

Darrell G. Moen, Ph.D.

Promoting Social Justice, Human Rights, and Peace

Inside Burma: Land of Fear

(1995: 50 min.)

Interviews and narration by John Pilger

Transcribed by Darrell G. Moen

Narrator: This is a film about the right of a people to freedom, and the power of the human spirit to resist against overwhelming odds. It's the story of Burma, once known as the "Golden Land." On the surface, everything appears serene. It's a country of extraordinary beauty and gracious people. But Burma is also a secret country. Isolated for the past 34 years since a brutal dictatorship seized power, the assault on its people all but forgotten. To tell their story, we had to go undercover. What we found was a land of fear.

Unidentified man: People who were carrying posters and flags, they were shot. And they all died immediately, on the spot.

Unidentified woman: Nine students were badly tortured and they were sent to prison for seven years, just for singing a freedom song.

Aung San Suu Kyi: Those who have already been in prison, they know what it is like to be in a Burmese prison. And they know that any day they are liable to be put back there, and yet they do not give up.

Narrator: The generals who crushed democracy in Burma have ruled with a regime so harsh, bloody, and uncompromising, that the parallels with Indonesia and East Timor are striking. More than a million people have been forced from their homes, and according to the United Nations, untold thousands have been massacred, tortured, and subjected to a modern form of slavery.

Burma, says Amnesty International, is a prison without bars. In 1988, the year before the democracy movement in China was crushed so publicly in Tienanmen Square, as many as 10,000 people were killed here by their government in a matter of days. The outside world knew little about this; the difference was the absence television cameras.

This film is being made in secret as the regime attempts to cover its crimes with the help of foreign investors, and by declaring 1996, the "Year of the Tourist." T

he history of modern Burma reaches back through the Second World War and a hundred years of British Imperial rule. With a population of 45 million (45,000,000), it has a natural wealth perhaps unequaled in Asia: oil and gas and vast teak forests. Renamed Myanmar by its military rulers,

Burma has been turned into one of the world's poorest countries. And, as we discovered and will reveal later in this film, it's also a country where slave labor and child labor are common. To the British who colonized Burma in the early 19th century, the "Golden Land" was always a sideshow to its rule over India. However, under a guise of benevolence familiar to Indian nationalists, the same myths applied: The British were bringing civilization, not empire-building.

Rudyard Kipling wrote a famous popular song that romanticized Mandalay, a town he never saw, and which was then being stripped bare of its teak forests leaving vast dustbowls. Fortunes were earned by the British exporters of Burma's rice and precious stones. In the 1930s, companies were making profits of £12 million (£12,000,000), a huge amount in today's terms. The oilfields became a byword for expatriate wealth, and these interests were protected by an Imperial army.

Dr. Aung Kin (Burmese historian): Present military mentality is conditioned by the colonial period. It's like a colonial army occupying the country. They behave like a corporate body solving its own interests. So they don't recognize people's representation or the will of the people. They regard themselves as separated from and superior to the populace. That tradition derives from the colonial period.

Narrator: The movement for independence from Britain began in the 1930s among the students and monks. The national hero was a young army officer, Aung San, the father of Nobel Peace Prize winner Suu Kyi. During the Second World War, Aung San and his comrades exploited the Japanese occupation to win independence. But in 1948, as independence was about to be granted, Aung San was assassinated. His name is revered in Burma today.

What was unique about the movement he began and which led to democratic governments in the postwar years was its quality of Buddhism, socialism, and democracy. The ideas of Marx, Nehru, and Voltaire were adapted. Marx was virtually transformed into a disciple of Buddha. This flowering of democratic socialism coincided with a period of turmoil as Burma's ethnic peoples demanded autonomy. But in 1962, the army stepped in and seized power. Its leader was a Stalin-like figure called Ne Win.

Dr. Aung Kin (Burmese historian): He ruled the country like Stalin ruled Russia through the KGB. He set up his intelligence apparatus, which he used as his eyes and ears. So he sees the country through this apparatus, and this intelligence apparatus became a government within a government.

