

## A Comparative Study of Administrative System of Myanmar (1923-1942)

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### Abstract

This paper deals with the administration of Myanmar during the period of (1923-1942) that consisted of Dyarchy Administration and 91 Departments Administration. After the majority of the people of Myanmar had protested the Craddock Scheme, the British had to grant the Dyarchy to Myanmar by the Government of Burma Act 1921. Dyarchy means the government by two independent authorities, the officialdom and the people and it goes without saying that the people has only a minor share in the determining of policy. This change in the administration is only a small change. The importance of the change is not the change in itself but opening of the way for bigger changes these are to follow. Thus, in 1937, the new administration was introduced in Myanmar by the Government of Burma Act 1935. It was the administration aiming at the grant of more administrative powers to the Myanmar national races. As the people's representatives could administer the 91 Departments, it was called "91 Departments Administration." But the 91 Departments Administration in essence was no more than the Dyarchy Administration.

**Key words:** Change of Administration.

### Introduction

After the first Anglo-Myanmar war, Rakhine and Tanintharyi territories were annexed by the British according to the Yandapo Treaty.<sup>1</sup> In 1852, the second Anglo-Myanmar War broke out. After the Second Anglo-Myanmar War Mottama and Bago were annexed by the British.<sup>2</sup> Thus the Lower Myanmar had fallen into the hands of the British. In 1885, the third Anglo-Myanmar War broke out. After the third Anglo-Myanmar War, the British government announced officially the annexation of the whole of Myanmar into the British Empire on 1 January 1886.<sup>3</sup> Since that time, Myanmar became a part of India and it was placed under the direct administration of the Governor General of India. Sir Charles Bernard became the Chief Commissioner for the whole of Myanmar.<sup>4</sup> From 1886 to 1897 was called the administration of the Chief Commissioner (or) the beginning of the colonial period.<sup>5</sup>

The transformation began in Myanmar in 1897 with the promotion of the Chief Commissioner to the rank of Lieutenant Governor. On 9 April, 1897, the Indian Governor General designated Myanmar as a province of India.<sup>6</sup>

On 17 December 1918, an administrative scheme was announced for Myanmar. It was drawn by Sir Reginald Craddock, the Lieutenant Governor. So it was called "Craddock

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<sup>1</sup> U Myint Thein, *Pyauung-Lae-Lar thaw Myanmar Naing-gan Oke-Choke Pone Sanit. A-myo-myo* (Changes in the Administrative Systems of Myanmar), Yangon, Ingyin Oo Press, First Printing, 2006, p.15 (Henceforth: Myint Thein, 2006)

<sup>2</sup> Myint Thein, 2006, 20

<sup>3</sup> Mya Sein, *Administration of Burma, Rangoon*, Zabu Meitswe Pitaka Press, 1939, p.125

<sup>4</sup> U Mya Han, *"Kolonhi Khit Myanmar Thamaing Abidan"* (The Dictionary of the History of Myanmar During the Colonial Period), Yangon, Yonkyichat Sarpay, Fourth Printing 2010, p.291 (Henceforth: Mya Han, 2010)

<sup>5</sup> Sagaing Hantin, *"Myanmar Naingngandaw Hmattan"* (Record of Myanmar), Three Volumes, Yangon, Pyithu Arnar Book Stall, 2012, p.59 (Henceforth: Han Tin, 2012)

<sup>6</sup> D.G.E Hall, *Burma*, London, Hutchinson House, Second Impression, 1950, p.138 (Henceforth: Hall, 1950)

Scheme".<sup>7</sup> By this scheme, four boards were formed and a chairman was appointed by the Lieutenant Governor to administer these four boards. By this scheme, arrangement was made that the representatives of the Legislative Council must be officials, not elected by the people. A Legislative Council was formed to give advice to the Lieutenant Governor. It was composed of nine members, out of whom five persons were Englishmen.<sup>8</sup> The chairman of the Legislative Council was the Lieutenant Governor. The members were entitled to discuss the issues of finance and administration but they had no other authority.<sup>9</sup> The Legislative Council was not to be consulted or could not give any advice.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, it was the sole responsibility of the Lieutenant Governor. The Legislative Council was just the body which was to confirm the arrangements of the government officials and Lieutenant Governor.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, the majority of the people protested the scheme. So the British government gave Dyarchy administration.<sup>12</sup>

In 1923, a new political structure was created. So, Myanmar became a province administered by Governor.<sup>13</sup> By the Government of Burma Act 1921, the British government granted the Dyarchy administration to Myanmar. Yet, the Shan States, the hilly regions of Chin and Kachin were excluded from that administration. There were five reserved areas of frontier regions which were put under the direct control of the Governor. Mr. Lionel Curtis was the first initiator who introduced the administration of Dyarchy system into Myanmar.<sup>14</sup> The Dyarchy Administration was meant that the joint administration between the Governor, representative of the British Government, and People's representatives. It started from 2 January 1923 and ended on 31 March 1937.<sup>15</sup>

