

“Speech to a Mass Rally at the Shwedagon Pagoda”

Aung San Suu Kyi, 1988

Reverend monks and people! This public rally is aimed at informing the whole world of **the will of the people**. Therefore at this mass rally the people should be disciplined and united to demonstrate the very fact that they are a people who can be disciplined and united. Our purpose is to show that the entire people entertain the keenest desire for a multi-party democratic system of government.

It is the students who have paved the way to the present situation where it is possible to hold such a rally. The occasion has been made possible because the **recent demonstrations have been spearheaded by the students** and even more because they have shown their willingness to sacrifice their lives. I therefore request you all to observe a minute’s silence in order to show our deepest respect for those students who have lost their lives and, even more, in order to share the merit of their deeds among all of us. So while doing this please keep perfect silence for the duration of one minute.

I believe that all the people who have assembled here have without exception come with the unshakeable desire to strive for and win a multi-party democratic system. In order to arrive at this objective, all the people should march unitedly in a disciplined manner towards the goal of democracy.

In this connection I would like to explain the part I have played in this movement. This is needed because a fair number of people are not very well acquainted with my personal history. It is only natural and right that those who do not know me would like to know some facts.

A number of people are saying that since I have spent most of my time abroad and am married to a foreigner I could not be familiar with the ramifications of this country’s politics. I wish to speak from this platform very frankly and openly to the people. It is true that I have lived abroad. It is also true that I am married to a foreigner. These facts have never interfered and will never interfere with or lessen my love and devotion for my country by any measure or degree.

Another thing which some people have been saying is that I know nothing of Burmese politics. The trouble is that I know too much. **My family knows best how complicated and tricky Burmese politics can be and how much my father had to suffer on this account.** He expended much mental and physical effort in the cause of Burma’s politics without personal gain. That is

why my father said that once Burma's independence was gained he would not want to take part in the kind of power politics that would follow.

Since my father had no such desire I too have always wanted to place myself at a distance from this kind of politics. Because of that I have kept away from politics. Some might then ask why, if I wished to stay out of politics, should I now be involved in this movement. The answer is that the present crisis is the concern of the entire nation. **I could not as my father's daughter remain indifferent to all that was going on. This national crisis could in fact be called the second struggle for national independence.**

This great struggle has arisen from the intense and deep desire of the people for a fully democratic parliamentary system of government. I would like to read to you something my father said about democracy:

We must make democracy the popular creed. We must try to build up a free Burma in accordance with such a creed. If we should fail to do this, our people are bound to suffer. If democracy should fail the world cannot stand back and just look on, and therefore Burma would one day, like Japan and Germany, be despised. **Democracy is the only ideology which is consistent with freedom. It is also an ideology that promotes and strengthens peace. It is therefore the only ideology we should aim for.**

That is what my father said. It is the reason why I am participating in this struggle for freedom and democracy in the footsteps and traditions of my father. **To achieve democracy the people should be united.** That is very clear. It is a very plain fact. If there is no unity of purpose we shall be unable to achieve anything at all. If the people are disunited, no ideology or form of government can bring much benefit to the country. This must be firmly fixed in the minds of the people. If there is no discipline, no system can succeed. Therefore one people should always be united and disciplined.

While I am talking about the need for unity I would like to say one thing. Some may not like what I am going to say. But I believe that my duty is to tell the people what I believe to be true. Therefore I shall speak my mind. If my words meet with your approval, please support me. If they are not acceptable, it cannot be helped. I am only doing what I believe to be right. What I wish to say is that at this time there is a certain amount of dissension between the people and the army. This rift can lead to future dangers. The present armed forces of Burma were created and nurtured by my father. It is not simply a matter of words to say that my father built up the armed forces. It is a fact. There are papers written in my father's own hand where he lays out in detail how the army should be organized and built up. So what objectives did my father have for the armed forces? Let me read to you one of them:

The armed forces are meant for this nation and this people, and it should be such a force having the honour and respect of the people. If instead the armed forces should come to be hated by the people, then the aims with which this army has been built up would have been in vain.

Let me speak frankly. I feel strong attachment for the armed forces. Not only were they built up by my father, as a child I was cared for by his soldiers. At the same time I am also aware of the great love and affection which the people have for my father. I am grateful for this love and affection. I would therefore not wish to see any splits and struggles between the army which my father built up and the people who love my father so much. May I also from this platform ask the personnel of the armed forces to reciprocate this kind of understanding and sympathy? May I appeal to the armed forces to become a force in which the people can place their trust and reliance. May the armed forces become one which will uphold the honour and dignity of our country.

