

THE PEOPLE  
WIN THROUGH

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*a play by U NU*

*with a long biographical introduction by*  
**EDWARD HUNTER**



# THE PEOPLE

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# WINN CROUCH

a play by U. N. CROUCH

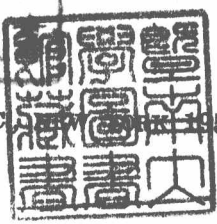


with a long biographical introduction by

中國科學院廣州哲學  
社會科學研究所藏

EDWARD HUNTER

TAPLINGER PUBLISHING CO., INC.



1957

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Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 56-12656

## CHARACTERS

U BA THEIN, *retired civil servant*

MA HLA MYINT, *his daughter*

AYE MAUNG, *her suitor*

AUNG WIN, *U Ba Thein's son*

KHIN NWE, *Aung Win's wife*

TET TOE, *their son, ten*

HLA HLA, *their daughter, eight*

### *White Band Insurgents:*

BOH SAN SHA

AYE NYEIN

THA SEIN

BA TOKE

BOH MIN YAUNG

BOH THOUNG HTUT

### *Villagers:*

*Headman of village in Pegu District*

PO SEIK, *schoolmaster*

PO LIN, *village elder*

U THA BYAW

HTWE MAUNG

*Various elders, others*

*Village Refugee Group:*

MAI SHWE, *country woman*  
U PO MYA, *her husband*  
AYE TIN, *woman*  
DAW PWA, *her mother*  
DAW AYE MAI, *woman*  
U THA DUN  
OHN PE  
MAUNG HTAIK  
U SIN

*Army:*

BOH AYE, *platoon commander*  
HLA THOUNG,  
MAUNG LIN,  
PE MYA,  
SEIN MAUNG, *soldiers*

*The Communists:*

BOH TAUKE TUN, *guerrilla captain*  
CHIT TUN,  
TIN NYUNT,  
SA MI, *guerrillas*  
*Other Red guerrilla troops*  
*Judge in Communist People's Court*  
*Jury*  
*Prosecutor*  
U SAN KE,  
KO PO LONE,  
THAKIN TUN KHIN,  
BA ZAN, *prisoners*  
U BI, *witness*

THAKIN LUN,  
THAKIN SEIN TINT,  
THAKIN SAMI, *members Communist Executive  
Committee*  
*Lieutenant, Insurgent group leader*

*Anti-Communist Guerrilla Group:*

MYA GYI, *leader*

THA HLA

*Three or four others*

*Prologue Speaker*

## INTRODUCTION *by Edward Hunter*

U Nu baffles people who try to label others. He does not fit into any one, neat compartment. Is he a politician or an author? Is he a lawyer or a priest? Is he a radical or a conservative? Is he a Westernized Burmese or a stubborn proponent of old Burmese traditions? Without much difficulty, a good case could be made for any of these labels. Indeed, each is more or less correct. U Nu is a man of tones and blending colors, not of any single, solid hue—white, pink, red, or what you will. This is part of his character.

When Burma won its independence, he became its first Prime Minister. He writes Western-style books, and wears Burmese native attire. He studied law at Rangoon University, and has been a devout Buddhist all of his life. He is a Marxist who has never been a Socialist Party member. He wrote a one-act play in 1934 satirizing the debauchery of Buddhist monks, wrote two domestic satires in 1937, another on Burmese society in 1938, called "Mad Humanity," and a biting drama on the sex life of the middle class Burmese in 1938, called "The Bull at Large." Yet he has been a lifelong crusader for the preservation of the ancient framework of Burmese society.



In Western society, the existence of such diverse traits in the same man would indicate a hopelessly confused individual. But U Nu is not confused. He cannot be explained as if he were a product of London society. His temperament is Burmese. What best describes him is not a professional designation, even of author or politician, but an objective—his country's sovereignty and security. Everything except this objective is subordinate in him. This is why he can be, at the same time, all these different things, yet constitute a harmonious whole, a typical Burmese—perhaps the Burmese who is most typical of this period in his country's history.

I showed his photograph to a mature American who had spent many years in the Orient. After studying the picture for a minute, he hedged by saying, "He's an Asian, and you know how they mask their feelings." This was a superficial impression, but U Nu's wartime career indicates that there is much truth in it; I doubt if the Japanese would deny it. I also showed the photo to a discriminating young art student, who had had no time in which to absorb grown-up patterns of thought, and whose reactions would be unaffected by racial notions. She studied the picture for a minute, and then gave her reaction this way:

"He looks sure of himself. He seems sympathetic and understanding. When he reaches an opinion, I don't think he changes it for anything. He looks cultured and educated."

This was U Nu all right. Professional labels are only a superficial guide to the man; motivation is what counts in him.