Martin Morland (Ex-U.K. Ambassador to Burma): I think he's a control maniac. He's one of the most extraordinary, contradictory characters that one could ever come across, one that changed a good deal. I think in his earlier years, he was a playboy. In the 1960s, he suddenly changed. Perhaps as a result of his advisors he changed his whole policy and became a very rigorous, authoritarian, puritanical (for other people anyway) kind of guy, and decided that Burma should be taken away from all kinds of foreign influence.

Interviewer: That hypocrisy in Ne Win is fascinating because he was the gambler, the man who liked racing and he'd turn up at Ascot [horserace track in England] now and then. And then he banned it all for the Burmese.

Martin Morland (Ex-U.K. Ambassador to Burma): Yes, I think he may have got cheated by a bookie at Ascot.

Narrator: Ne Win imposed a silence on Burma. He abolished its lively free press and had a strict censorship control on radio, newspapers, books, and films, isolation one of the most literate societies in Asia. The new rule stated: "Any incorrect ideas and opinions which do not accord with the times are banned." These torn and tattered books in a Rangoon market are the remains of free expression in Burma. Even our filming of them attracted the attention of military intelligence. Of course, rumor has been impossible to ban. Especially when the subject is the dictator himself.

Martin Morland (Ex-U.K. Ambassador to Burma): When his soothsayer warned him that there might be a bloodbath, he would stand in front of a mirror and he would trample on dead meat or something to simulate the blood. And then he would shoot himself in the mirror. Having done that, this would avert the possibility of an assassination.

Narrator: Of all the world's meglamaniacs, perhaps only Ne Win has ruled by astrology and superstition. The best example of this was the day he bankrupted the population. Without warning, he canceled most of Burma's currency, replacing it with banknotes that added up to or included the figure 9. According to his chief astrologer, nine was his lucky number. The Burmese weren't quite so lucky. As most people here keep their savings in cash, most of them were ruined.

Burma was now completely impoverished. People went hungry while their fertile land was given the ignominious status of "least developed country." Desperate for foreign

exchange, the regime forced bankrupt farmers into the fields at gunpoint while Ne Win bought properties in London and Tokyo, and made a fortune in precious stones. The torch paper had been lit. The frustration that had been building for 25 years now exploded as the students took to the streets. It's just after dawn beside Inye Lake in the center of Rangoon.

We're filming this with great care because even at this hour, it's almost certain that we're being watched which is a normal state of affairs for many Burmese. This causeway is known as the white bridge. On March 16, 1988, hundreds of school children and students marched along it, singing the national anthem. Then, as they looked behind them, they saw the steel helmets of army and they knew they were trapped.

According to eyewitnesses, the soldiers beat many of them to death, singling out the girls. Those who escaped were pursued here into the lake where they were caught and drowned, one by one. Of the survivors, 42 were locked in a waiting van and left in the noonday heat where all of them suffocated to death. In the meantime, fire engines were brought here to wash away the blood.

Zaw Gyi (exiled journalist): The government was arresting hundreds of students including the female students. On the way to prison, we were shouting that we were students and not criminals. Around 1am or 2am, they began to torture and beat the students. They came and took them away one by one to torture them. And they never came back.

Kotunu (political exile): I was kept in a cell filled with mosquitoes for the whole night with my hands tied behind my back. They kicked my in my ribs and punched my ears over and over. Then they began to interrogate me. They told me to sit in a half-squatting position and made me face the wall. Then they lit a candle and held it under my scrotum.

Yemin Shain (exiled nurse): We were made to kneel down, then our anuses would be probed with nails. Cold water was dripped onto our heads for hours. The whole body would be beaten so much that in some cases the internal organs, like the lungs, were damaged.

Narrator: Despite the suppression, the people had set up what they called a "Parliament of the Streets." A free press returned with some 40 newspapers and magazines with titles like "Scoop," "New Victory," and "Liberation Daily." Some were printed, others photocopied and handprinted, and most were distributed free. Making a rare appearance on television, Ne Win threatened his people: "If there are more demonstrations, the army will shoot to kill."

