

***The League for Democracy and Peace (LDP), a political party founded by the late Premier U Nu after the 1988 pro-democracy uprising, has reorganized as a new political party called the Democracy and Peace Party (DPP) to contest the coming 2010 election.***



***Aung Than, the chairman of the DPP, is a high court attorney and was the joint-secretary of the LDP's central think-tank committee. In the 1990 election, he contested as an LDP candidate representing Pabedan Township.***

***Htet Aung, the chief reporter on The Irrawaddy's election desk, interviewed Aung Than about his party's economic policies.***

**Question:** *In the DPP policy platform, it says “the party will exercise an open market system with free trade competition which helps to move away from state capitalism.” Why do you think the country should turn away from state capitalism?*

**Answer:** They [the ruling regime] claim in their state- owned news papers that the national economy must be kept in the hands of the state and the citizens. We believe an open market system should operate based on free trade. In our opinion, if we want to exercise a market economic system efficiently, we must allow business freedom.

To explain our party's policy, we will be establish “Associations Promoting Socio-economic Status” to efficiently operate a market economic system. Such associations, we believe, will protect the grassroots level. Why do we need such associations? Because there will be heated competitions between the rich and foreign investors who will manipulate market pricing. We will therefore form APSSs at the grassroots. As farmers are made up of two- thirds of the country's population, the associations will be based in villages. The initial capital will be vested by village savings and perhaps with loan assistance of the government when necessary. Then it will gradually develop into a self-reliant system after paying back the government loans. Finally, village-owned banks will emerge to help the socio-economic status of the villagers.

**Q:** *The late Premier U Nu introduced Burma to a “Pyi Taw Thar Scheme”—an eight-year*

*economic development plan. Does your party's economic policy reflect anything of that plan?*

**A:** Yes. It reflects partially. The association I just mentioned existed before.

**Q:** *In your policy platform, you used the term "Micro Finance Society." Will such an entity be formed by the regime or based on public participation?*

**A:** The government is required to promulgate laws in formation of the MFS. It will not be a top-down approach but rather be based on the active participation of the community at the village level. That is one of the essences of democracy. Public servants will have such establishments. It is similar to "University Concord" in the era of AFPFL (Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League). We will form the MFS to work for the social welfare of public servants and to protect them from the instability of commodity prices also. Ultimately, we envision that there will be MFS even for vendors who are unable to escape from the daily-debt circle.

**Q:** *The regime formed the Myanmar Rice Industry Association (MRIA) early this year which operates in areas from rice production to marketing. What are the differences between the DPP proposed associations and the MRJA?*

**A:** The association we want to form is not like the MRJA which is purely based on the interests of merchants. Since we don't focus on their interests and are working toward the best interests of the grassroots, ours will have very different goals and structures. We also want to transform the restricted market economy into a relaxed environment. For example, the fuel distribution business was handed over to private enterprises but it doesn't encourage competition in running this business. I think there are limitations that deter competition. We don't want to work that way.

**Q:** *Are you saying that a huge capital requirement and special privileges to those who have special business relationships to the government deters other people from entering the fuel business?*

**A:** Yes, that's true. That also hinders a flourishing market economy. A few people with strong financial power are monopolizing business. We want to change that situation.

**Q:** *If we look at the economic growth of ASEAN countries like Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand, foreign direct investment (FDI) is seen as a key driving force. At the same time, they receive massive loan packages from the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF). Burma has is under economic sanctions because of its political situation. There are indications that these sanctions will remain in place after the election. Do you have a policy to attract foreign investment?*

**A:** As I said before, we need to exercise an efficient market economy. There should also be mechanism to guarantee investments. Then, foreign investment will come. Now the US government has given a signal that they will make some changes in their position after the election.

**Q:** *Where did you get this message? From the US mission in Rangoon?*

**A:** No. It was from our discussion with US government officials during their visit.

**Q:** *The Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) led by Prime Minister Thein Sein has been creating an environment in which they can win big in the election. If that happens, how will the DPP, as an opposition party, work to improve the relationship with the international community?*

**A:** The USDP has an upper hand under present circumstances. We had a similar experience in our history. When the AFPFL split into two factions, namely the Clean and the Stable parties, each contested the election held in 1960. The powerful AFPFL faction, the Stable party, did not get public support at that time. What I believe now is that our people have a hidden desires. We just have to work hard to persuade people to express their desires. Then we, the democratic forces, can defeat the much more powerful government-backed party. Hidden desires can unite people.

**Q:** *Under the current political atmosphere, do you think the upcoming election will be free and fair?*

**A:** It is very hard to say the upcoming election will be free and fair. The party led by the incumbent prime minister has an upper hand over everyone else in organizing and using government departments. They have the authority to do so. But, I am sure they can't organize all public servants and the people.