

# HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY: THE EXPERIENCE IN MYANMAR

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## 1. INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

Mayanmar was first consolidated out of a series of minor States in the 11th century under king Ananratha. From this time on, kings ruled by divine rights and had total control. In 1885 the British completed occupation of Burma (as it was), the last king was deposed and the country was put under colonial rule. Following the British take-over a rebellion movement emerged. However, this movement was not very successful and it was not until the end of the Second World War that Burma became independent. Aung San, father of Suu Kyi, negotiated with the British for independence and was set to become Burma's first Prime Minister. Tragically, Aung San, continued the struggle for stability in Burma by leading the government starting from 1947.

The democracy lasted only until 1962, when General Ne Win lead a military coup against the parliamentary democratic government. General Ne Win had initially been a leader of the resistance movement against British rule. He came in control of the government's military in 1949. Ne Win led a brief "care-taker government" in 1958 during the democratic elections which were won by the U NU. However, in March, 1962 he seized power. He suspended the constitution, dissolved the parliament, put U Nu in prison and established a military dictatorship under the rule of the Burmese Socialist Programme Party (BSPP).

Early on, when Burma first opened up to Western ideas, socialism swept the intellectual class. Even Buddhist Monks saw it as the road to social "Nirvana". After his take over, Ne Win, much like Chairman

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<sup>1</sup> Kolvig, Eric, *Burma Today, Land of Hope and Terror*, Burma Action Meeting, Washington DC, 2nd draft, November 1991.