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Recurrence of Rumors of Resignation of U Nu,
Prime Minister of Burma

Background

1. On several occasions in the past, U Nu has threatened to resign. This has always turned out to be a political maneuver, as U Nu has counted on the Burma Socialist Party (BSP) need for him to hold the government coalition (AFPFL) together, and they have "persuaded" him to remain. A recent series of reports, however, indicate a new and similar situation with apparently a more real possibility that the BSP may decide to dispense with U Nu.

Evidence

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2. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] describe a meeting on 7 January 1956 between U Nu and leaders of the Socialist Party.¹ One version says that U Hla Maung called on U Nu with a virtual ultimatum, while the other source states that the meeting was called by U Nu. Both state the Prime Minister was told that the Socialist Party had decided that he should resign following the 27 April elections. U Ba Swe, Defense Minister and prominent BSP leftist leader, was to become prime minister, with U Kyaw Nyein, Minister of Industries, Secretary of the Socialist Party and leader of the more right-wing elements in the party, as vice-prime minister. Thakin Tin, Minister of Land Nationalization would also serve as a vice-prime minister.

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[REDACTED] is not clear as to whether Hla Maung was accompanied by other BSP leaders. Hla Maung says that Ba Swe, Kyaw Nyein and Thakin Tin were present, with Kyaw Nyein taking the leading part.

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3. U Nu was unprepared for this and answered only that the BSP leaders should do as they thought best. They agreed to consider the matter further, but at least until the latter part of February no further decision has been communicated to U Nu.

Other Signs and Portents

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4. It has often appeared that the BSP has been unhappy about Nu's tendency to run away with the ball on foreign policy. A report [REDACTED] as early as 1955 stated that the BSP had disapproved of U Nu's invitation (in Moscow) to the Soviet Union to attend the next Afro-Asian Conference and compelled him (by cable) to retract it. (That he did retract it is public information.) The source went on to say that the Socialists were increasingly disenchanted with U Nu and that Home Minister and party leader Bo Khin Maung Gale had suggested that he ought to be dropped. 25X1X6

5. Another [REDACTED] report says that U Nu told the Rector of Rangoon University in a private conversation [REDACTED] that he expected to be removed as prime minister after the election. He told the Rector this so that the latter would not count on him for support either for university legislation or for an appointment as Ambassador.

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6. [REDACTED] also reported that the principal BSP man in the War Office told U Nu's wife, in answer to a query that she should be looking for a house. Source added that U Nu has asked his wife to put up K. 30,000 towards building a house. The site has already been acquired. This could be an indication that Nu expects to have to leave the Prime Minister's residence.

7. The same report stated that U Nu has proposed to the BSP that U Thant, a politician completely dependent on U Nu support, be a candidate for election to Parliament. U Nu was said to hope that U Thant could win the election and be appointed Information Minister, and thus be firmly established politically before U Nu steps out.

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8. The fact that U Nu's constituents in the Lanmadaw district of Rangoon were dissatisfied with him and asked in late March that he be replaced as their representative by Kyaw Nyein may also indicate that his hold on the Burmese public may not be as strong as formerly.

9. The BSP felt it necessary to release a statement by Information Minister U Tun Win to the press (The Nation, 10 March) to the effect that U Nu would remain as Prime Minister as long as the AFPFL remained in power. This may be a case of protesting too much, and could indicate that the BSP leaders have been considering his replacement and are aware that the rumor is being circulated.

Summary of the Evidence

10. It seems clear that the question of U Nu's retirement is again under consideration by BSP leaders. U Nu may have brought it up, as he has done before to put pressure on the BSP, but there seems a stronger possibility this time that they may take him up on it which should not be ignored. It may be that the Socialists have stirred this matter up simply to keep U Nu under control and that they will not actually carry through with it.

Effect of the elections

11. This affair should be considered in its relation to certain implications in the results of the Burmese elections. State Department reports have suggested that, following the AFPFL loss of strength, there may be a temptation for leftist elements in the BSP to reach out to the left "opposition" for support. The degree of loss of strength so far apparent does not seem to create any overwhelming pressure in that direction for the government as presently constituted. However, if U Nu steps out and U Ba Swe becomes prime minister, he may find himself opposed within the government, and the party by the "rightist" elements of the Socialist Party led by Kyaw Nyein and thus under the necessity of seeking support from the more extreme leftist "opposition" elements. This would undoubtedly then serve to direct Burmese policy further to the left.

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U.S. Interest

12. In the immediate future, at least, U.S. interests in Burma would be best served if U Nu stays on as prime minister. If he goes it would be in our interest to have Kyaw Nyein win out over Ba Swe in any internal Socialist Party struggle, since he is generally more pro-Western in orientation and a stauncher opponent of the legalization of the Burma Communist Party than Ba Swe.

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