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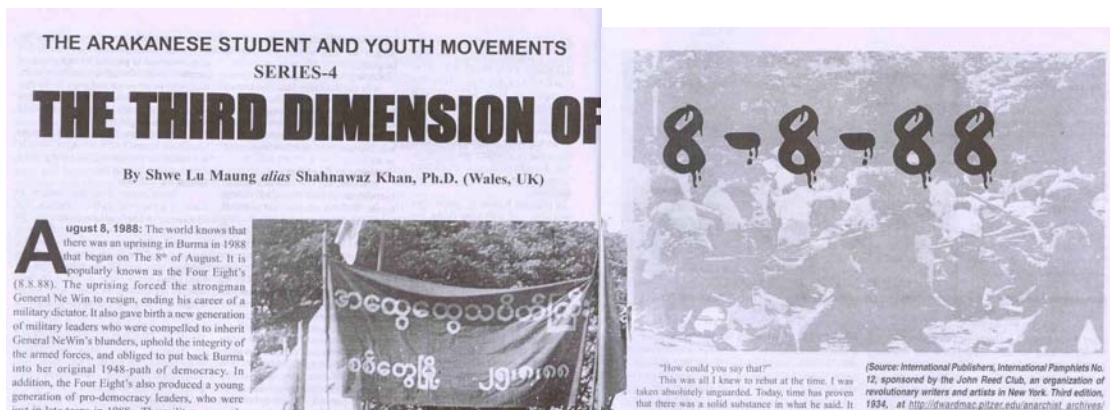


THE THIRD DIMENSION OF

8-8-88

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The Arakanese Student and Youth Movements Series-4: The Third Dimension of 8.8.88.

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August 8, 1988. The world knows that there was an uprising in Burma in 1988 that began on The 8th of August. It is popularly known as the Four Eight's (8.8.88). The uprising forced the strongman General Ne Win to resign, ending his career of a military dictator. It also gave birth a new generation of military leaders who were compelled to inherit General NeWin's blunders, uphold the integrity of the armed forces, and obliged to put back Burma into her original 1948-path of democracy. In addition, the Four Eight's also produced a young generation of pro-democracy leaders, who were just in late teens in 1988. The military generals dubbed the uprising as the *riot*. Popularly, it is called as the *pro-democracy uprising* by the mass media. However, my dear friend, Red Comrade U Oo Khin Maung, called it *Paris Commune in Burma*. He was then a Central Executive Committee (Politburo) member of Arakan Communist Party (ACP) and Joint-Secretary of National United Front of Arakan (NUFA).

During the peak of the uprising in late August, he came all the way from his hideout in the Bangladesh-Burma border, travelling more than 200 risky miles, to me in Dhaka and discussed about the *Paris Commune in Burma*, to my disappointment.

With his standard pleasant and humble smile, he asked me, "So, Ako Shwe Lu Maung, you believe that the military government will be overthrown this time?"

I answered, "I believe so, Ako Oo Khin Maung".

"How could you, when all what is going on is nothing but a *Paris Commune*?", he blasted me, still wearing that gentle and humble smile.

"How could you say that?"

This was all I knew to rebut at the time. I was taken absolutely unguarded. Today, time has proven that there was a solid substance in what he said. It deserves a closer look, since it constitutes *the third dimension* of the 1988 democracy uprising.

Paris Commune. A historical event that is known as the Paris Commune lasted 72 days from March 26 to May 30 in 1871. It is hailed as the first proletarian revolution by the leftists and scorned as the anarchism by the rightists. More than 100,000 men and women were killed or exiled when it was finally crushed. A critical analyst named Alexander Tracutenberg (1934) commented as follows: “*The absence of a disciplined, well-knit revolutionary leadership both prior to and after the establishment of the Commune spelled disaster at the outset.* There was no unified and theoretically sound working class political party to put itself at the head of this elemental rising of the masses. Several groups competed for leadership--the Prudhonists, the Blanquists and the Internationalists were the most representative of them. And this doomed the Commune to continued confusion and indecision, to a lack of planning and of a long-range program. Piecemeal, day-to-day treatment of a rapidly developing revolutionary situation with utter neglect of tactics seemed to have been the practice of the leaders.”

