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## THE TACTICS OF THE BURMA COMMUNIST PARTY AND THEIR RELATION TO THE DOCTRINES OF WORLD COMMUNISM

### Introduction

In endeavouring to understand the behavior of Communists and Communist Parties there is one factor that must be constantly borne in mind. Communists believe that in the writings and sayings of the great Communist leaders they have the explanation for all events in human history and the answers to all problems. Whenever they are faced with a new situation or a difficult decision they turn to the Communist Scriptures for guidance as to their course of action. They may sometimes stretch these doctrines pretty much out of shape to justify a decision which they believe desirable, but the doctrinal basis must be there, no matter how distorted.

While the overall aims of Communism, whether worldwide or in a single country, remain unchanged--that is, revolution, seizure of power, the dictatorship of the proletariat, and so on--the tactics to be followed at any particular historical moment must vary widely. Communist writers again and again have stressed the necessity of flexibility; to advance and retreat, to take three steps forward and two steps back, to shift from one form of struggle to another as the situation changes, but never to lose sight of the fundamental objectives. As Lenin once said:

"It is our duty as Communists to master all forms, to learn how to supplement with the maximum rapidity one form for another and to adapt our tactics to every change that is called forth by something other than our class or our efforts." V. I. Lenin, "Left Wing Communism," Selected Works, Vol X, p. 147.

Lenin's successor as the fountainhead of Communist wisdom, wrote similarly:

". . . in a given phase of the revolution, tactics can change repeatedly, according as the revolutionary tide is ebbing or flowing, according as the revolutionary movement is advancing or receding." J. V. Stalin, Problems of Leninism.

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A more recent statement from an authoritative Communist writer indicates that Communist doctrine on this point has not undergone any significant changes.

"For the duration of each strategic stage of the revolutionary struggle tactics can change many times. The Liberation struggle cannot develop in the form of an uninterruptedly rising wave; it develops in flows and ebbs, attacks and retreats. These changes must also be considered by the tactics of the revolutionary proletariat; its most important task is the definition of ways and means, forms and methods of struggle which most of all correspond to the given situation and most truly prepare strategic success." N. V. Trotski, "On The Foundations of the Strategy and Tactics of Leninism." Moscow, 1955

No one can ever accuse the Burmese Communists of having neglected this aspect of their doctrine. As anyone who has followed the twists and turns of Burma Communist Party tactics since 1947 can testify, in this respect Thakin Than Tun has learned his Marxism-Leninism well.

It is the purpose of this article to show, by quoting from the Communist classics, how each and every important decision and change of tactics by the Burma Communist Party can be explained on the basis of the master doctrine laid down by the theoreticians of international Communism.

### Burmese Communism After World War II

With the end of the war and the expulsion of the Japanese from Burma, one of the principal problems faced by the Burmese was the question of the attitude to be adopted towards the returning British. All factions, Communists, Independents such as Aung San and U Nu, Socialist leaders and army men such as Ne Win were agreed on one thing--the reestablishment of the prewar British colonial government was not to be permitted. When the British offered a plan which promised independence through peaceful negotiation and agreement, all except the Communists felt that it would be a good thing to try it. Certainly if independence could be achieved without adding the effects of another resistance struggle to the devastation of the war, this would be all to the good. If the British promise turned out to be a lie, then it would be time to take up arms again.

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But the Communists refused to accept any such policy. They insisted that the British offer was a sham, they demanded that it be refused and urged an immediate armed struggle against the British. When they were unable to force the AFPFL to adopt their ideas, they withdrew and began the insurrection.

This otherwise puzzling policy becomes easy to understand when we look at some of the basic Communist doctrine on revolutions. No good Communist really believes that the revolution against capitalism and imperialism can ever be achieved without the use of force, or, as U Nu has said, the "cult of the gun." Communists may sometimes endeavour to persuade the world that they have changed and are prepared to seek their goals through peaceful means, but this is simply an example of the flexibility of their tactics--they do not really mean it. Here is what some of the Communist masters have had to say about revolutions.

"But there can be no revolution without a civil war. Or do they believe that in other more advanced countries a Socialist revolution will take place without civil wars? . . . It is only through civil war and the iron dictatorship of the proletariat that Socialism can be attained. Such is the programme of the Communists." Bukharin, Program of a World Revolution, 1920. p. 95.