Narrator: It's now eight minutes past eight o'clock in the morning. The people of Burma chose this time on the eight day of the eight month in 1988 to begin one of the most remarkable popular uprisings in modern times. The dock workers were the first to go on strike. Then in the days and weeks that followed, it seemed that almost everyone in Burma was showing their defiance and courage at least equal to those who stormed the Berlin Wall.

Martin Morland (Ex-U.K. Ambassador to Burma): The students began it. Then, each group came out, saying, "We represent the doctors." "We represent the lawyers." And they walked through the streets shouting various slogans in which the most common was, "The government - this is our business. The government, this is our business."

Narrator: As tension rose between the people and the regime, Ne Win faced a new opponent whose presence he had not reckoned on. Aung San Suu Kyi, the daughter of the national hero Aung San, returned to her home from England. The leaders of the democracy movement Persuaded her to join the struggle, and at her first appearance in Rangoon, more than half a million people heard her call for the restoration of democracy. The people now had a leader.

Suu Kyi had never been a politician. But now, as the founder of the National League for Democracy she called for elections. She spoke at rallies throughout the country. In one incident, she came close to assassination when troops refused to let her pass, and threatened to shoot her.

Aung San Suu Kyi [speaking at a rally in English]: Whatever problems arise are generally created because a truckload of armed soldiers come along and start waving their guns around. If the [officer in charge] of the local [military garrison] can order his men to shoot down people without any real cause, it means that there is something very wrong with the system.

Soe Naing (Burmese exile): We came to the first barricade, and the soldiers said that if we passed that line, we would be shot. they started shooting and we ran for our lives. One of my friends was shot in the head. He died instantly. Most of the people who died were young. Their mothers, who tried to save them, were also shot and killed. They spared no one. The soldiers shot anyone on the streets not in uniform.

Narrator: Despite the massacres in Rangoon, still the generals feared [the popularity of] Suu Kyi. In July 1989, she was placed under house arrest in her father's home. 3,000 of her party's workers were also arrested. With the opposition weakened, so they thought, the generals called elections for the following year. But they failed to understand the depth of the country's frustration.

Even sections of the army and police, who had not been involved in the killings, supported Suu Kyi. The National League for Democracy won an overwhelming victory, gaining 82% of the parliamentary seats. The generals were stunned, and refused to hand over power. But the people's desire for freedom could not be smothered. The atrocities of 1988 remained a rallying cry.

Unidentified voice [radio interview]: Troops have been shooting people all day. Twice today troops came to the hospital demanding they be given the bodies of the dead and also the wounded. When the doctors and the nurses refused, saying that the patients needed more treatment, the troops opened fire, killing at least four doctors and eight nurses.

Narrator: This is amateur video tape of Rangoon hospital [taken on Sept. 19, 1988]. Having banned foreign television, the regime ordered anyone with a camera to be shot on sight. In defiance of this, there was some courageous reporting. On one tape, the voices of two Burmese cameramen are heard as soldiers prepare to fire at them. "What shall we do?" asked one of them. to which his friend replies, "Keep on filming until they shoot us."

Aye Chan Naing (Burmese exile): There was sort of like a civil war inside the city. And I could hear all the gunfire just sitting in my home. The military troops all over Ranggon, they'd been shooting all of the demonstrators. At one point, they didn't have enough medication to treat these injured people. So doctors, nurses, and medical students decided to appeal to the soldiers to not shoot anymore. And they wrote on a Red Cross banner, "Please stop the shooting." And these soldiers even shot inside Rangoon General Hospital and there were many people killed at that time.

Yemin Shain (exiled nurse): We were protesting in front of the hospital and then the soldiers shot at us.

Narrator: The generals so feared the power of the demonstrators that they moved to dispose of them, dead or alive, in Rangoon cemetery.

Neu (Burmese exile): At least three of them were students. One was still alive and shouting, calling for his mother. He was fully conscious and shouted, "I don't want to be buried alive!" The cemetery workers didn't want to bury the boy alive, but the soldiers forced them. They had no choice.

