

A House Divided

jeudi 23 octobre 2008, par [Kyaw Zwa Moe](#) (Date de rédaction antérieure : 17 octobre 2008).

Now the issue isn't just about Burma's oppressive military regime. Or, the stand off between the junta and the opposition. It's now about the internal politics of the country's most popular opposition party founded by Aung San Suu Kyi.

The resignation of 109 youth members of the main opposition National League for Democracy is one of the most significant events since the formation of the party in 1988.

It throws into question the democratic workings of the party itself and further weakens the image of the party's aging leadership.

The resignation came after younger members' publicly voiced complaints that they aren't allowed to participate in decision-making. The move followed a statement by NLD chairman Aung Shwe naming six new youth advisers and ten others to lead youth activities without accepting nominations or suggestions from youth members.

It's awkward and embarrassing to see the leading pro-democracy group facing problems of democratic principles within its own membership.

"Our organization is a democratic one," said Khin Htun, who has loyally worked for the NLD youth wing during the past two decades but was among those who resigned. *"We must respect the basis of democracy. If we don't respect the rules of democracy, it will be very difficult to work out the process of democratic reform in Burma."*

Khin Htun has spent years in jail as a result of his dedication to the NLD since its formation in 1988. Like him, many of the 109 members who resigned are former political prisoners.

NLD leaders should allow youth members to play a role in decision-making and genuinely consider their views when deciding on policy issues.

"Youth is our future," said Kin Htun. *"I want to urge our leaders to include the viewpoint of the youth members."*

In fact, the NLD has faced this issue since the early 2000s, especially during times when Suu Kyi has been detained—she has been under house arrest for 13 of the past 19 years.

The current top NLD leaders generally regard themselves as caretakers of the party rather than innovative visionaries crafting a philosophy and strategy that will move the entire pro-democracy movement forward.

The current NLD leadership has been repeatedly challenged and questioned regarding its capability to lead the pro-democracy movement. Segments of the general public and groups within the core circle of activists and politicians have been disappointed that the NLD seems to be floating along aimlessly on automatic pilot and is in danger of becoming irrelevant.

Last year, Suu Kyi herself talked about party leadership. When she was allowed to meet with her party's senior members, she counseled them to move forward without her. She said the party

sometimes needs “*to push and pull.*” Sometimes she would lead and sometimes she would follow others’ leadership in the party, she said.

In fact, this issue seems to be exacerbated by a generation gap. Party chairman Aung Shwe and U Lwin are respectively in their early 90s and late 80s. Some activists don’t fully trust them because of their backgrounds as former army commanders who held high-ranking positions under Ne Win’s authoritarian government.

A popular exception is Tin Oo, the NLD’s vice-chairman who is currently under house arrest. In his early 80s, he’s gained great respect from the public even though he served as commander-in-chief under New Win’s government.

The youth members who resigned represent a critical core of the party—indeed it’s very future. A mass resignation is a significant signal that shouldn’t be ignored or discounted.

This is a critical moment for the NLD leadership. It makes little sense to criticize the authoritarian military regime when the opposition party’s own house is in danger of collapse.

Unity within the NLD and unity within the entire pro-democracy movement is critical to the country’s future.

It’s time for the country’s pro-democracy groups to unite under simple, clear policy goals. The NLD can show the way by quickly repairing the distrust and division within its own party.

P.-S.

From the Irrawaddy Magazine.

http://www.irrawaddy.org/opinion_story.php?art_id=14467