



BURMA LINKS



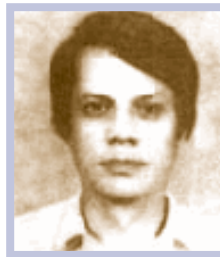
NOVEMBER 2001

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Burmese journalist honoured by Canadian counterparts

The Canadian Journalists for Free Expression (CJFE) has honoured Burmese journalist, Myo Myint Nyein, with their International Press Freedom Award. The Burma Media Association, which nominated him, was extremely pleased with the news released on October 24. Unfortunately, due to his continued imprisonment, Myo Myint Nyein, who has been jailed in Burma since 1990, will not be able to attend the ceremony which takes place in Toronto on November 8.

A contributor to the satirical news magazine *What's Happening to Us*, he was sentenced to seven years for "organizing youths and students to create instability" in the pages of this news magazine. On March 28, 1996, he was sentenced to another seven years for his involvement with another group of



Myo Myint Nyein

journalists in what they called the "Press Freedom Movement". The award by the CJFE recognizes journalists who demonstrate a commitment to freedom of expression and who overcome enormous odds to produce the news. Over 500 leading journalists as well as corporate and NGO representatives will attend the gala event, whose primary aim is to raise funds for CJFE's press freedom activities.

According to recent statements by former political prisoners, detention conditions in Burma have not notably improved since the return of the Interna-

tional Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in 1998. On 1 January 2000, Burma was the country with the most journalists in prison anywhere in the world according to Reporters Sans Frontière's 2000 report. Freedom of speech is still non-existent and, currently 18 journalists are languishing in jail, serving heavy sentences under extremely harsh conditions.

In addition, the regime's drastic censorship still deprives the Burmese people of independent news, as the Press Scrutiny Board checks all texts closely to eliminate words like "democracy" and "corruption". It also forbids the publication of articles about female heads of State, which means that positive references to NLD leader Aung San Suu Kyi are not allowed.

Labour delegation tours Burma

For the first time, in September, a four-member delegation from the International Labour Organization (ILO), a UN agency, was allowed to carry out a full inspection of Burma. Although the ILO has been permitted to carry out missions to Burma in the past, this time, the junta promised, nothing

would be off-limits. But whatever the ILO's four wise men concluded about the state of forced labour in Burma after their recent tour of the country, they are unlikely to announce either full support for the military regime's declarations that the practice will be outlawed or to accuse it of total failure. The consequences of either choice would buck political trends that are now trying to nudge, not threaten, the junta toward reform.

So the ILO team's statement, to be
(cont'd on page 2)

CFOB extends our heartfelt condolences

to the family and friends of Deena Naw, who was tragically slain in Ottawa on September 9.



Nobel Laureates add to pressure on UNOCAL

The University of Virginia has decided to divest over 50,000 shares in stock from the California-based Unocal oil company after protests from students, faculty and seven Nobel Peace Laureates. The Nobel Laureates wrote a letter to the UVA administration supporting the UVA student council's call to divest its Unocal holdings—worth \$1.5 million—on account of the company's complicity with human rights abuses in Burma.

Unocal is a partner in a consortium with Total of France, the Petroleum Authority of Thailand Exploration and Production (PTTET) and the SPDC's Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprises (MOGE), that has been the target of condemnation ever since its project to bring oil to Thailand from the Andaman Sea began a decade ago. The oil company is being sued by 14 villagers who had been living in the vicinity of the pipeline and suffered terrible abuses by the military regime in connection with the project's construction and security. In September 2000, a U.S. federal judge stated that evidence suggested Unocal knew about and benefitted from forced labour on the pipeline project. A quote from Unocal's former president certainly makes this clear.

"I am sure that the military uses conscripted labour for portage. And I — I know that in the early days of the execution of this project, military units in the area of the project were using conscripted labour." (March 28, 2000, John Imle, former president of Unocal)

Earthrights International released a report in May 2000, *Total Denial Continues*, which documents the ongoing situation of human rights abuses in connection with the Yadana and Yetagan pipelines—along with information on the key corporate



Yadana and Yetagan pipelines

secure the pipelines.

In their letter, the Nobel Laureates wrote "While Unocal turns its back on the conditions surrounding its pipeline, its partners, the illegal military junta, are torturing killing, raping and enslaving thousands of people."

