



- 4 Section 340 (l) of the Code of Criminal Procedure provides that “any person accused of an offence before a criminal court, or against whom proceedings are instituted under this code, in any such court, may of right be defended by a pleader.” This basic right to legal advice is consistently denied to political prisoners in Burma. They are not even allowed to make contact with their families. The authorities generally refuse to give any information on prisoners who have not yet been tried. The NLD and the families of political prisoners have to make ongoing requests to find out where they are, with what “crime” they are to be charged, and when and where the trials would take place. Usually the trials of political prisoners are held in a special courthouse within the jail boundaries.
- 5 Last month a number of political prisoners were tried in Insein Jail. When the NLD heard that U Win Htein and some others were going to be produced at court on a certain day, a lawyer was sent to defend them. The Special Branch officer at the jail questioned by the lawyer said he did not know anything about a trial. But the trial took place while the lawyer was waiting at the gate. It continued after he left in the afternoon. The next week, a number of lawyers again went to Insein Jail. They were accompanied by the families of the prisoners. They went on the day they had heard the trial was to continue. This time they managed to get into the prison courthouse. However, they were only allowed to cross-examine four of the twenty-four witnesses for the lawyer who was accusing U Win Htein.
- 6 The next morning, the lawyers and the families of the prisoners arrived at Insein Jail at nine o’clock. They had heard sentence would be passed that day. The area around the jail entrance was full of security officials, and all the shops along the road were shut. The lawyers were refused entry. They were told sentence would only be passed at the end of the month and were asked to leave. However, the judge involved with the case had been seen at the Insein Township Magistrate’s Court. The lawyers were convinced the trial was scheduled to proceed within a matter of hours. They continued to wait outside the jail. The judge eventually arrived and entered the prison grounds at around two o’clock and came out again after about forty minutes. The lawyers followed him to the Insein Township Court. They asked what kind of sentence had been passed. The judge, very nervous and surrounded by security guards, would only say that an application should be made to copy the records of the court proceedings. Some days later the government media announced that U Win Htein and others had been given seven-year prison sentences each.
- 7 The sight of kangaroos bouncing away across an open prairie can sometimes be rather beautiful. The sight of the process of law leaping away from accepted standards of justice is very ugly at all times.

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