Narrator: The atrocities even extended to the crematorium where a line of trucks took the dead, and the wounded.

Aye Chan Naing (Burmese exile): In fact, my house is quite close to the crematorium. During that time, I heard that they brought a lot of bodies and that some of the people

were still alive when they were cremated. The crematorium was surrounded by military troops.

Interviewer: So they were burning dead people and people who were not dead?

Aye Chan Naing (Burmese exile): They didn't even identify the bodies, not to mention notify the parents. They just brought everybody they saw lying in the streets [and cremated them].

Narrator: Suu Kyi remained a prisoner for six years. Alone in this house on University Avenue, she was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. Her whispered name would become a byword, and people would pass her house just to be reassured by the sound of her playing her piano. Last year she was finally released, though today she is still denied freedom of movement. As this film goes to air, her husband Micheal and their two sons in England have again been refused permission to visit her. Early one Saturday morning, David Monroe and I went to see her, our cameras concealed from the military intelligence guards who continue to watch her every move.

Interviewer: What were the most difficult times to you personally during your house arrest?

Aung San Suu Kyi: There were times when I was worried for my colleagues. There were times when I worried for our people out there when they seemed to be undergoing a lot of repression. And then I worried about my sons very much because the young one was only twelve [when I left England] and he had to be put into boarding school. So, naturally I worried about these things. But then I would always remind myself that the families of my colleagues were far worse off because those of my colleagues who were put into prison in Burma, their families were also insecure.

Interviewer: Were you able to stay in touch with Michael during that time?

Aung San Suu Kyi: Not throughout that time. There were times when we were out of touch. I think the longest period we were out of touch was two years and four or five months, with no letters or anything getting through during that period of time.

Interviewer: I would try to imagine being you, and surrounded by a hostile force, cut off from your family, your colleagues, comrades, and friends, weren't there times when you were actually terrified?

Aung San Suu Kyi: No, because I didn't feel hostile towards them [the soldiers]. This is what people don't seem to understand. They say that you must have been terrified, but why? I didn't feel hostile towards the guards or the soldiers surrounding me, and I think fear comes out of hostility.

Interviewer: You and your people are at present up against quite uncompromising and brute power. How can you reclaim the democracy that you won at the ballot box with that power confronting you?

Aung San Suu Kyi: I don't think we're the first people who have had to face an uncompromising and brutal power in the quest for freedom and basic human rights. I think we depend chiefly on our own people, on the will of our own people, for democracy.

Interviewer: But it still comes down to, on the one side there is a power that has all the guns.

Aung San Suu Kyi: But increasingly, I think it is getting more difficult in this world to resolve problems through military means. It is no longer acceptable. I do not think the ASEAN countries themselves would accept a military solution to the problem in Burma. And the fact that the authorities themselves are so keen to attacking us in their papers seems to indicate that they also are not depending on guns alone.

Narrator: This is the "death railway" of World War Two. Carved through the Burmese jungle by the Japanese at the cost of 16,000 Allied soldiers lives. For the men who build this railway and survived, believing their horror would never happen again, there is a terrible irony here. During last year's 50th anniversary celebrations of victory over the Japanese, I remember the Burmese being mentioned just once in the television coverage. An ex-serviceman was asked by a reporter, "What about the Burmese?" And he replied that they had vanished when the Japanese invaded.

In fact, more than 100,000 Burmese and other Asian prisoners also died building the "death railway." If the British army in Burma was a forgotten army, then the people over whose land it fought were invisible victims. And that remains true today as history repeats itself. This is the regime's great secret - an extension of the "death railway" linking the towns of Yay and Tavoy. Once again it is being built with slave labor in an area where foreigners are banned. Under the noses of the guards, we filmed it for the first time.

Tamla Too (Burmese man): The Japanese forced us to become slave labor. They were foreigners, but now, it's our own people who force us [to work as slaves]. Some die of fever. Five people died when a hillside was bulldozed. Only parts of the bodies could be found, only the head, and in some cases only a foot. Of the five, only two bodies were recovered before the soldiers bulldozed them away.