The Dyarchy was the result of Montagu Chelmsford proposals. The Mont-Ford report suggested "A Rule of Two" or "Dyarchy" and that proposal was applied in Indian provinces in 1921. At first Myanmar was left behind considering it still unfit for this little improvement even. But after two years struggle, Myanmar got it with some modifications.<sup>16</sup> The first tenure of joint government, started on 2 January 1923, was formed the following persons;

- (1) Sir Willian Keith (Revenue and Finance).
- (2) U Khin (Local Administration)
- (3) Sir J.A. Maung Gyi (Forest)
- (4) M.A Maung Gyi (Education)<sup>17</sup>

The following persons consisted of the second tenure of joint government during Dyarchy period;

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<sup>7</sup> John F. Cady, *A History of Modern Burma*, Newyork, Cornell University Press, 1960, p.203 (Henceforth: Cady, 1960)

<sup>8</sup> Hall, 1950, 147

<sup>9</sup> Myint Thein, 2006, 29

<sup>10</sup> Han Tin, 2012, 60

<sup>11</sup> Cady, 1960, 203

<sup>12</sup> Mya Han, 2010, 22

<sup>13</sup> Han Tin, 2012, 59

<sup>14</sup> Myint Thein, 2006, 32

<sup>15</sup> Bhamaw Tin Aung, *"Koloni Khit Myanmar Naingan Thamaing"* (History of Myanmar under Colonial Period), Yangon, Pyithu Alin Sarpay, 1964, p.86 (Henceforth: Tin Aung, 1964)

<sup>16</sup> Than Tun, *A Modern History of Myanmar (1752-1948)*, Yangon, Monywa Sarpay, 2010, p.141 (Henceforth: Than Tun, 2010)

<sup>17</sup> Mya Han, 2010, 202

- (1) Sir Willian Keith (Revenue and Finance)
- (2) U May Aung (Local Administration)
- (3) Sir Llewellyn (Forest)
- (4) Dr. Ba Yin (Education)

The third tenure was made up of these persons;

- (1) Samuel Andrew Avery (Revenue and Finance)
- (2) Sir. J.A Maung Gyi (Local Administration)
- (3) Sir Llewellyn (Forest)
- (4) U Ba Tin (Education)

The following persons incorporated the fourth tenure of joint government;

- (1) Mr. Cooper (Revenue and Finance)
- (2) Sir Maung Ba (Local Administration)
- (3) Sir J.A Maung Gyi (Forest)
- (4) U Kyaw Din (Education)

The fifth joint government was composed of the following persons;

- (1) Mr. Cooper (Revenue and Finance)
- (2) Sir Maung Ba (Local Administration)
- (3) U Ba Pe (Forest)
- (4) Dr. Ba Maw (Education)<sup>18</sup>

With the start of that administration Myanmar was administered by the Governor. Under the Governor, there was Legislative Council with 103 members and Executive Council with four members.<sup>19</sup> Of 103 members of the Legislative Council twenty two were nominated members,<sup>20</sup> two executive council ministers of the Governor, and seventy nine people's representatives were elected by votes. Among the seventy nine, peoples representatives included fifty eight Burmans, five Kayins, eight members of Indian representative, one member of Rangoon University representative, one member of European representative, one member of Anglo-Myanmar, one member of European Grocery Shop Association, one member of Chinese Mercantile Association, two members of European Chamber of Commerce and one member of Burman Trading Corporation.<sup>21</sup>

In Dyarchy, the system had been exercised in election that the electoral circles were fixed with population or special regions. The right to vote was the system of family unit. All adults both male or female who is not less than 18 years of age could vote in the election.<sup>22</sup>

According to Dyarchy Administration the present Lieutenant Governor was promoted to the Governor. The first Governor of Burma was Sir Harcourt Butler (1923-37). The position of Governor was appointed with the consultation made by the Emperor of England with the Governor General of India. The Governor ruled on behalf of the Governor General of India, who had to rule on behalf of the Emperor of England. The term or tenure of the Governor's rule was five years. The Legislative Council was under the Governor of Burma. Above that council was also organized the Executive Council which comprised two ministers selected by the Legislative Council and two ministers out of the governor-appointed officers, who ruled the special Departments (Hone Affairs and Finance Department) to be dealt with by the Governor himself, and the two ministers selected by the Legislative Council ruled the departments transferred by the Myanmar Legislative Council. But all the plans of the Legislative Council

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<sup>18</sup> Mya, Han, 2010, 202-203

<sup>19</sup> Tin Aung, 1964, 86

<sup>20</sup> Hall, 1950, 150

<sup>21</sup> Mya Han, 2010, 199

<sup>22</sup> Myint Thein, 2006, 33

and the Executive Council could be confirmed only with the approval of the Governor, or be cancelled by the Veto if the Governor did not approve it.<sup>23</sup>

According to that Dyarchy, Government's functions were divided into two groups, one of real importance and another of lesser importance. Technically the first or the really important group was called "the Reserved Subjects" and the second was called "the Transferred Subjects".<sup>24</sup> The Reserved Subjects were,

