burma lost the one man who held the nation's confidence and might have led the people through a peaceful transition from colonial to independent rule.

## II

Aung San was neither systematic nor original in his approach to politics. For him, the term politics was all-encompassing, "politics means your everyday life. . . . It is how you eat, sleep, work and live, with which politics is concerned."<sup>11</sup> It also was not a static concept, "as your everyday life changes, so changes your politics."<sup>12</sup> As a political activist, whose immediate concern was to find workable solutions to problems and to persuade others to support his tactics and goals, he demonstrated in his speeches both pragmatism and eclecticism. Apparent contradictions did not seem to bother him for in his mixture of ideas and tactics he sought answers, not logical symmetry. If Aung San was flexible and pragmatic in his politics, he was firm and unswerving in his twin goals of independence and national unity.

The ideas of Aung San can be traced to his heritage, his education, his personal acquaintances, and his times. Probably the strongest and most persistent influence upon his thinking was his heritage. As a child in Upper Burma he had heard stories and myths of his country's past from men who still remembered the last days of the monarchy, the third Anglo-Burmese War and Burmese resistance to the British in the decade after the conquest. As a student, first at Natmauk and later at the National High School in Yenangyaung, he grew to maturity in an area where tradition was strong and persistent. He and his contemporaries were nourished by stories of Burma's past and imbued with a love of their country and a passionate desire for freedom and independence. Aung San's speeches and writings were filled with historical references and allusions. Whether he used the past to arouse passions by reminding his audiences of "imperishable memories" of sacrifices, heroism, and valor by heroes past and present "arising ever to the call of historic destiny," or by speaking in cold and logical terms about the strength and weaknesses of Burmese feudalism, Aung San drew often from this wellspring and found a response in audiences and colleagues alike.

Buddhism—an integral part of the Burmese tradition—did not provide Aung San with a dominant theme in his political thought, as it did with several of his contemporaries, nor did it provide a basis for his speeches and actions. Nor, however, did he ignore or evade religion. He had definite views on religion which he stated frequently. In his opinion, religion and politics must be separate. "Politics," he wrote, "must see that the individual also has his rights, including the right to the freedom of religious worship. [But] here we must stop and draw the line definitely between politics and religion."<sup>13</sup> On the eve of the meeting of the Constituent

<sup>10</sup> See Maung Maung, *A Trial in Burma* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1962), for a detailed discussion of the background to the event and its aftermath.

<sup>11</sup> See below, Document 16, p. 95.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 96.

Assembly he restated this view even more emphatically: "In politics there is no room for religion in as much as there should be no insistence that the president of the republic shall be a Buddhist or a minister of religion should be appointed to the cabinet."<sup>14</sup> It followed from this that monks should have no political role in Burma. In his address to the First National Conference of the AFPFL in January 1946, he stated that the role of the Buddhist monks should be to purify the religion and carry its message to the rest of the world.<sup>15</sup>

The development of his belief in a clear separation between politics and religion takes on special importance when one considers that Aung San grew up at a time when Buddhist monks were active in the emerging nationalist movement of Burma, and the faith provided an early and continuing unifying theme. Buddhist monks such as U Ottama and U Wisara were in the forefront of the nationalist struggle, and their imprisonment, hunger strikes, and public meetings proved strong magnets for attracting rural Burmese to their support. Yet, despite this, Aung San never identified with the Buddhist political leaders and did not employ religion in the service of politics. As a believer in religious freedom, he was able to relate to people of all faiths and win their backing for his political organization and the cause of national independence. Under his leadership, the movement was predominantly secular and impartial on the religious issue.

The second most important source of his ideas was his education and his personal acquaintances. He was first exposed to Western thought as a student. At the university he concentrated on three subjects—English literature, modern history, and political science. To these he added law which he began to study after graduation, though he did not complete his studies. His personal library, which still remained intact in 1971 in his home in Rangoon,<sup>16</sup> bears witness to his broad range of interests which included the sciences as well as Western historical, political, and literary subjects.

His reading in Western literature was wide. It extended to liberalism and capitalism, with emphasis upon the ideas of rule of law and contract, parliamentary government and orderly change, individualism and freedom. In addition he was exposed to socialism, communism, fascism, and other systems of thought. Aung San and his contemporaries read extensively among radical authors whose works they found in the private bookstores and bookclubs of Rangoon or on the shelves of the Bernard Free Library. They could not read systematically because much of the radical literature was proscribed. Despite the vigilance of the British, however, they managed to become acquainted with the major ideas and much of the rhetoric of such writers as Marx, Lenin, Stalin, Trotsky, Mussolini, and Hitler. In addition they read some of the works of those Asian thinkers who were strongly influenced by Western thought; men such as Sun Yat Sen, Gandhi, Nehru, and Subhas Chandra Bose. These were men of thought and action who were making history; and many young Burmese were attracted to their new ideas and values.