In its own defense, Unocal claims it is not liable because it does not directly participate in the abuses. Moreover, the company claims that their operations in Burma have benefitted the country and that the people of Burma want them to stay.

Unocal's tainted reputation is not confined solely to Burma. After intense pressure from women's, human rights groups and the U.S. government, the company in 1998 abandoned plans to build a pipeline in Afghanistan which would have provided the Taliban \$100 million annually. In response to the September 11 bombings in the United States, Unocal donated \$100,000 to the victims and their survivors. This move diverted attention from their past involvement with the Taliban. But it's too late for Unocal to wipe the Burmese blood off their hands. Intense international pressure must be exerted to put a stop their continued collusion with Burma's brutal military regime.

players, Total, Unocal and Premium Oil (UK). The report reveals that all three companies have been aware of the suffering the military regime is inflicting on the people of Burma to

Labour (cont'd on page 2)

presented to the Governing Council's meeting in mid-November, will probably hedge. It will condemn the continued existence of forced labour but not strongly enough to trigger another directive to ILO members to take national action such as sanctions against the regime. Nor can it afford to ignore the evidence of coverups by the generals and their henchmen — particularly in ethnic areas where for decades civilians have been forced into portering and growing crops for the army battalions stationed among them. In at least one case these coverups extended to murder. Seven Shan villagers, who complained to the SPDC Eastern Command that forced labour was actually increasing despite General Khin Nyunt's May dictum that it had been outlawed, were arrested, interrogated and

then disappeared. Their bodies were found later in a river. Both Asia Watch and Amnesty International warn that whatever advances may be claimed, forced labour is still persistent in the country.

But recent statements by the UN Agencies and the European Union indicate that at least some western leaders may be ready to overlook such crimes in favour of staged cooperation. In August, nine UN humanitarian agencies in Burma called for increased aid to the country. The EU renewed its sanctions policy while announcing that in the future Burmese representatives would be welcome at EU-ASEAN meetings. The ILO's distinguished investigators will most likely be careful to continue this carrot-and-stick progress along a very treacherous path.

Burma activists cross Canada

Two human rights activists from Burma visited Canada last summer on a whirl-wind cross-country tour that stopped in Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton, Toronto, Montreal and Ottawa. Charm Tong of the Shan Women's Action Network (SWAN) and Minn Mone of the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP) came from the Thai-Burma border to attend the Canadian Human Rights Foundation yearly human rights course. But before starting their training, CFOB arranged the tour for the activists to meet with Canadian organizations working on issues related to their work in Thailand and to develop relationships with them.

Due to the brutal repression of Burma's military regime, many Burmese have had to flee to neighbouring countries such as Thailand, India, and Bangladesh. While often struggling for basic survival as refugees, many of them have nevertheless formed a myriad of civil society organizations dealing with women,

youth, ethnic, political, health, labour and other issues. In Canada, the two Burma activists met with a host of organizations that, under "normal" circumstances, they would not have had the chance to meet.

In addition, along the tour, the two activists met with fellow Burma activists in Canada at public events and gatherings that were organized by solidarity groups in each city. At these events, audiences were inspired by Charm Tong and Minn Mone, who spoke of the situation in Burma, their important work and personal experience. Burma supporters in all of the cities helped to organize and transport the two Burmese activists to meetings and events, helped with interpretation, hosted them at their homes, and, overall, made them feel well at home.



Toronto audience listens attentively to Burma activists on tour

Some success— but still lots of shame

At least 2 Canadian and 23 American companies cut their business ties to Burma over the past year. In Canada, Reitmans and Wal-Mart Canada caved to pressure, and, in the United States, companies such as Sara Lee's Hanes, Costco, TJ Maxx, Fila, IKEA, Perry Ellis, and Pottery Barn did the right thing.

Yet imports from Burma into Canada are still on the increase. Figures released by Canada's Trade Commissioner Service show imports from Burma were up by more than 65% in the first quarter of 2001. Clothing imports surpassed other products at \$13.367 million—up by 57% over the same period last year—while the value of fish, prawns and seafood imports reached \$4.15 million—an increase of 177%. Despite removal of the preferential trade tariff in 1997, imports to Canada have more than tripled in the past four years. Last year's import value of \$ 60.794 million was more than double the value of the previous year.