In the industrialized West, where specialization has reached exaggerated heights, we have lost some of the wholesome traits of a less modernized society. These are what U Nu has retained. They are what he is aiming at in his neutrality policy. He is trying to be practical and opportunistic, so as to achieve a harmony between his people's languorous past and the requirements of the precise Twentieth Century. He is trying to use the lushness of Burmese nature and character to modify the cold harshness of the industrial age. Such an idyllic formula would be a modern miracle. So the frustrations and the gropings continue in U Nu's lovely land of Burma and in the minds of his volative, simple-hearted people.

U Nu cannot be understood apart from his people; he is intimately related to every phase of their past half-century of humiliation, turmoil, exploitation and bedevilment.

He is a Mongolian-Chinese type, of medium height and width, with a roundish face and small, soft eyes. He has a restful, dreamy look. As he reached maturity he took on the mark of a man of substance, calm, with a well-earned self-assurance.

U Nu was born on May 25, 1907, into a middle-class merchant's family. Hardly a quarter century before, the British had made his country a province of colonial India, removing even the pretense of Burmese autonomy. This was a crude and unstatesmanlike effort to put an end to Burma's recalcitrance. Burmese intractability was not solved by decreeing the merger of the Indian and Burmese territories; the fundamental problem was merely evaded. Burma thus be-

came the colony of a colony. The fallacy that Burma and India were alike not only allowed their European masters to exploit Burma, but enabled Burma's big neighbor to do so, too.

The Burmese generally are dissimilar racially to the Indians. The latter's aborigines, Negroid and Australoid, have been pressed south by dark-skinned Aryan hordes from the northwest, whereas the yellow-hued Burmese came from Tibet. In India there are scores of languages, each with numerous dialects, the most prevalent of these being derived from a Sanskrit base, with generous borrowings from the Persian and Arabic. The tonal languages of the Burmese are derived from Eastern sources. Their pronunciation is akin to the Chinese, although their writing has a Sanskrit form. The personalities of the Burmese and the Indians are full of contrasts.

The British, blandly disregarding this conflict in race, culture and speech — unable even to recognize these dissimilarities — lumped all these people together as just Asians, and assumed that by the sheer legalism of a centralized administration, all of these differences could be made to disappear. This was the period when the English were evolving a liberal, *laissez-faire* doctrine, which relieved their own, changing society of impossible stresses.

This policy worked well where it evolved naturally out of Christian culture, with its emphasis on the free will of the individual. But when imported like a package of merchandise into a part of the world where it was neither familiar nor convenient, this noble-sounding, hands-off policy upset such cultural equilibrium as

had already been attained, stymied the natural evolution in beliefs and attitudes, and deprived the weak of such defenses as it had built up. The timing was out of joint, of lop-sided advantage. Instead of spelling out progress, these elements of Western advance meant more stifling evidence of colonialism. Decaying superstitions and dying customs were saved from extinction by the premature enforcement of this doctrine, along with its moral accompaniment of fair play, implemented as if tropical Rangoon was temperate, foggy London. All of this went over the heads of foreign merchant and white crusader alike. They were just not interested; they used these doctrines as a tactic rather than as a principle.

Burma had been relatively independent until the British came in to trade — just trade, as they said. The Burmese saw their country's freedom melt away with this commerce. There was no feudalism in Burma, except among the hill tribes. As social distinctions and class lines develop strongest out of feudal concepts, Burma had little of either. The powerful and rich were few and irresponsible. This gave rise on the other, crowded side of the pendulum to compensating irresponsibility, typified by the peculiar brand of outlaw produced by Burma and India, known as the dacoit.

## 2

Burma was small and lush, with a rice and bamboo culture freely provided by a bountiful nature. The people lived well, for the soil was magically fertile,

except in the cold, rugged hill areas. The country was underpopulated. The people did not have to work hard to make ends pleasantly meet, except during planting and harvest seasons. There was not much to do in the lowlands in the interval, except a little cottage industry, which was not really necessary.

The people lived a lazy, easy life that was reflected in their trustful outlook and their fanciful faith in the spirits of nature—in pixies called nats. They abhorred trade and had no patience for business; they willingly let outsiders attend to such dull matters. The Burmese did not have to buckle down in order to be well fed and comfortably clothed and housed. They did not need the help of others. The people from the hill tribes went into the British army because it gave them a livelihood, and helped support their families. The lowland Burmese had no such incentive, and did not take to army life. They did not like the discipline, and even less did they take to domination. A Burmese, when pressed, would bow to the inevitable, then disappear into the jungle and join the free-wheeling, quick-tempered dacoits. He knew he could never starve in Burma's jungle, which is relatively hospitable to man, in contrast to the Malayan jungle, which cruelly fights the human race. If he had to go into the villages for food and other supplies, these brigands found the peasants not too resentful so long as he grabbed only what little he needed, for everyone knew that there was always more where this come from. This was an idyllic life, but a pushover for speculators and merchants from far and nearby, who came with all the legal appurtenances of Western society.

