

Contribution of the Burmese delegate

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On culture and education of youth in the spirit of peace and friendship between the peoples.

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Dear friends,

We are assembled from all ends of the earth, from Venezuela and Australia, from South Africa and Finland, from various lands-- young people, black and yellow, white and brown, to solemnly discuss and to act in defence of the rights of youth all over the world. And what is it exactly that we want?

I remember two lines from Pablo Neruda; He wrote,

"I want the earth and the fire, the bread, the sugar, the wheat, the sea, the books, and the land, for all men."

We need all these, (that is not demanding too much), not for a handful but for all men. We make this demand not only because thousands of youth are dying and suffering in defence of their rights for a place under the sun, but also because many youth, before they could enjoy the embrace of mankind are losing faith in life itself and view every passing day as a torture.

Last year, two students committed suicide in our country, Burma. The actual cause for their tragical end was the education system that persists in our land.

It is not only the presence of such a deplorable system of education in the country that we wish to raise our voice against: we have in mind also, the absence of any education at all for many people. Out of 2,500,000 children of school going age only (600,000) can attend schools. There are only about 9,685 seats in higher schools and the universities and college provide a further 4500 only. Thus in Burma we find ~~54~~ 44% of the males and 83.5% of the females illiterate. Among the national minorities the situation is still worse, less than two per cent of the people in the Chin Hills know how to read and write.

If we must feel with paining hearts for those unable to go to any schools, we also realise that those who can are also not very lucky. We shall not go into details: much had been said already in this hall we will only say that, inability to study many subjects in the mother tongue, absence of sufficient text books, theories in institution aloof from the practice in life, cosmopolitanism reigning supreme, national culture belittled or cultivated in backward directions-- all these are the lot of students in Burma. From the little boy crouching on the floor over his slate and getting caned on the head by his teacher--to the university student lacking educational facilities and bribing professors for a favour--education in Burma is a farce. Stu-

Students feel the absence of museums and libraries, laboratories and other sources, but live in crowded rooms, paying high fees and rents. 80% of the children have to discontinue their studies before completing the primary courses, about half of the students quit their classes before graduation--on account of financial difficulties.

But after all, graduation again does not mean something substantial. A science graduate runs to take up law, a philosophy student becomes a physical trainer, a literature student becomes a clerk at the counter. But those who get this much to do are lucky because there are 200,000 unemployed people in Rangoon city which has a population of 700,000.

Last year over 13,000 entered the matriculation examinations. Only about 2,000 passed and rest failed. The naked reason is that the government was unable to provide seats for higher learning or to ~~guarantee~~ guarantee suitable employments. Many of the unsuccessful candidates joined the army and faced death, weaker people found life hopeless--then as I told you earlier, two students committed suicide.

The education system in Burma is thus literally murdering the youth and the cultural life in itself has been deteriorating worse and worse. The crimes of colonialism in this sphere are barbaric.

I will tell you an instance. Over <sup>19</sup>centuries ago, there was an ancient writing, called the Pyu inscriptions, in Burma. It became extinct after the 13th century when a new form <sup>came</sup> into use. Anyway these inscriptions lived on, carved out on ~~laks~~ slabs of stone. At the end of the last century, when British colonialism began its rule in Burma, many of these valuable stones were used for the construction of railway lines. You can very well imagine what a great loss has been suffered not only by Burma but also by the entire mankind.

Our beautiful music and dance, characteristically Burmese, but also absorbing the influences of these from India, Siam, Cambodia, China and others are now falling to pieces and the queer uncanny movement of the hands and feet of a half clad Hollywood girl coupled with shrieks and unearthly cries is being substituted.

From this period of destruction of historical monuments to the period of Hollywood legs, our legacies of culture had suffered much. Our palaces had been shelled and bombed out during the last war, our religious shrines that contain the highest examples of our national culture had been razed to the ground.

Yes, unjust wars and culture never go together. Really reliable libraries are so few, there is no national museum, no national theatre, no national art gallery. As a substitute, the United States Information Service Centres are being opened up in all the large towns of the country. 70% of the film shown in Burma are yellow American.