While the United States imposed sanctions on all new investment in Burma in 1997, this did not discourage major American corporations from importing hundreds of millions of dollars worth of goods from Burma. Some of these include Ames, Haband, and the single biggest clothing dealer in the country, Federated Department Stores—owner of Bloomingdale's, Macy's and Burdines.

Most of Burma's apparel factories are still wholly or partially owned by the military regime and most products currently imported from Burma come from sectors that have been tainted by forced labour — i.e. the apparel, fish, shrimp and teak wood industries.

If you see products "made in Myanmar", please notify CFOB immediately. We need your help to end this shameful business.

NEW feature!

BURMA+PLUS

News highlights between newsletters will soon be available at Burma Links Online (.PDF)— see Page 9, for late-breaking updates, at the CFOB website: www.cfob.org

Without the committed support of the Burma solidarity groups and individuals in the five cities we visited, the tour could not have been a success. Please accept CFOB's thanks for all your help and cooperation!

HIV/AIDS IN BURMA

A meeting was held in Burma by the World Health Organization in September to discuss the situation of HIV/AIDS in Asia. Dr. Chris Beyrer, a long-time researcher of the disease in Burma, said that the rate of infection there has reached dire proportions. He presented a study in 1999 suggesting that 687,000 adults in Burma were living with the disease that same year—or nearly 3.5 percent of the population, a rate worse than any other nation in Asia except Cambodia where about 4 percent are infected. The country's health minister, Maj. Gen. Ket Sein, continues to deny that HIV/AIDS is serious problem in Burma, insinuating that it's a Western media fabrication to harm the dictatorship's image. Beyrer told a UN conference in June that Burma's military authorities regularly falsify statistics to hide evidence that the disease has reached epidemic proportions.

SECRET TALKS PROGRESS SLOWLY

Recently, there has not been much new information about the status of the secret talks which began a year ago between Aung San Suu Kyi and the SPDC. The UN Special Envoy, Razali Ismail, who has played a significant role in the talks, last visited Burma in September. He stated that he was hopeful of progress but did not reveal much more, "I can only say that I'm satisfied. I should not say anything more as negotiations are still under way". While in Burma, Razali also spoke with leaders of Burma's ethnic minorities. In radio interviews at the time of the visit, two of these leaders, Khun Tun Oo, head of the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy and Dr. Saw Mya Aung, leader of the Arakan League for Democracy, declared their ongoing faith in Aung San Suu Kyi.

According to Dr. Saw Mya Aung, the ethnic peoples know what they want from the talks since they have already discussed the issue of political reconciliation amongst themselves and with Aung San Suu Kyi. According to Khun Tun Oo, the two-way talk—between Aung San Suu Kyi and the junta—is important before beginning the tripartite dialogue. But when the time is right, tripartite talks are necessary because Daw Suu or the SPDC alone cannot solve the problem of ethnic reconciliation in Burma.

Since January, the junta has freed nearly 160 political prisoners—including over 30 NLD elected MPs—and has allowed some NLD offices to re-open. However, Amnesty International estimates there are still over 1,500 political prisoners in Burma.

SEPTEMBER 11 AND BURMA

Whatever the effects of the Taliban's ban last year on opium production, the present air attacks and warfare in that country can only encourage poppy production in the famed Golden Triangle of Burma, Laos and Thailand. New routes are opening up through Cambodia and along the Mekong River according to the United Nations Drug Control Program.

In late years, Afghanistan replaced Burma as the source of

most of the world's illegal opium and heroin. It was thought to be exporting more than 70 percent of the drug. When the Taliban outlawed production last year Burma watchers braced for renewed activity along traditional export routes from Shan State and northern Thailand. Now, since the US-led retaliation against the Taliban, Burmese opium prices have fallen, perhaps in anticipation of renewed Afghan supplies if the production ban can no longer be enforced.

But a bumper harvest is expected in Burma's poppy fields because of excellent growing conditions and the renewed presence of the United Wa State Army (UWSA), an enthusiastic grower and trader of opium. The UWSA has displaced the Shan State Army and its firm opposition to opium and heroin production.