(Source: International Publishers, International Pamphlets No. 12, sponsored by the John Reed Club, an organization of revolutionary writers and artists in New York. Third edition, 1934, at http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/anarchist_archives/coldoffthepresses/tracutenberg/pariscommune.html).

I shall limit my discussion to the above-mentioned characteristics of the Paris Commune in order to compare it to the 1988 Burma Uprising. Various classic political analyses of the Paris Commune has been written by such gurus like Karl Marx (1818-1883), Friedrich Engels (1820-1895), Mikhail Aleksandrovich Bakunin (1814-1876), Vladimir Ilich Lenin (1870-1924) and many other past and present scholars. I have no room or scope to explore every aspects of the Paris Commune. It is so wide, vast, and wild as well.

The Rakhaings and 8.8.88. The *uprising* began all over Burma on August 8, 1988 spontaneously, in response to the call of the students. The Burmese believe that the numeral 8888 is woven with supra-mundane mystic power. A good number of the Rakhaing youths, students, and monks who participated in the uprising were kind enough to give me the detailed accounts. In the Rakhine State of Burma the *uprisings* sprouted in Sandway, Taungup, Kyaukprou, Kyauknimaw, Man Aung (Cheduba), Mreybon, Saite Twey (Akyab), Pauktaw, Munbra, Punnakyon, Mrohaung, Kyauktaw, and Rathedaung. The demonstrations in the Rakhine State were very well disciplined and organized. The Saite Twey Commune was led by the senior politicians of independence struggle era. On the 23rd of August they had taken over the offices of military socialist government and its Burmese Socialist Programme Party, and set up *people's administrative committees*. The takeover was announced from BBC radio news and the rest of the country followed the example. By the end of August entire country was in the hands of the people's administrative committees that were commonly called “General Strike Committees.” The Rakhaings are good at taking the lead. It was the famous Rakhaing monk U Uttama who was the first brave heart to ask Lt. Governor Sir Reginald Henry Craddock to go home in 1920. It was the Rakhaing guerrillas under the leadership of Bo Gri Kra Hla Aung, Saradaw U Seinda, and Saradaw U Pyinnyathiha, who revolted against the Japanese rulers in 1944. Although they are smart, intelligent, and initiative their means have been incapacitated since 1784, making them dependent upon the Bama ruling race.

Emergence of Bama Leaders. A good number of leaders emerged during the uprising, including Prime Minister U Nu (1907-1995). He was the parliamentary Prime Minister who was overthrown by the Revolutionary Council headed by General Ne Win (1911-2002), in March 1962. He brought independence to Burma on the 4th of January 1948 with the Nu-Attlee Treaty that was signed in 1947. As a veteran politician since 1930s he was a good friend of Chinese

Prime Minister Chou Enlai (1898-1976), India Prime Minister Jawharlal Nehru (1889-1964), Indonesian President Sukarno (1901-1970), and Yugoslavia President Marshal Josip Broz Tito (1892-1980). He was one of the main architects of 1955 Bandung Declaration and subsequent Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). If General Aung San is honored as *Father* of the nation, U Nu must be honored as *Architect* of the independence. His political thoughts are too far advanced for Burma. If he was in India or Thailand he would have been much honored and revered. The Burmese lauded General Ne Win when he kicked out U Nu from his office, and imprisoned him in 1962. Similarly, in 1988, when he declared his restoration of 1947 Union Constitution, along with its democratic institutions that also includes his legitimate premiership, *with the strength of [his] heart*, he was simply ridiculed and ignored. Under these circumstances, I will not lower him down by comparing him with other leaders.

Similarly, I will also not include Brigadier General Aung Gyi in the gang of the Rangoon Commune. Brigadier General Aung Gyi, was the Vice-Chief of Staff of the Burmese Armed Forces and second in command in the Revolutionary Council. He was not in favor of setting up permanent military government, but wanted to hand over the power back to the civilian government once the danger of federal policy is negated. He said this point in Japan, where he paid an official visit in early 1963. Upon his return he was sacked and exiled in Ma-chen-baw, northern Kachin State. He was a socialist in the line of the Socialist International, thus he preferred pluralistic democracy to socialist one-party system or military socialism. Nevertheless, he is still guilty of the 1962 coup d'état. I exclude him because he gracefully accepted the twist of the circumstances, and faded away. He was a soldier with political integrity.