For their part the people should try to forget what has already taken place, and I would like to appeal to them not to lose their affection for the army. **We shall reach our goal of a strong and lasting Union only if we are all able to go forward in unity.** We have not yet achieved this goal. Let us not be disunited. Therefore let us resolve to march forward in unity towards our cherished goal. In doing so please use peaceful means. **If a people or a nation can reach their objectives by disciplined and peaceful means, it would be a most honourable and admirable achievement.**

I have a few things to say about the students who have been at the forefront of this nationwide movement. The students are most able. They have already demonstrated their physical courage. I believe that they will now go on to demonstrate their moral and mental ability. May I appeal to the students to continue to march forward with the same kind of unity and resolve? At this moment there are a number of student groups. I would like these groups to come together as a unified body. I understand that they are soon going to call a conference for this purpose. Should this occasion arise may I pray that it will result in an entire cohesion and unity of the students.

Some students have asked me which politicians are standing behind me. They are apprehensive that such politicians might manipulate me and then take over the students. I am happy that the students have been so open and honest with me. Young people are frank and free from deviousness. I answered them truthfully. **There are no politicians behind me. What I am trying to do is to help achieve the democratic system of government which the people want.** For the achievement of this system, there are some veteran politicians who wish to help me in various ways. I have told such politicians that if their object is to obtain positions of political power for themselves, I would not support them in any way. Should these politicians try to obtain positions

of political power I promise in front of this assembly of people that I myself will not hesitate to denounce them.

There is a sort of gulf between the older and younger generations. This gulf will have to be bridged. There is the feeling that the older and younger generations are quite apart from each other. This is something that should not happen. Whether young or old the entire people should be united.

The strength of the people is growing day by day. Such growing strength has to be controlled by discipline. Undisciplined strength or strength which is not in keeping with right principles can never lead to a beneficial fruition. It could lead to danger for many. Therefore please continue to use our strength in accordance with rightful principles. At this juncture when the people's strength is almost at its peak we should take extreme care not to oppress the weaker side. That is the kind of evil practice which would cause the people to lose their dignity and honour. The people should demonstrate clearly and distinctly their capacity to forgive.

If we are to examine what it is that we all desire, that is what the people really want at this time, the answer is multi-party democracy. We want to get rid of the one-party system. The President, Dr Maung Maung, has said that he is calling an emergency party congress to decide whether there should be a national referendum. So far as I am concerned I do not think it is necessary to have this referendum. **The entire nation's desires and aspirations are very clear. There can be no doubt that everybody wants a multi-party democratic system of government. It is the duty of the present government to bring about such a system as soon as possible.**

For the people's part they should continue to demonstrate for this through peaceful and disciplined means. May I emphasize again that we have not yet arrived at our cherished goal. Please think in advance of what should be done to bring about a firmly established Union. Please think of the country's future. Unless we consider the future of our country, the changes that are coming into being may not be able to achieve much benefit for the country. My father said there is a great need for the people to be disciplined and this cannot be repeated too often.

We do not need to have a referendum. **What we do need is a multi-party system. It should be introduced as quickly as possible by means of free and fair elections.** Conditions necessary for the holding of free and fair elections should be created throughout the country. The people have lost their confidence in the government of the day. If the holding of free and fair elections requires an interim government, such a forerunner should be created.

The main objective is not to have either the present form of government, nor an interim government, nor to have some other new government, but to have a government that can bring

about a strong and prosperous Union of Burma. Please do not lose sight of the main objectives, nor forget the future welfare of the country. Should we lose sight of these, present victories will change to future failures.

What stage have we reached now? Well, our cherished aim is clearly within sight. Let us march forward together towards that goal. Let no divisions creep in. It is important that divisions of opinion should not arise among the students. There should be a complete restraint on creating such divisions. Therefore should differences arise between them now the country's future unity will be jeopardized.

While I am on the subject of unity may I speak for a while on the union of states of which Burma is composed. The different peoples of Burma should also remain united. The majority people of course remain the Burmese. They must strive with ever-increasing efforts to live in this accord and amity. Because the Burmese people form the biggest majority, they should make the greatest efforts to live in this accord and amity and to achieve that much needed unity and friendship among national racial groups.

Those who have the greater strength should show restraint and tolerance towards those who have less strength. Here I wish to say one thing regarding those people who are supporting the one-party system. The fact is many members of the Lanzin Party (Burma Socialist Programme Party) have themselves lost faith and confidence in their party. Such party members should resign from the Lanzin Party. They should hand in their party cards.

However, those who continue as members of the Lanzin Party out of conviction should not be molested. Democracy is an ideology that allows everyone to stand up according to his beliefs. They should not be threatened or endangered. Each one should go forward towards his own goal. Do not because of your greater strength be vengeful towards those who are of weaker strength.

We have gone far beyond the intended time, so I must cut this short. The final remark I wish to make is for our rally to maintain unity and discipline. Our strength should be used for the cause of what is right. Only by observing these requirements shall we be able to find our goal.

May the entire people be united and disciplined. May our people always do what is in complete accord with rightful principles. May the people be free from all harm. To conclude I would like to reiterate our emphatic demands and protests, namely that we have no desire at all for a referendum, that the one-party system should be dismantled, that a multi-party system of government should be established, and we call for free and fair elections to be arranged as quickly as possible. These are our demands.