THE PORTRAIT

(Reprinted from ABD News, 01/10/01)

for Daw Aung San Suu Kyi

*Cut through the canvas, my face.
See the country writhing behind me.*

*Barbed wire garlands the old house
like a giant's crown.*

*The woman behind the gate
wears yellow flowers in her hair.*

*Twisted around her throat
and ankles and wrists*

*are the ropes of voices, the braided
red commandments of the dead.*

*At night alone in the old house
she understands everything*

*was inevitable, step after step
into the dumb mouths of the guns*

*into the dumb mouths of the guns
into the room of slit-eye and boot
then beyond, into the future's country.*

*You will see her, years later, in portrait:
a small, exhausted woman, sitting upright*

*(she never lets her back
touch the back of her chair)*

*her beauty, grown keen as her bones,
whetted, the tongue of a knife.*

*She holds the blade in her hand, hilt forward.
Yes: she is offering you the weapon.*

by Karen Connelly

BURMA ACTION

To make “Burma Action” most effective, we need your help.
Please contact us with activity ideas and event information in advance of
our next publication.

Promotion of Burma Tourism—is it on the rise in Canada? Two recent examples:

The Queen’s University Alumni Association has organized a package tour—called “Lost Kingdoms”—for February 2002 that includes Burma in its itinerary. This promotion is particularly disappointing coming from a University association, but especially Queen’s, which awarded an honorary degree to Aung San Suu Kyi in 1995.

Perhaps Queen’s has forgotten that the Nobel Laureate they lauded six years ago has repeatedly requested tourists not to visit her country at this time because of the support and legitimacy it provides to the country’s illegal military junta. The American dollars that tourists—and investors in tourist infrastructure—pump into the military regime’s coffers help to keep the junta in power.

Perhaps Queen’s has not heard about the evidence to the International Labour Organization (ILO) which estimates that hundreds of thousands of men, women and children are forced to labour on construction projects, including those linked to tourism, each year. Some well-known examples of tourism-related projects built by forced labour are the Mandalay airport and the moat at the Mandalay palace, but there is an enormity of lesser-known examples.

Leisureways, Sept/Oct. edition, produced by the Canadian Automobile Association (CAA), makes Burma seem like a mysterious, enchanted Shangri-la—which it can be for foreigners who wear rose-coloured glasses. It is very disheartening to see a Canadian association promote leisure time literally on the backs of the people of Burma, who are forced to build the hotels, airports and pagodas that serve the tourists. In November 2000, the ILO issued an unprecedented call for governments, businesses and unions to review their relations with Burma — to ensure that they in no way foster forced labour there. The tourism industry, like all other industries in Burma, has a responsibility to respond to this request.

What you can do:

- **Write to the Director of Alumni Affairs** at Queen’s University demanding they remove the Burma segment of their package tour, and publicize why they have taken this move. Copy your letter to the associated tour company promoting the package—Conference World Tours.
- **Write to the CAA** urging them to stop all tourist packages and promotion to Burma until democracy is restored. Again, urge them to publicize their actions.
- **Contact local bookstores** that carry Burma Lonely Planet guides and urge them to stop carrying the guide until Burma’s democracy movement calls for an end to the tourism boycott. (see Burma Campaign UK’s website for more information on the “Lonely Planet Boycott” at www.burmacampaign.org.uk)

• Please send a copy of all letters
to Canadian Friends of Burma!

For sample letters,
see CFOB’s website:
www.cfob.org/campaigns/tourism

ADDRESSES:

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Also send a copy to:
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Toronto, ON M2P 2A8
Tel: 1-800-387-1488
email: Conference@vision2000.ca

Canadian Automobile Association
Tel: 1-800-268-3750
email: caatravel@central.on.caa.ca

Don't dam the Salween

Canadian dam-builders, along with the Asia Development Bank, are most likely eyeing construction of the tallest hydroelectric dam in Southeast Asia, planned to be built soon in southern Shan State on the Upper Salween river. Thailand's electricity generating authority GMS Power needs partnership funding of at least US\$3 billion for the Ta Sang project. Japan's Electric Power Development Corporation (EPDC) is a contender. But people close to the project say EPDC is only one of eight or nine strong applicants now bidding to carry out the final detailed design stage of the dam.