India was enormous and scorching, where people took to trade with sharp-eyed eagerness. The first effect of the administrative merger and the imported laissez-faire policy was to open the floodgates of Burma to the impoverished Indians, who were being crowded out of their own land by an annual increase in births that alone equaled the entire population of certain European countries. Many came as moneylenders and petty merchants, and between themselves and the competitive Chinese, soon monopolized the business life of Burma. The Indians soon became the biggest landowners in Burma, making the recovery of this good earth, and not domestic land reform, Burma's most critical postwar problem.

The English built up the idea of trade monopoly, and then stood by, guaranteeing peace and order to Indians and Burmese alike, exacting a fee from all indiscriminately, for the multitudinous services they provided.

## 3

This was U Nu's world. He was a native of Wakema village, in the Myaungmya district, 50 miles west of Rangoon, where the Irrawaddy River splits into half a dozen mouths. His father was a patriotic trader. He sent his son to a government school with misgivings. He admired its high standards in education, and was satisfied that the study of English was obligatory, for he knew how necessary it was for one's future

prosperity. Yet he would have preferred more emphasis on Burmese subjects. He either had to send the lad to a government school, or forego any pretense of a modern education for him.

The only other education available was in the monasteries. This stress on religion came naturally to the Burmese country boy. Social life in a town or village was bound by the Buddhist temple, where a boy normally enrolled for a week or a month as a novice, just as casually as an American or British youngster attends a Boy Scout camp. U Nu did so, too, and like all Burmese youngsters, took lessons in the sutras and discussed Buddhist teachings with the monks. He enjoyed excursions to neighboring pagodas. The Buddhist environment lent itself to an intimacy between the people and the church. U Nu loved the color and the glamor of Buddhism.

His Burmese intensity, acquired from his father, also drew him to Buddhism. He was an intellectual, yet found in religion a solace that pure intellect could not provide. His nationalist feelings found an outlet in the faith of his fathers; nothing else seemed to remain Burmese any longer. Buddhism had identified itself with patriotism. Buddhist monks, called pongyis, participated frankly in politics. They were deeply impressed by the work of the Young Men's Christian Association, brought over from England. The nationalist movement received its flame, as elsewhere in Asia, from the youth, and the Y. M. C. A. was a youth movement. This inspired the monks, shortly after World War I, to organize Young Men's Buddhist Associations. These promptly became an embryo political

party, thus getting around the British ban on political associations. This was the nucleus of Burma's political party system.

The political complexion of the Y. M. B. A. was hardly concealed by the mild-mannered monkhood. One outstanding monk, Sayadaw U Wisara, died a political martyr. Jailed by the British for a seditious speech, he went on a 166-day hunger strike. U Nu must have followed the news about this fasting monk with all the excitement that his American and British cousins displayed for baseball or football. The monk's dying message, "Be wary and wise," might well have been a motto for U Nu.

He was always wary and wise. He led a normal boy's life, although he was scrupulous about rising early enough to have time for prayers in front of his family shrine, before going to school. This gave him a sense of closeness to his own people, that remained with him throughout the day in the foreignized school.

Every schoolboy in the country soon heard the exciting news when the students of Rangoon University went on strike in 1920. They insisted that a new regulation, called the University Act, was discriminatory. Actually, the points raised in the protest were secondary in the minds of the youth. A resentment had been building up for some years over the failure of the British to consult them or any other Burmese when coming to decisions. The actions adopted were secondary in these Burmese minds to the way in which they were reached. The Burmese were weary of being led by others.

A mild sort of united front was already in exist-



ence, in the form of a General Council of Burmese Associations. This was actually an official party, with village, town and district branches. The student strike at Rangoon was thus quickly transported, by lay and clerical channels, throughout the land. This was U Nu's first political experience, for in his distant village he, too, went on strike. So did students in government schools everywhere. As was natural, the boys all repaired to their respective pagodas and monasteries, where they exchanged gossip with the monks, and eagerly expressed their patriotic feelings.

As the school boycott dragged on, and education appeared stalemated, older students began to teach the younger. This year-long walkout was the start of what became known as national schools, formed by the Burmese people themselves. These, like government schools, gave both a primary and secondary education. Although they were not recognized by the government, Burmese opinion was overwhelmingly in their favor, and U Nu's father gladly transferred his son to one established in Rangoon. As was to be expected, the curriculum leaned heavily on nationalist teachings.

A dispute over whether these national schools should accept government financial aid caused a split in the General Council of Burmese Associations, and led to the creation of a group called the People's Party, which became known to history as the Twenty-Oners, after the number of its original members. This group favored the acceptance of such help.