Narrator: It has been estimated that over 200,000 people have been forced to build this railway, of whom up to 300 have been killed or have died from disease or

exhaustion. The democracy movement has tried to videotape evidence of this, sometimes with tragic results.

Unidentified Burmese man: I didn't take the guide to the place where we made the video recording. He was just a guide and didn't know what we were doing. I never met his family, but I heard later that his wife was arrested. They'd just got married and had a child. She was tied up and beaten for three days in front of the whole village. On the last day, an army captain cut off both of her hands with a knife.

Daw Angeline: They have been building this railway for three years. And if there are no adults available for work left in the family and no money [for bribes] to get out of the work, the child has to go. The children are too young to know the danger, so they are the ones who die.

Narrator: A report by the American State Department says the Burmese regime routinely used forced labor and that this railway will transport soldiers and supplies into the area where a \$1 billion gas pipeline is being built for the regime by the French oil company Total, which is part owned by the French government, and the American oil company Unical. The children here are being forced to work in temperatures of 35 degrees Centigrade. They carry heavy loads of clay on their heads.

This girl fell back exhausted, holding a disjointed shoulder. This boy is ten-years-old. He has this job because he is small enough to fit in the hole directly beneath the grinder. But as we discovered, it's highly dangerous work. The children are forced to make bricks for the army, who then sell them back to the railway construction company. This load of clay, as heavy as wet cement, almost buried the boy. We stopped filming and quickly pulled him free. The other children would not have had the strength to save him. How many, we wondered, die like this.

Narrator: More than half the national budget of Burma goes on the army, guns, and the means of repression, much of it paid for with foreign exchange. To the generals in Rangoon, tourism provides this money, along with a dubious respectability as foreigners are carefully guided to the country's magnificent, silent monuments. These tourists are unaware, but the local people they meet risk imprisonment if they speak too freely to them. "Our soldiers," says the Minister of Tourism, "are here to protect you."

The British built this guest house around the time that Rudyard Kipling was writing *The Road to Mandalay*. I wonder if he'd recognize the Burma of his dreams today. According to the regime, in the Year of the Tourist, "Roads will be wider, lights will be brighter, grass will be greener, and tours will be cleaner." Pick up a travel brochure these days from any of the famous names, British Airways, Kuoni Worldwide, Orient Express, and you would be pardoned for thinking that the same Ministry of Propaganda supplied the copy.

For example, "To find an unspoilt country today may seem impossible, but Burma is such a place. Indeed, Rangoon means 'end of strife.' It's easy to see why. Its easy-going ways are a tonic to the Western traveler." It's a tonic that doesn't cheap in one of the world's poorest countries. A cruise up the Irrawaddy River to Mandalay will cost you more than £2,000 for just eleven days.

However, there is a Kipling piano bar, and it says here [in the travel brochure], "... on suite cabins that are not just simply luxurious, but include the latest satellite TV, video, and your own personal safe. And in the evenings, gentlemen will feel relaxed in a jacket and tie, and ladies in a dress." What sound advise. And that's not all - there;s a free lecture on Burma's history and culture. But you don't get this in the picture.

These are prisoners restoring the moat of the imperial palace in Mandalay, in preparation for the "Year of the Tourist." The regime says they are criminals in a country where writing a poem or singing a song calling for democracy can get you ten years hard labor. And here is the moat, finished. All it needs is tourists. Brian Whittaker, an Australian lawyer witnessed slave labor when he and his wife Jacqueline flew in to a new tourist airport in the north of Burma.

Brian Whittaker (lawyer): We heard the clinking of chains, and we went outside and noticed about 30 people crushing rocks by hand. One of them raised his prison uniform at the legs to display manacles which were running across his ankles. He then quietly raised his shirt which revealed a chain around his waist. And from my memory, he also had a manacle around his neck. One of the officials informed us that the prisoners were political prisoners. He very explicitly said that they were political prisoners. <

b>Interviewer: The Burmese government has said, when questioned about this by human rights organizations, that this is a traditional, voluntary form of labor.