It must not be misunderstood, though; we are not opposed to foreign

we are not opposed to foreign culture. What we want is to appreciate the real culture of the progressing world and not the trash of the decaying. What we are up in arms against is the foul usage of culture for aggressive wars. What we greatly oppose is the insult against Whitman and Dreiser under the pressure of the gangster yarns, the murder of Shakespeare and Dickens and Shaw by war comics. We want to enjoy as much of international culture as the others: we desire Pushkin and ~~Hug~~ Hugo, Rembrandt and da Vinci, Smetana and Beethoven--and all the cream of international culture. We still have much room for Hikmet and Aragon, Ehrenburg and Fast, for the White Haired Girl and Anna Proletarka. I am sure every simple soul in the world can understand our profound love and thirst for learning which cannot be quenched by pornography.

And we declare that we shall fight against the culture of war for a culture of peace. We shall fight not only in defence of our own national culture but also in defence of the culture of Vienna and Paris, of Leningrad and Prague against the culture of Hollywood and the War-mongering Inc.

For this struggle, for this fight to attain a culture of peace and friendship between the peoples of the world, we, in Burma need young cultural workers, teachers and artistes. These people, however, are being ruthlessly suppressed and teachers are one of the lowest paid personal in the country. Our writers, artists, dancers, musicians and other have to lead miserable lives, starving, bearing the most low down insults of the men with capital. Their works are bought over, their hopes changed for dollars--young artistes have no chance for development.

How different is the picture, for instance, in Czechoslovakia! How well the young writers, to give an example, are given careful attention! How wonderfully the young sculptors and painters and others are given boundless horizons to explore!

We only wish to draw the conclusion, that this deplorable situation in Burma is caused by the semi-colonial rule plus the new burden of getting mixed up with the war plans of a handful of maniacs.

How can the Burmese government expect to remedy the cultural deficiencies of the long suffering land when it is spending 59% of its budget on war and only 8.5% on education? The award of a paltry sum of money to a research worker can help but little: on the other hand, the creation of barriers against the progressing countries under pressure from the planners of a war is indeed damaging.

Against all these, students and cultural workers, of all beliefs and opinions, are struggling in various forms. In Burma, where armed struggle is taking place, those in the areas liberated from the reactionary foreign pressure, are building schools and reviving the peaceful national culture even in the face of all difficulties. In other

In other areas, the struggle for more schools, and scholarships better equipments and better conditions are going on. More and more people are coming to realise that we must unite to defend our cultural workers of the press and radio, of the stage and the screen, of the pen and the brush. Above all we have to shake ourselves loose from the camp of war and to set about working for a national unity, to take a firm stand for peace and to take decisive actions against all aggressive invasions in political, military, economic and cultural spheres.

I will now conclude. The suppression of another nations education and culture, the stifling of the culture of the people under commercial aspects--these are also detrimental to the cause of peace and friendship among the peoples. Certain instances of the past still bring us unpleasant memories, but, dear friends, history on the whole offers us the brightest of hopes. When the Englishmen and the Indian, the French girl and the Vietnamese put their heads together: when happy exchanges of peaceful culture take place: when the doors of education will be open to one and all, dear friends, ours can be a wonderful world. The setbacks we have suffered for centuries ~~x~~ can easily be remedied within a few decades.

The question whether the culture of a country is really great or young is another matter to discuss, but we love our culture with all our ~~ex~~ simple hearts. In ancient Burma, we used to enumerate ten forms of arts and crafts and fondly called them the Ten Flowers. We want these ten flowers, and others as well, to bloom with fragrance-- not only the Burmese flowers, but also those of other lands. May all the flowers bloom! May both the warm rays of sunshine and the silvery flakes of snow bring smiles to mankind! May all the seasons bring joy to life! May the doves fly across the blue skies!

We, the youth, live on hope and for all our ideals we shall unswervingly fight. We see no obstacle that we cannot conquer. The future is in our united hands--forward friends, because we are many and they are few!

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