Like most members of his generation who were politically active, Aung San was opposed to capitalism and, what he saw as its byproduct, imperialism. He called himself a "leftist" and moved back and forth within the socialist tradition. While he

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<sup>14</sup> *New Times of Burma*, May 24, 1947.

<sup>15</sup> See below, Document 16, p. 97.

<sup>16</sup> The author visited Aung San's home in 1971 and examined his books which filled a room on the main floor.

was an active member of Dobama Asiayone, he was in close contact with Thakin Soe, Than Tun, and Ba Hein,<sup>17</sup> early advocates of Soviet-style communism. As a member and official of the Freedom Bloc, he became more thoroughly acquainted with peasant nonviolent socialism as advocated by Dr. Ba Maw, who headed the Sinyetha Party and Thakin Mya, who was the leader of the All Burma Cultivators' League. In 1939 he and several friends joined together to form a Marxist study group, which today is considered the forerunner of the Communist Party in Burma. Aung San dropped out of the group shortly after its creation and journeyed to India where he met the leaders of the Congress Party. He returned briefly to communism in 1944, when he met secretly with Thakin Soe and joined the Communist Party, only to resign after a few months. In 1946 he expressed his sympathy for communism when he said, "I have still a genuine interest in communism and the Communist Party." This, however, did not prevent him from breaking openly with it, a few months later, and expelling the party from the AFPFL. The ideas of socialism and communism attracted him, but the Leninist party organization led by his rivals repelled him.

His writings reveal his intellectual debt to Stalin and other Communist leaders whose works he read and studied. They also reveal his reliance upon non-Communist socialism for the political forms he ultimately advocated, when the time came to set forth his ideas about the future Constitution of an independent Burma.<sup>18</sup> Socialism, in the broadest sense, provided him with a rich source of ideas from which he selected and rejected as the times and situation demanded.

The development of his ideas also reflected the times in which he lived. The decade of the 1930s opened with a world-wide economic depression and closed with a world war. From the perspective of a resident in a colony in transition, the period abounded with ideas, personalities, and change. While Great Britain was gradually permitting political change to occur in India and Burma via constitutional means, alternative methods promising swifter and more dramatic change were offered by the Communists in the Soviet Union and the Fascists and Nazis in Italy and Germany. The authoritarian and dictatorial systems of Russia, Italy, and Germany challenged the British and the French by providing work to their people and by building a new sense of national pride among their citizens. All this was apparently accomplished without the aid of colonial exploitation. For Aung San and his friends these "new orders," viewed from a great distance, seemed attractive alternatives to their own political and economic realities.

Asia, too, offered models for change. Aung San and his contemporaries watched and imitated the Congress Party of India as it challenged the British. They also observed the Japanese defy the League of Nations by invading Manchuria in 1931, and again attacking China in 1937. The Japanese looked larger and more important in

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<sup>17</sup> Thakin Soe was a leader of the Communist movement in Burma from its inception. In 1938 he published what many believe was the first book on Marxism written by a Burmese, entitled *Hsoshelit Wala*. In 1946 he broke with the main party. While his organization used the official name, Communist Party of Burma or Red Flags, it was never more than a splinter party. Than Tun, until his assassination by party rivals in 1968, was the leader of the major Communist faction, the Burma Communist Party or White Flags. Ba Hein was considered by many to be a brilliant young Marxist, but he died in 1946. For more about him, see Thakin Nu, *Burma under the Japanese: Pictures and Portraits* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1954).

<sup>18</sup> His constitutional ideas are to be found in most of his speeches. However, the most important ones to consider are "Problems for Burma's Freedom" and "Bogyoke Aung San's Address at the Convention held at the Jubilee Hall, Rangoon, on 23rd May, 1947." See below, Document 16.

1940 following the fall of France and Britain's capitulation to Japanese demands to close the Burma Road, even briefly. Burma's neighbor, Siam, bent with the winds of change as it altered its name and its political system and moved closer in words and appearance to the Japanese model. Finally, the humiliating defeats of the colonial powers in Asia over a relatively short period of time seemed to be convincing proof that the old order had passed and the peoples of Southeast Asia, at last, were in a position to win their freedom and determine their own future.

As will be seen in this collection of speeches and papers, Aung San's ideas and tone reflected these important influences. Both as a student and political leader he used Marxism as a model for many of his thoughts and speeches. When, in 1940, he came under the influence of the Japanese his rhetoric became harsh, dogmatic, and imitative of his new masters. The ultimate victory of the Allies was accompanied by further change in his style of speech and the adoption of a more reflective approach, combining liberal, democratic, and socialist ideas with the new internationalism of the United Nations.