Brian Whittaker (lawyer): That's rubbish! It was clearly not voluntary. You don't volunteer to crush rocks dressed in threadbare uniforms in the freezing cold with chains all over your body, and standing under guard. I'm familiar with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and I believe that what I observer was a clear breach of the provisions and the articles relating to forcible work and slavery.

Aung San Suu Kyi: Forced labor goes on all over the country. A lot of these projects are aimed at the tourist trade, the tourist industry. They're meant for tourists. Building roads, building bridges. So we do not think that it is a good idea to promote "Visit Myanmar 1996." Which is not to say that tourists should stay away forever from Burma. After all, Burma will always be here. And one day, when it's a democratic Burma, I think it will be a place that tourists will enjoy visiting and need not have any qualms about visiting it.

Narrator: These prisoners are preparing a tourist attraction in Mandalay. The actual road to Mandalay has recently been converted to an expressway. For the local people forced to work on it, it's known as the "road of no return." According to Amnesty International, two workers who tried to escape were executed by soldiers on the spot - one was hacked to death.

Interviewer: Mr. Sherwood, last year your company signed a deal for \$35 million (\$35,000,000) with the Burmese regime. What does that involve?

James Sherwood (Chairman, Orient Express Hotels, Road to Mandalay River Cruise): Well, it's basically an investment in ships and shore facilities for the development of river tourism in Burma.

Interviewer: Did you consider all the implications of Burma's rather appalling record as far as human rights are concerned before you went in with this project?

James Sherwood: Well, I did. And I tried to investigate these allegations about human rights infringements. It's very hard to pin them down. People make these allegations or accusations, and I immediately try to see if there is any prove. I can't find any prove, but I accept that I cannot visit all of Burma. My visits are limited to the principle cities so that's perhaps a "out of sight, out of mind" attitude, so I can't speak any further than my personal knowledge. <

b>Interviewer: Did you make any real attempt, before investing in Burma, to see this other side?

James Sherwood: Well, what I did do was that I contacted the Senior CIA Representative for Burma and had extensive discussions about the truth of all these allegations. And he confirmed to me that they were all untrue, or to the degree that they occurred, they were related to the drug war.

Interviewer: Excuse me, but they're not [just] allegations. You would think that the United Nations, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, even the U.S. State Department says, for instance, that forced labor is routine in Burma. I don't think that these all come into the realm of "allegations." There's a great deal of substance there, surely.

James Sherwood: Well, perhaps you can say so, but I don't have any personal evidence of it.

Interviewer: Did you see the elected leader of the country, Aung San Suu Kyi, when you were there?

James Sherwood: No, I didn't. I think it would be inappropriate or untactful for us to open a dialog with the opposition leader. **Interviewer:** But some would say that the generals you saw were the opposition.

James Sherwood: Well, I believe that the generals are in power.

Narrator: The generals' power is backed by foreign money. One estimate is that once it crushed democracy in 1990, the Burmese regime has drawn 65% of its financial support from oil companies. The main backers are the French company Total and its American partner Unical. The oil pipeline they are building in the south of Burma will allow the generals to sell the country's natural gas to Thailand. The deal will give them an estimated \$400 million (\$400,000,000) a year over 30 years. And the British are back.

Last December, a London Chamber of Commerce seminar was told about the "real visionaries" in the Burmese government. And in the House of Commons, the Foreign Office Minister Jeremy Hanley made this remarkable statement: "Through commercial contacts with democratic nations such as Britain, the Burmese people will gain the experience of democratic principles." Of course, just as the peoples of Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Iran, Indonesia, and all the other modern tyrannies have gained experience of the democratic virtues of British business. If the opposite wasn't true, this would be funny.

We repeatedly asked ministers of the Foreign Office and the Department of Trade in London to be interviewed for this film, but they refused. So did the Burmese Embassy [in London]. We can reveal that one British company that did trade with the Rangoon regime was the arms company, BMARK (British Manufacture and Research Co. Ltd.), a subsidiary of Astra Holdings whose chairman was Gerald James.