"The substitution of the proletarian state for the bourgeois state is impossible without a violent revolution." V. I. Lenin, The State and Revolution, Selected Works, Vol. VII, p. 21.

"Lenin is perfectly right when he says 'the Proletarian revolution cannot take place without the forcible destruction of the bourgeois State machine!'" J. V. Stalin, Problems of Leninism.

"Leninism teaches that no great revolution in history succeeded without armed uprising and civil wars." Definition of revolution, Russian Political Dictionary, 1947.

"Marxism-Leninism teaches that the violent overthrow of the domination of the exploiting class is a general law of the Socialist revolution." P. Fedoseev, "The Marxist Theory of Classes and Class Struggle", in Bolshevik, No. 14, July, 1948.

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"Revolution is the violent overthrow of one class by another." Mao Tse-tung, Selected Works, Vol. 1, p. 18.

"Revolution is the solving of problems by war". Mao Tse-tung, Selected Works, Vol. 11, p. 505.

It should be plain from the above statements what a Communist really means when he talks about revolution, however much he may sometimes pretend he is talking about a "peaceful" revolution. It should also be plain why Thakin Than Tun and his followers, as good Communists, could not possibly accept revolution which ended British imperialist rule without bloodshed. This would have been a violation of one of their most fundamental doctrines.

#### The Revolutionary Situation

While it is true as we have seen above that the Communist believes that it must come to armed struggle in the end, at certain times the Communist movement adopts other tactics. Armed struggle is to be resorted to only when what Communists call the "revolutionary situation" has developed--that is, when the time is ripe for the violent overthrow of the existing government. Let us see how Stalin defined this situation.

"The moment for the decisive blow, for raising the standard of revolt must be carefully chosen. This must be when matters have reached a climax, when the vanguard (Communist Party) is ready to fight to the bitter end, when the reserves (peasants) will not hesitate to rally to the support of the vanguard and when disorder is paramount in the ranks of the enemy . . . Then the time is ripe for revolution." J. V. Stalin, Problems of Leninism.

In the opinion of the Burmese Communists this was a proper description of Burma in 1948! The chaos and destruction of the war had not yet been repaired. The problems left from the era of imperialist rule had not yet been solved. The new Government (they thought) was weak. Now, if ever, it seemed, was the moment for the seizure of power. And so, in the belief that only by violent action could the revolution be achieved and judging that the revolutionary situation had arrived in Burma, the Burmese Communists began an armed insurrection.

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This decision was not made in or for Burma alone. The world Communist movement had decided that the time was ripe for the expansion of Communist rule by force. These were the years which saw the Berlin blockade, the seizure of power in Czechoslovakia (with the help of the threat of the Red Army bayonets next door), the Communist attack upon South Korea, the intensification of the Huk rebellion in the Philippines, the beginning of insurrections in Burma and Malaya. Even the then weak Partai Komunis Indonesia staged an abortive uprising at Madiun.

### The Period of Armed Struggle

The ensuing years were long and painful for Burma as the Government struggled to suppress the insurgents and at the same time to repair the damages of the war and to begin the badly needed programs of reform and development. Nevertheless progress was steady if gradual. The Communist insurgents steadily declined in strength under the pressure of the Army. The most pressing social problems were relieved. Industrialization began as did the redistribution of land in areas where Communist violence did not prevent it. On the world scene likewise, the expansion of Communist rule by force had met with failure. The Allied airlift had broken the Berlin blockade. South Korea had been saved from Communist conquest by the United Nations. The governments of Malaya, the Philippines and Burma had succeeded by their own actions in reducing once threatening insurgent armies to a handful of terrorists hiding in the jungle.

Obviously someone had guessed wrong. The time had not been ripe; the revolutionary situation had not arrived. The armed struggle at this particular historical moment had been a mistake and the revolution was not a success. Lenin had long before provided guidance for harried Communists who found themselves in such a situation.