The dam's reservoir will submerge hundreds of square kilometres of forests used for food and fuel by villagers. It will also dam up tons of river nutrients that now sustain the rich fisheries in the Salween estuary near Moulmein.

Burmese military battalions were required to make the Salween site safe for a feasibility study — which has not yet been made public. Villagers were forcibly re-located and forced labour on the site has been documented.

The 6,400 megawatt Ta Sang will also be one of the five biggest dams in the world. Its reservoir will cover at least 530 square kilometers. Two-thirds of the power it produces will be sold to Thailand, providing hard currency to the Burmese military regime. The installation will be too far from major Burmese cities to help them with power shortages.

The US\$3 billion cost of construction does not include money for an environmental impact study. So far there are no details about how and when this will happen. Expected environmental effects include increased risk of earthquakes in the area, because of the weight of the huge reservoir, die-back of valuable mangrove forests, higher incidence of water-borne diseases, destruction of fisheries and of other food supplies.

Mae Sot Garden School—a light for Burmese children

By Vivienne Galanis

On May 14, 2001, a school for children of illegal workers in Mae Sot was established by Burmese-Canadian, Cho Cho Pyone, a member of the Canadian Women's Group in Thailand, and her husband Donald Aung.

The school, which aims to educate the children who can



Students at Mae Sot Garden School

not attend Thai schools, is open to children of all ethnic and religious backgrounds. Free tuition, lunch, books, and transportation are provided as well as free health assistance and nutritional information.

An urgent need exists for native English-speaking teachers who could volunteer their skills for at least one semester— food and accommodation would be provided.

Contact Cho Cho Pyone at: aung@ksc.th.com or by fax at: (662) 286-2196

Canadian Burma watchers are needed to keep an eye on the development of this project, including the possible China and corporate connections. Contact CFOB for more information.

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Ottawa Burma activists demonstrated on 8-8-88 in front of the Burmese embassy and later in the day, about 40 people—including Burmese student activists who came all the way from Toronto—took part in a vigil at the Human Rights Monument. The event was endorsed by CFOB, the BSDO, the Chin Human Rights Organization, Mining-Watch Canada, Alternatives, and the Canadian Union of Postal Workers.

In Ottawa, the Canadian Union of Postal Workers delivered more than 11,000 postcards from Canadians to the Burmese embassy in July. The postcards called on SPDC Chairman to release student leader Min Ko Naing and other political prisoners. Attempts by activists to personally deliver the cards last March were quashed by the embassy.

In September, Ottawa Burmese community members set up a volunteer support group to help their peers have better access to social services provided in the city, such as interpretation, counselling, legal aid, women's shelters, etc. CFOB will assist the group by providing office space, supplies, and guidance when needed.

In Toronto, BSDO members held an 8-8-88 memorial at the Burmese Buddhist monastery. The participants offered food and donations to the monks and prayed for those who gave their lives to the movement.

Toronto Burma activists also issued a statement condemning the inclusion of Burma in the ASEAN Economic Road Show held on Oct. 2–5.

Edmonton: To commemorate the UN's International Day in Support of Victims of Torture in June, Rachel Bocock spoke on behalf of BWI at a joint gathering of human rights NGO's. And, on August 9, BWI held an evening to commemorate 8-8-88: Dr. Virginia Cawagas gave a speech on "people power"; Dr. Alice Khin presented a slide show on Burma; Prem Kalia and Rev. Bruce Miller led an interfaith prayer and candle light ceremony. BWI also took part in a Unity Festival in September which brought together many activist groups in the Edmonton area.

The **East Kootenay** Friends of Burma will continue to support the Burma student postcard campaign by distributing cards in Cranbrook coffee shops. The group recently published an article about Min Ko Naing in the local Cranbrook newspaper. Also, the group will again participate in Amnesty International's annual fall fund-raiser. The funds will likely be used to help Burmese refugees that the group has recently sponsored—to pay off their air plane debts to the Canadian government.

Vancouver: In addition to Burma Courier, another publication has sprung out of Van-

cover. The first edition of the "All Burma Democratic News" (ABD) was issued in Sept, providing coverage of local, regional, and international news. Editor, Soe Kyaw Thu, stated that the intent of the publication is to "...revive the '88 spirit among the Burma exiles who have come to Canada and to instill it in those who did not participate." ABD news is currently looking for correspondents in Calgary, Edmonton, Saskatoon, Winnipeg and in the lower mainland area of BC to provide local coverage of Burma events. To contact, ABD News, see bottom of page 6.