Many have read Aung San's writings without giving due weight to the times in which they were written and have concluded that he was an opportunist who had no deep ideological convictions. An opposite view is expressed by at least one scholar, Dr. Maung Maung, who selected a single item from Aung San's legacy and seized upon it as though it alone were the true mirror of the man's ideas.<sup>19</sup> Neither approach does justice to Aung San. His writings must be seen in their totality against the background of his times if one is to understand his acceptance by his people and appreciate his genuine search for ideas that would help Burma find freedom and unity. If his sources were in conflict, so too were his ideas; but neither inhibited him from expressing what he thought and felt. His daughter expressed it well when she wrote, "He was not infallible, as he freely acknowledged, but he had the kind of mind that did not cease expanding, a capacity for continuous development."<sup>20</sup>

Aung San's ideas cannot be separated from his personality. Thanks to the efforts of Dr. Maung Maung and Dr. Ba Maw, a composite picture of him has been assembled which suggests that he was a very complex man.<sup>21</sup> Although a public figure from the time he was a university student, he was introspective and shy. Maurice Collis in his book, *Last and First in Burma*, said that, after studying the papers of Governor Dorman-Smith, he had the impression that Aung San was a shy and quiet person who was terribly lonely. According to Collis, Aung San accepted the informal friendship and warmth of the Governor despite their political rivalry.<sup>22</sup> Collis met Aung San briefly in London when the Burmese leader was celebrating the signing of the Aung San-Attlee Agreement. He found him poised and self-assured; in his book, Collis remarked that Aung San's reserve had thawed and that "he was genial and gay."<sup>23</sup>

This change in Aung San's personality and his growth in self-confidence as the nation's leader can be detected in his speeches. Speaking at the first AFPFL national

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<sup>19</sup> Maung Maung, *Burma and General Ne Win* (New York: Asia Publishing House, 1969), pp. 298-300.

<sup>20</sup> Aung San Suu Kyi, *Aung San*, p. 33.

<sup>21</sup> See Maung Maung, *Aung San of Burma* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1962); Ba Maw, *Breakthrough in Burma* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968).

<sup>22</sup> Maurice Collis, *Last and First in Burma* (London: Faber and Faber, 1956), p. 270.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 287.

conference in January 1946, on the role of leadership in general and his contribution to the Burmese nationalist movement in particular, he said, "No man, however great, can alone set the wheels of history in motion."<sup>24</sup> He went on to say that, with the backing of the people, leaders can do remarkable things, including altering the general course of history. Considering his own role in Burma at that moment, he said, "we have still an arduous way to traverse before we reach our goal, you want me to pilot you safely to that journey's end! I cannot thank you easily for this gesture of trust and confidence. . . . I cannot dangle any promise of speedy results or sudden windfall of millennium before you."<sup>25</sup>

A year later, after returning from England where he had negotiated an agreement with the British on Burma's future, he defended his actions and derisions in a public address. In the course of his speech he took up the theme of leadership again. This time, however, he saw it quite differently:

Was it not I who pulled Burma out of the stage in which she was neither held in regard by men or respected by dogs, to the level of a nation whose affairs have attracted the attention of the world? . . . From the day we took office in the government, you must have seen that I have, as is well-known to the country, worked in the interests of the country. Now I have made a success of the job, securing the establishment of a constituent assembly, the investment of powers to the interim government and the principle of granting to the Frontier Areas the same rights and privileges that we enjoy. . . . I will assure freedom for Burma within a year. . . .<sup>26</sup>

As Aung San grew in confidence so did his thought develop. He left a rich legacy of ideas and advice. What follows is a brief discussion of some of his thought.

### III

Aung San linked together his ideas on nationalism and national unity. When asked to define nationalism he said

In my view. . . every nation in the world must be free, not only externally but internally. This is to say, . . . every nation in the world being a conglomeration of races and religions should develop such a nationalism as is compatible with the welfare of one and all, irrespective of race, religion or class or sex. That's my nationalism.<sup>27</sup>

By this he did not mean peoples of different origins, religions, and cultures living in a common territory with little or no contact between them. Instead, he described nationalism as the sharing of a common life, the development of common interests, the use of a common language, and the growth of the feeling of community "which gives us a consciousness of oneness and the necessity of that oneness."<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> See below, Document 16, p. 94.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *The Burman*, February 6, 1947.

<sup>27</sup> *New Times of Burma*, December 10, 1946.

<sup>28</sup> See below, Document 16, p. 104.