- (1) Law and order
- (2) Revenue and Finance
- (3) Irrigation and
- (4) Major bureaucracy in charge of general administration

The Transferred subjects were,

- (1) Local Government
- (2) Education
- (3) Public Health
- (4) Agriculture
- (5) Excise
- (6) Public Works and
- (7) Forest

Two members who controlled the Reserved Subjects were only responsible to the Governor. Two Myanmar members of the Transferred Subjects were responsible to the Legislative Council. Members of the Reserved Subjects controlled the finance and had had the first claim on it for their own departments. So, members of the Transferred Subjects found it impossible to do large scale reforms involving heavy expenditure on education and public health, which were of vital importance in building a nation.<sup>25</sup>

Since 1923, Myanmar was put under the Diarchy administration, but in 1937, new administration was introduced in Myanmar by the Government of Burma Act 1935. It was the new administration aiming at the grant of more administrative powers to the Myanmar national races.<sup>26</sup> As the people's representatives could administer the 91 Departments, it was called "91 Departments Administration".

On 1 April 1937, the British Government started 91 Departments Administration in Myanmar.<sup>27</sup> Thereby the Dyarchy Administration came to an end in Myanmar. In the Dyarchy period, Myanmar was ceased to be a province of the India's Empire, and with that Myanmar had been come to a country under the direct rule of the British Government.

In the structure of 91 Departments Administration, there were one British Governor, the Chamber of Parliament and the Cabinet. There were two chambers of Parliament, a Senate and a House of Representatives. The Senate had thirty six members of whom half were elected and half nominated and it could be always overridden by the Lower house. The House of Representatives had (one hundred and thirty two members) 132 members who were all to be who were all to be elected. The Cabinet had six to nine ministers appointed by the Governor.<sup>28</sup> To help the Governors there were three consultant ministers. One consultant finance minister and one Attorney General were directly appointed by the Governor's will. The consultants had

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<sup>23</sup> Mya Han, 2010, 201

<sup>24</sup> Than Tun, 2010, 141

<sup>25</sup> Than Tun, 2010, 142

<sup>26</sup> Mya Han, 2010, 46

<sup>27</sup> Tin Aung, 1964, 86

<sup>28</sup> Than Tun, 2010, 145-146

the right to discuss at both Chambers of Parliament and committees. But he had no right to vote.<sup>29</sup>

According to 91 Departments Administration in the Parliament of Myanmar there were Senate and House of Representatives. Except the excluding hilly tracts, 132 members of Parliament elected for the House of Representatives were as follows:

**Members of Parliament elected for the House of Representatives and Ethnic Group Numbers<sup>30</sup>**

Myanmar Representative	91
Kayin Representative	12
Indian Representative	8
Anglo-Myanmar Representative	2
European Representative	3
Indian Workers Representative	2
Myanmar Workers Representative	2
Myanmar Traders Association Representative	1
Indian Traders Association Representative	2
Chattiya Association Representative	1
European Traders Association of Myanmar Representative	5
European Trading Association of Yangon Representative	1
Chinese Traders Association Representative	1
Yangon University Representative	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>132</b>

Like the Dyarchy Administration, in the 91 Departments Administration, important departments were put under the control of the Governor. The people representatives had no authority to deal with the important issues. The Governor controlled the important departments and he had the veto power to annul the resolutions of both Chambers. Moreover, he could dismantle the People's Parliament and Cabinet. He could dismantle the People's Parliament and Cabinet could issue emergency acts and he could issue emergency acts and he could administer the country by his own will.<sup>31</sup> Therefore, Senate and House of Representatives were just for show and the real power was in his hand. In reality, the Governor was the person who represented the British government or who obeyed the order of the British government. The power was not in the hands of Myanmar people, but in the hands of British government and British Parliament.

**Conclusion**

To sum up, in 1923, the administration of dyarchy system was introduced in Myanmar. According to the divide and rule policy of the British, the dyarchy did not concern with the frontier areas. These areas were fixed as the Reserved Areas and remained under the control of Governor. The dyarchy was the new administration aiming at the grant of more administrative powers to the Myanmar rational races. But the people's representatives were only experienced in administration, they had no political authority for the dyarchy. During that time, the administration that the people of Myanmar would like was Home Rule or Autonomy. The dyarchy can be regarded as the attempt to delay the autonomy to [Myanmar. Administration of](#)

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<sup>29</sup> Myint Thein, 2006, 39-40

<sup>30</sup> Mya Han, 2010, 46

<sup>31</sup> Mya Han, 2010, 47

Myanmar (1923-1942) that consisted of Dyarchy Administration and 91 Departments Administration. But the 91 Departments Administration in essence was no more than the Dyarchy Administration. Hilly tracts such as Shan, Kachin, Chin and Karenni, also known as the Excluded Areas, and other areas were still divided and so, it can be called the "Super Dyarchy Administration". The 91 Departments Administration was not advantageous to the nation and nationalities except it gave ministerial positions to the political leaders. It only gave the administrative experiences and procedures. It can be regarded as the attempt to delay the autonomy for Myanmar.

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