The **Vancouver Burma Roundtable** also participated in the UN International Day in Support of Victims of Torture—displaying information about the situation in Burma. To remember 8-8-88, activists held a demonstration in front of Ivanhoe Mine's headquarters, denouncing the company's complicity with human rights abuses in Burma. The event was a joint effort of BSDO, the Canadian Karen Community, the Mon Community of Canada, and the Roundtable. "Our numbers weren't large, but we raised our voices loud enough to be heard by Ivanhoe staff on the 9th floor of the office tower. Sadly, nobody waved in response!" exclaimed, Eric Snider, editor of Burma Courier.

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HAIR TODAY,

GONE TOMORROW: The complete lack of freedom of expression in Burma is exemplified by the junta's extreme "hair control" laws for public performers. In the 1970s, scissors-wielding police often ambushed and forcibly trimmed long-haired youths. But tolerance increased by 1990, when Zaw Win Htut, one of the country's most popular rock stars, was banned from public performances because of his long hair. After several years, he finally gave in and cut his locks. But when he began to keep his head clean-shaven, after a brief time as an apprentice monk, the military soon banned bald people from public performance. Still, hair is not the biggest casualty of the junta's censorship—it's ideas. "I don't even think about the censorship anymore", Zaw Win Htut recently stated. "For me, it is all about the music and not the lyrics."

THE NEW ONLINE BURMA

LIBRARY (OBL), a database of links to thousands of documents on Burma, is located at www.burmalibrary.org. An evolving project, OBL makes these documents available in text-based format to ensure speedy access. The library functions as a linked catalogue to much of the Burma material already on the Internet and will eventually house a number of archives and directories. As they become available, more links to documents in Burmese and other languages will be included. OBL is still at an early stage of development and the Librarian invites on-going feedback. Send comments to: darnott@iprolink.ch

NE WIN DIES AGAIN: News in October that Burma's former dictator had passed away, once again turned out to be false—although it is fairly certain that the former tyrant is on his last legs. The news spread after his recent visit to a Singapore hospital. While Ne Win remains alive, rumours of his death have come and gone recurrently over the past decade.

IVANHOE & SPDC ARE ONE: In August, Burma's military regime posted on their website a statement by Ivanhoe Mines referring to sanctions as "a form of war". The statement declares that the company will not "become a casualty of external political confrontation that has no certain outcome". An Ivanhoe spokesperson said the statement had been issued at the time of the company's annual meeting in Vancouver in June. One wonders that if sanctions are "a form of war", what is "partnering and supporting an illegal military regime and its human rights abuses"?

EAST TIMOR'S independence leader Xanana Gusmao declared in June the country's solidarity with Burma's democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi. "Not many people know that Aung San Suu Kyi has worked hard for democracy and has forged solidarity links with the East Timorese people. Because of that, it is my responsibility to reciprocate that solidarity and thank and encourage her on her continuing struggle," he stated. Xanana also inaugurated a "Friends of Burma" solidarity group, led by his wife, Kirsty. What a great name for a Burma group!

AUSTRALIA—A "DOWNER" for Burma: Despite the junta's continued human rights abuses, the Australian government has sent a new team of aid workers to Burma, which Foreign Minister Alexander Downer claims is to eradicate malnutrition among children of that country. However, many Burma observers would question how that's possible without democratic change. Perhaps Downer has forgotten that it was under Burma's military regime, that the country went from being "the ricebowl of Asia" to one of the poorest countries in the world—despite its abundant natural resources. "Sometimes we are a little concerned that the policies of the Australian Government may not be such that would hasten the process of democratization in Burma," Daw Suu announced in a video smuggled out of Burma in 1999.

TRADE UNIONS IN AUSTRALIA, despite their government's soft stance, are holding firm on Burma. The national Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) succeeded in pressuring 18 Australian companies to pull out of Burma last August after writing to more than 50 companies earlier this year. Unfortunately many companies, mainly in the tourism industry, did not respond and continue to deal with Burma.

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