

DANCING with **DICTATORS**

1 X 57 or 1 X 80 HD



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contact

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Through the battle for control of *The Myanmar Times* the country's only paper with any foreign ownership—a weekly newspaper published in both English and Burmese. *Dancing with Dictators* provides an inside look at one of the most repressive regimes in the world today. Central to the story is Ross Dunkley, a dedicated and energetic Australian publisher who controls 49% of the newspaper.

Dunkley came to Myanmar (previously Burma) at a time when a more liberal attitude was in the air. Partnering with a young America-educated Burmese Sonny Swe, and leveraging Swe's connection to the highest level of the military government, the paper took off. However, four years later, during the junta's hard-line crackdown, Swe was sentenced to 14 years in jail, and the military forced Dunkley to accept a new local partner, publisher Dr. Tin Tun Oo, who took over Swe's 51% shareholding. Dunkley accepted the fait accompli but refused to allow Dr. Tin Tun Oo into the office except for monthly board meetings. The tension between the two publishers is a ticking bomb waiting to explode.

Dancing with Dictators is set against the background of the 2010 election, the country's first since the military stole control of the government from democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi in 1990. In an effort to end Myanmar's isolation from the outside world, the military junta announces the first election in twenty years with a promise to change the government from a monolithic military-based administration to a civilian administration. Although many view the election as a sham, for those inside the country this is an opportunity for a new start. Through the eyes of Dunkley and his staff, this film delves inside the election process and onto the streets. After massive poll manipulation, the military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) eventually claims a landslide victory with 80% of the vote. The disappointment inside the newsroom is palpable.

Dunkley's outspokenness during the election does not go unnoticed. Soon, he is arrested and charged with immigration offences. These charges are then linked to accusations that he drugged and assaulted a sex worker, charges exploited by factions inside the government with an agenda to take full control of the paper and remove the foreign owners. While the foreign investors of the newspaper regroup, Dr. Tin Tun Oo takes over Dunkley's position as CEO. After nearly seven weeks in Myanmar's notorious Insein prison, Dunkley is released on bail. In the end, he is acquitted on three charges but in a face saving move for the government he is found guilty of causing simple hurt and an immigration violation. After six months unable to leave the country Dunkley is freed. He intends to appeal the simple hurt conviction. Recently, he was granted a visa to return to Myanmar and is now back inside the paper with plans to regain control of the company and achieve his dream of breaking the state run monopoly that controls what passes for the national conversation and publish *The Myanmar Times* as a daily.

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credits

Writer: Hugh Piper

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Producer: Helen Barrow

Photo Credit: Courtesy of Evershine



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