Former Military Commanders. The newly emerged Bama leadership can easily be classified as “the old uniforms in muftis,” with one fresh addition known as Mrs. Aung San Suu Kyi Aris (Daw Suu). They emerged in a remarkable Kyaukgon conference of the former military commanders at Rangoon, to which more than 3,000 attended in late August. The key figures are Colonel Aung Shwe, Colonel Kyi Maung, Colonel Lwin, Colonel Lun Tin, and General Tin Oo. With the exception of Colonel Aung Shwe and General Tin Oo, all of them were the original members of the Revolutionary Council that staged the coup d'état in 1962. Colonel Aung Shwe was sacked in 1961 for his misconduct against U Nu in the 1960 election, in favor of the socialist camp. General Tin Oo was conducted into the Revolutionary Council in 1965 as a colonel and was bestowed with General Ne Win's blessing to become a general and chief of the staff in 1974, just to get jailed in 1977. All of them are socialist militants wearing different shades from red to pink, but none of them have politicking experience. Following the shortcut to power, they joined the army, imposed their ideology at the gunpoint, and put all the blame on General Ne Win when things went wrong. In page 291 of his book *Burma and General Ne Win*, Asia Publishing House, New York, 1969, Dr. Maung Maung wrote “A few young colonels had put it to him even before the Pyidaungsu party had been in office for a year that a return to power was a duty.” Earlier they had together seized the power in 1958. Accordingly, all of them are guilty of the coup d'état, a national crime. They were directly involved or indirectly responsible in all killings of the civilians that had occurred from 2nd March 1962 to 1988. All they know is to use the brute force and confront with might and anger. Nevertheless, they have no gut to confront their Old Man, General Ne Win. Hence, they brought in the daughter of General Aung San (1915-1947), *Father of the nation*, and put her at the front. Their action was cowardice and immoral.

Daw Suu. Mrs. Aung San Suu Kyi Aris, popularly known as Daw Suu, is the daughter of General Aung San whom most Burmese regard as Father of the nation. Her maiden name Aung San Suu Kyi literally means ‘union of Aung San and Kyi’. Her mother's name is Khin Kyi(?-

1988). She was educated and brought up in India and later in the United Kingdom. She belongs to Burmese aristocracy since the days of the Burmese kings. Her father's maternal grandfather Mingyi (Commissioner) U Min Yaung was a general as well as the duke of Natmauk, in the last days of Burmese king Thibaw. Such personalities like Lord Mountbatten of Burma (1900-79) and Lord Gore-Both, a former British Ambassador to Burma, were her family friends. Accordingly, she also dwelled in the circle of British nobles and aristocracy. Having married in 1972 to an Oxford Don, Dr. Michael Aris (1946-1999), she was popular as Suu Aris in the realm of Oxford socialites. She did not live in Burma, but came to Rangoon to look after her terminally ill mother, Daw Khin Kyi. In 1988, students and the ousted military commanders brought her to the stage and made her their leader. As the daughter of General Aung San and a descendant of the Third Myanmar Empire aristocracy, she qualified for the leadership. Up to the age of 43, she was no more than a housewife and socialite. Except for a few temporary jobs, no other professional experience can be attached to her. In the classification of Niccolo Machiavelli (1469-1527), she was a *prince of fortune*. She was raw and naïve in politics. She rejected U Nu, who all along was a partner and successor of her father. In 1988, when the people were demanding for democracy, U Nu, at the age of 81, restored democracy, the 1947 Union constitution and its democratic institutions, *with the strength of [his] heart* as mentioned above. He needed Aung San's support in the exact manner Aung San badly needed his support in 1946-47. U Nu surrendered to Aung San's demand and joined the party politics, abandoning his private life of a philosopher-playwright. At the death of Aung San, Daw Khin Kyi supported U Nu along, even in the 1960 election. If Aung San were alive he surely would have given U Nu his full support. In all accounts, when we consider it from political point of view, Burmese Buddhist traditional and cultural point of view, or moral and ethical point of view, Daw Suu, in the absence of her parents, was obliged to stand by U Nu at that junction. Especially, it was so because U Nu was democracy and democracy meant U Nu at that crucial junction. Above all, it was U Nu who honored her mother by appointing her Burmese Ambassador to India in 1960, probably the first woman ambassador in the world. As a result, Aung San's family did not become the prisoners of General Ne Win in 1962, and remained in the United Kingdom, free from the scourge of Burmese Way to Socialism. For the reasons she knew best, she rejected U Nu and joined the former military commanders, who are guilty of the 1962 coup d'état. Consequently, she had made herself submerged in the guilt of collaboration with the criminals of that 1962 national crime.