**"To accept battle at a time when it is obviously advantageous to the enemy and not to us is a crime; and those political leaders of the revolutionary class who are unable to "attack, to manoeuvre, to compromise" in order to avoid an obviously disadvantageous battle, are good for nothing." V. I. Lenin, Left Wing Communism, Selected Works, Vol. 31, p. 58.**

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### The New Communist Tactic

Certainly Than Tun did not desire to commit such a "crime" nor to be described as "good for nothing." Since the battle was obviously going badly it was necessary to put an end to it and seek to carry on the revolution by other means. Now was the time to display some of the "flexibility" of tactics which the founders of Communism had rated so highly. So it was that from the latter part of 1955 down to the present the Burma Communist Party has sought to liquidate the insurrection which was going so badly and reestablish itself as a legal, respectable political party and participate in the democratic processes and institutions of the country. The BCP utilized its front organizations such as the Peace movement; it mobilized masses of misguided young students; it used the influence of the aboveground Communists in the BWP and made personal appeals to Government leaders; all to persuade the Government to let the Communist insurgents come out of the jungle (leaving their arms safely hidden for future use, you may be sure) and enter the political life of the country.

Communist doctrine states clearly that at certain times and under certain circumstances it is correct for Communists to enter "bourgeois" political institutions, to stand for office in elections, to hold seats in Parliament and even to enter Governments. But the doctrine describes just as clearly what must be the purposes and goals of Communists who take part in democratic political processes.

"As long as you are unable to disperse the bourgeois parliament and every other type of reactionary institution you must work inside them." V. I. Lenin, Left Wing Communism.

"Compromises are necessary even with the direct enemy if they are concluded in order to escape destruction and to preserve one's forces for attacking the enemy in the future." N. V. Tropkin, On the Foundations of the Strategy and Tactics of Leninism. Moscow, 1956

Clearly Than Tun and the BCP were acting strictly in accordance with doctrine when they sought to escape destruction by ending their insurrection and becoming a legal political party. But what is the purpose and goal of such a legal party in its participation in democratic political processes? Let us look again at the authorities.

"Therefore, there can be a question only of utilizing bourgeois State institutions with the object of destroying them. The Communist Party enters such institutions not in order to do constructive work, but in order to direct the masses to destroy from within the whole bourgeois State machine and Parliament itself." "The Communist Party and Parliamentarianism." Theses Adopted at the Second Congress of the Communist International. 1920.

"The Parliament can in no way serve as the arena of a struggle for reform. . . Therefore it is the immediate task to tear this apparatus out of the hands of the ruling classes, to break and destroy it, and to create in its place a new proletarian apparatus. At the same time, however, the revolutionary general staff. . . is vitally concerned in having its scouting parties in the parliamentary institutions. . . in order to facilitate this task of destruction." Theses and Statutes of the Third Communist International.

"Therefore, it is only possible to speak of utilizing the bourgeois State organizations with the object of destroying them. The question can be discussed only and exclusively on such a plane." Theses and Statutes of the Third Communist International.

"The final objective--the elimination of parliament--determined the mode of its utilization." Roger Garaudy, Cahiers Du Communisme, Paris, May, 1956.

Can there be any doubt what the purposes and goals of Than Tun and his followers would be as members of the Burmese Parliament or even as Cabinet Ministers? Can there be any doubt as to the purposes and goals of the BWP members who already occupy such positions, for remember that they too know their Communist scriptures. To remove any lingering doubt that Than Tun himself understands these basic doctrines of the Communist movement, here are his own words in a question and answer session during a conference of the Burma Communist Party. These statements were contained in a document prepared for the Central Committee of the BCP which the Army captured in Pakokku District.



**"The moment we get a ceasefire, we will use our democratic rights to continue the fight, to add to our strength, and prepare once more for armed struggle. . . There is no question of a coalition with the Nu government. The final goal of seizing power must be won through violent methods. There is thus a change in strategy. It is not to form a coalition with the Nu government, but to eradicate it. While we are fighting within the democratic fold the armed struggle will have to be held in abeyance, but the final struggle will be with weapons." Thakin Than Tun.**

**Surely it is abundantly clear that in all its baffling twists and turns of policy over the years, the Burma Communist Party has been guided and its decisions determined by the body of Communist doctrine which is at once the Scriptures and the Manual of Tactics for Communists everywhere. And it should also be clear that to understand what Communists are up to at any given moment it is necessary to study, not their public statements, for these are only the expression of the tactical variation of the moment, but the fundamental doctrines written in the books and articles intended for the instruction of the Party faithful rather than for the consumption of the public.**