Gerald James (Former Chairman of Astra Holdings): It became apparent as we investigated BMARK's affairs after we took it over, that they were running a secret order book and were also conducting other covert operations on behalf of the [British] intelligence community.

Interviewer: What evidence do you have that BMARK did ship arms to Burma?

Gerald James (Former Chairman of Astra Holdings): Well, here you have a list with several countries on them, including Burma. That document emerged when, under great pressure, the receiver was forced by Sir Richard Scott who threatened him with a court order to disclose information to me.

Interviewer: So this, in fact, is a byproduct of the Scott investigation. I see the sales to Burma were in 1990. That was two years after the military regime cracked down there, so arms arriving at that time would have been quite significant.

Gerald James (Former Chairman of Astra Holdings): Yes, I should imagine it would have been very significant.

Interviewer: But the British government has made clear since 1988 that they would not grant licenses for the export of arms to Burma.

Gerald James (Former Chairman of Astra Holdings): Yes, the British government has denied a lot of things, but in the end, they've turned out to be a pack of lies.

Narrator: Like Britain and America, Australia has pursued a double-faced policy. While the government condemned human rights abuses, the former Prime Minister Bob Hawke led a trade mission to Rangoon.

Bob Hawke (Former Australian Prime Minister): We had been uniformly impressed by the competence, knowledge, and commitment of these [Burmese] ministers and their associates to the economic development of Myanmar as a basis of the national and political advancement of the people of their country.

Aung San Suu Kyi: I think if you investigate the situation, you will find that the so-called "open-market economy" that exists [in Burma] at this moment is only open to some and not to everybody.

Narrator: Yes, the other day another Australian politician, Mr. Fisher, said that Burma is heading towards democracy, therefore investment is absolutely justifiable. What do you say to people like that?

Aung San Suu Kyi: Investment is not justifiable now, but I am convince Burma is heading toward democracy because of what the people want and because of what all those who want democracy in Burma are doing, and not because of the investors investing or for any other reason.

Narrator: Japan is another big investor. Playing its part is the Japanese National Broadcasting Company, NHK, which is "proud" of its impartiality. NHK owns some of the only TV film of the killings in 1988. When we asked to purchase this, we got the following reply: "Unfortunately, it is NHK's policy that the footage showing the Burmese army shooting citizens who demonstrated cannot be used by anybody in the world because it's too delicate and might threaten Myanmar's stability. Please erase the material in your library. I appreciate your understanding the situation."

With our film smuggled out, we flew to Thailand and crossed the Burmese border into a liberated area held by the Karen, one of Burma's ethnic peoples who have been fighting for autonomy for more than 40 years. The presence of these undefeated people, enjoying a guarded freedom in their own land, demonstrates that until there is democracy and perhaps a federation of all of Burma's peoples, there will never be peace. When I asked people in Rangoon if 1988 could happen again, if there could be another uprising, I was told this: "Imagine a pedestrian crosswalk.

The traffic seems to never stop for the pedestrians. One or two run across. The majority wait impatiently at the curb. Then they surge across. Until the traffic has lost all its power. We the Burmese people are back at the curb now. Waiting impatiently." In many ways, Burma is typical of poor countries where foreign investment and tourism have become triggers for so-called "development" and economic growth.

What this usually means is that those at the top get rich while the majority end up in sweatshops, and that autocrats and dictators gain a false respectability by embracing the so-called "free market." In Asia, the result of this is a vast, expanding pool of cheap labor from China to Indonesia. And now, with the prospect of Burma undercutting them all.

This is another side of the "Asian economic miracle" that you seldom read about in the business pages. Backed by the power of foreign capital and the power of tourism, it gives a gloss to essentially brutal policies. In other words, it normalizes the unspeakable. This was how the apartheid regime in South Africa lasted for as long as it did. Sanctions, but profits, helped to bring it down.

At the height of their epic struggle in 1988, the people of Burma produced a genuine, popular democracy, then legalized it with an overwhelming vote. For this act of principle and courage, they paid a terrible price. They deserve more than our complicity and silence.