Ending Forced Labour in Myanmar: Engaging a Pariah Regime.
By Richard Horsey. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2011. Hardcover: 241pp.

Without question there will be a slew of forthcoming books that attempt to explain the origins and patterns of political change in Myanmar since 2011. All of them should use Richard Horsey's book as a central text to explain regime behaviour and international engagement. Horsey — a prominent analyst of Myanmar affairs who has worked for the United Nations, European Union and the International Crisis Group — was the liaison officer for the International Labour Organization (ILO) in Myanmar for nearly ten years during a key period in the organization's engagement with that country. Part memoir, political anthropology, human rights reporting and analysis on diplomatic engagement, *Ending Forced Labour in Myanmar* provides a rare insight into the working of a major international body and the frustrations it faced in dealing with a military regime in bullish denial that it had a widespread and reprehensible problem.

The practice of forced labour in Myanmar was so pervasive in the mid-1990s that by one estimate Horsey quotes, one million people in the country were being forced to work on infrastructure projects on any day. Further, the army routinely used thousands of civilians and prisoners to transport supplies during operations against insurgents, press-ganging civilians from cities and towns to the frontlines, as well as villagers in ethnic conflict zones, many of whom were forced into service and died from overwork or execution. Comprising seven chapters, the book outlines the ILO's rare use of a commission of inquiry in 1998 to outline patterns of forced labour by state authorities. They did so by interviewing victims and witnesses and by gathering evidence along Myanmar's borders, as the regime refused the investigation team access to the country.

In roughly chronological order, Horsey details how the ILO moved from condemnation to engagement by establishing an office in the former capitol Yangon and investigating complaints on the ground. They did so by dispatching high-level teams of eminent jurists to investigate reports of forced labour and engage with senior regime officials. He also discusses a period of crisis when the ILO was nearly expelled from the country and the then ruling State

Peace and Development Council threatened to withdraw from the world body.

Horsey's account is deeply engaging as he takes the reader from the halls of power in Yangon, to a poverty stricken village gripped by corrupt local officials obstructing his investigations and intimidating witnesses, to the machinations at the ILO annual meetings in Geneva on whether to use sanctions against Myanmar or engage the regime with training programmes. The author examines four harrowing cases that encompass the patterns of forced labour: a village forced to construct dikes for a local army unit's prawn farm; the story of a 14-year old boy press-ganged into the military as a child soldier and who nearly perishes on the frontline; civilians forced to perform sentry duties in ethnic conflict zones; and the prominent case of Su Su Nway, a young farmer who stood up to local officials who had coerced her community into building a road. The ILO managed to resolve many of these cases through a combination of on-the-ground investigations, lodging complaints with relevant authorities, and measured international pressure based on Myanmar's obligations as a signatory to the Forced Labour Convention that required the amendment or repeal of abusive laws.

Horsey also manages to inject some humour into an otherwise grim narrative, including a series of anonymous death threats delivered to the author and his co-worker written on Mickey Mouse notepaper, a request from the Ministry of Labour to the ILO to supply "a small stock of asses" so that the army could substitute pack-mules for civilian porters on operations, and military intelligence officers paying the fines for farmers under arrest ahead of an ILO Governing Body meeting in Geneva to avert a more critical report.

The book's conclusion draws these disparate and complicated experiences into an erudite and even analysis of lessons learned that includes the accurate calibration of pressure and demands by the ILO that gave the organization "credibility in the eyes of the regime". Horsey also emphasizes an understanding of the regime and recognition it was not monolithic or inherently irrational. Finally, the agency pursued incremental progress rather than immediate success. The credit must go to the ILO and various Myanmar officials for persevering in "a highly intrusive process to address the problem" (p. 184) that has resulted in a marked decline of mass forced labour in the central heartland and urban areas, although

forced labour remains a significant problem in ethnic conflict areas and in some rural communities.

The undoubted progress of the ILO's efforts, in large part due to Horsey and his successor, can be gauged by the July 2012 agreement of an action plan between the ILO, Myanmar's Ministry of Defence and other agencies to eradicate forced labour by the end of 2015. The plan includes an exhaustive list of labour related abuses such as child soldiers, the "self sufficiency policy" which reduced the central supply of rations to frontline units and made them dependent on plunder and extortion of the local community, and use of convict porters that the military has long denied. Admitting theses abuses is the first step in the long process of ending them, but as Horsey warns in his conclusion, "(t)here is a very long way to go before forced labour is consigned to history, particularly as regards the army" (p. 183).

This is arguably the most important book written on Myanmar for many years, and deserves a wide readership inside and outside the country for anyone who wants to understand the difficult task of engagement with a paranoid regime infused with a culture of impunity.

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