Nothing to Something. From August 8 to September 18, the Rangoon Commune leaders did just nothing, except for a few anti-military regime speeches, which were purely rhetorical. The people asked them to form an interim government. They did not agree; nor did they give importance to U Nu's restoration of democracy. On the 18th September, the new military government, with the name of State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), under the chairmanship of General Saw Maung, crushed the uprising, killing more than 10,000 across the country. After washing the bloodstains in the cities, SLORC allowed formation of political parties, promised to hold an election in 1990, and hand over the power to the elected representatives. The promise sounded very good. The former military commanders of the Kyaukgon Conference formed National League for Democracy (NLD) with Colonel Aung Shwe as the chairman, and Daw Suu as the General Secretary. It was a great success, comparable to that of AFPFL in 1946-47. The NLD galvanized the world by winning 392 of 485 People's Assembly seats in the 1990 election. In the Rakhine State, it won 9 out of 25 seats, standing second to Arakan League for Democracy (ALD) which won 11 seats. This showed that 36% of

the Rakhaing populace supported NLD. Up to this point it was a smooth sail for NLD; no gale or storm was there. The election was perfectly fair and open. So far so good, the NLD became something. It appeared that the blood of the 10,000 demonstrators, who sacrificed their lives in the 1988 uprising, had humbled the military rulers. But, it was the calm before the storm.

The Fluctuation of Barometer. The genuine trial began at this point. The NLD got ready to form a new government and asked for the immediate power transfer to carry out the task. The SLORC simply told them that people's Assembly would be summoned, but its job was to draft a new constitution along with the representatives delegated by the Myanmar Armed Forces. The draft constitution would be put up for the national referendum and final adoption. A fresh election would then be held under the law of the national constitution and the SLORC would transfer power to that body of elected representatives according to the law provided by the constitution. May I ask, "What would you do if you were the NLD at that point?"

NLD's Policy of Confrontation. The NLD turned down the SLORC's proposition on the spot and pitched a cold war. It was a decision made by Daw Suu and NLD's Central Committee that was mostly made up with the former military commanders of Ne Win's era. A good number of NLD's people's representative-elects and prominent youth members objected to the centralized decision, and wanted to go for cooperation with the SLORC. They were expelled from the party. This was the most undemocratic action of a party, which was struggling for the establishment of democracy in that country. Series of anti-SLORC rallies sprouted all over the country, giving the SLORC good opportunity to crush them. As usual, the SLORC did the job happily and efficiently. By the end of 1990, the NLD and all other anti-junta political parties were banned; hundreds of political workers, leaders, and monks were arrested. Daw Suu was detained in her own villa to get counted among the most famous world political detainees. The Western powers jumped up and showered her with various awards, including 1991 Nobel Peace Prize. But, at home, her political base was totally undone. Her and NLD's policy of confrontation was wrong from nose to tail.

The Rangoon Commune. The 8.8.88 uprising and its subsequent leading organ, the NLD, has failed in the struggle. The uprising's inherent characteristics are similar to those of the Paris Commune, which are analyzed by Alexander Trachtenberg (1934), as cited above. Therefore, it is reasonable to call it *the Rangoon Commune*. I shall continue my analysis to elucidate the reasons behind my conclusion in next issue of the Arakanpost.

(Acknowledgement. I duly acknowledge that "the Paris Commune" of my friend U Oo Khin Maung originally generates this idea of "the Rangoon Commune").

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