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by

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Communism in search of Hegemony in South Asia: the Case of Nepal

Sobhanlal Datta Gupta¹

The uniqueness of Communism in Nepal

The history of communism in South Asia has been largely marked by bloody and brutal repression in the period of colonial domination as well as in the post-colonial era. This has been largely an effect of the blatantly authoritarian character of the regimes and the violent nature of the confrontation involved in the repression of the outlawed Communist Parties in this region. India has been the lone exception, thanks to the sustenance of parliamentary democracy for more than six decades. Consequently, in a democratically favourable environment the communist movement in India has thrived in conditions of legality without the fear of repression and this has impacted on the development of communism in India after independence in a quite decisive manner. Repression has driven the Communist Parties in other countries to go deep underground and it is not quite difficult to imagine why they have resorted to political extremism, involving armed violence against the regimes, commonly known as Maoism. While in most of the countries of South Asia these parties have been virtually silenced by the police and the military, unleashed by the state (the most tragic example being the case of the Communist Party of Indonesia, which in the early 1960s was the largest non-ruling Communist Party of Asia), the lone exception has been the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist). Formed only in 1994, and operating in conditions of deep illegality, its emergence in recent times as the key player in the transformation of the politics and society of Nepal, dominated by a brutally authoritarian monarchical regime for years, is significant for more than one reason.

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One : the mass movement against monarchy, which was largely spontaneous and in the making of which the burgeoning civil society in Nepal played a crucial role, ultimately forcing the king to succumb in 2006, was utilized by the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) more effectively than by any other party, although all political parties joined this mass upsurge against monarchy.

Two : in a remarkable show of flexibility, the Party has joined the national mainstream and abjured the violent path, however on certain conditions.

Three : following the deposition of the royal Government, the pressure that is being mounted on the Koirala Government for declaring Nepal a Republic has been initiated by the Maoists and it is they who are calling the shots in Nepal's transition from monarchy to democracy.

Four : at the time of writing this paper the election of the Constituent Assembly of Nepal has just been concluded and the results that are coming out very convincingly prove that the Maoists are not only coming to power electorally in the immediate future but also they would constitute the biggest political force in Nepal in the days to come, leaving behind all the other major parties. This is evident from the results declared so far, which show that out of 240 seats for which direct election was held to constitute the 601 seat Constituent Assembly, the Maoists have so far secured 118 seats, while leading in 2 more, the voting percentage being 31.7%, followed by the Nepal Congress, which has got 35 seats, the voting percentage being 22.94%, and the Communist Party of Nepal (United Marxist Leninist), which has secured 32 seats, the voting share being 21.79%. Given their already powerful mass base, it is now quite likely that the Maoists, emboldened by the election results, would now push forward the agenda of political revolution (the transition from monarchy to republic) together with that of a social revolution.

Five : the Maoists have a powerful military wing of their own, which draws on the peasant masses, and although they have surrendered their weapons consequent to the agreement signed between the Seven Party Alliance and the Maoists in June, 2006, the military factor can eventually play a crucial role in shaping the destiny of communism in Nepal.

Six : although the Maoists in Nepal have been heavily oriented towards the idea of an agrarian revolution through violence it is very significant that after the recent political changes in Nepal, they have become self-critical, moderate and flexible, prepared to take lessons from history.

All these are pointers to the emergence of communism in Nepal as a hegemonic, as distinct from dominant, force, keeping in mind the famous Gramscian distinction between domination and hegemony. This stands in sharp contrast with the rather tragic fate of communism in South Asia, which includes India too, because over the years the traditional domain of the Communist Parties has been steadily taken over by the non-Communist forces, together with the fact that in India as ruling parties the Communists have remained confined to just three states, namely, West Bengal, Kerala and Tripura, for decades. While the case of Nepal, therefore, is quite unique and exceptional, it is necessary first, to have an idea of the circumstances which made it possible for the

Maoists to come to the forefront of struggle against monarchy and project themselves as a hegemonic force.

The Strategy of the Maoists in Nepal

The most crucial factor in the understanding of the rise of the Maoist Communists in Nepal is their capacity to establish themselves as the real vanguard of the poor masses, especially the landless peasants, in their struggle against royal autocracy. The process has been long, complex and tortuous. In the transition from a partyless, monarchist autocracy, known as the panchayat system, which continued to characterize Nepal's politics for decades, to a parliamentary democracy in the 90s, as many as seven ideologically divided Communist Parties and groups played a truly glorious role in mobilizing the people's struggle for democratic aspirations by successfully overcoming their ideological differences and organizing the Jana Andalan (People's Movement) under the banner of the United Front in 1990. After the establishment of the multi-party system in 1990, the CPN (M-L) and CPN (M), two major Communist groups, buried their differences and formed the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) (CPN - UML) in January, 1991. Interestingly, in March, 1998 a radical faction split from the party and formed CPN (ML) but again reunited with the CPN (UML) in March, 2002. Thereafter, following the establishment of parliamentary democracy in Nepal, the CPN(UML) not only participated in the elections but also emerged as the country's main opposition party as against the Nepali Congress and eventually came to political power on two occasions through elections, namely, in 1994 when Man Mohan Adhikari became the country's first communist Prime Minister as the head of a minority government and again in 1997 when the CPN(UML) became a partner in a coalition government and the office of the Deputy Prime Minister went to the party. In fact, the years after 1990 showed a steady growth of the CPN (UML) compared to its major rival, the more liberal than social-democratic Nepali Congress. The public support of the UML grew in the three elections of the 1990s. In 1994, they already won most seats although still got less votes than the Nepali Congress. In 1999, it can be presumed that had there been no split, they perhaps could have won the absolute majority of seats and more votes than the Nepali Congress. This trend continued in the local elections of 1997 where the CPN (UML) became the dominant party.

Obviously the intriguing question that demands explanation refers to the decline of the CPN (UML) and the rise of the CPN(M) in recent years notwithstanding the fact that both the parties consider the Nepali Congress as the representative of the Right and consider socialism as the ultimate goal. Possibly, the clue lies in the CPN(UML)'s agenda of people's democratic revolution where its immediate aim has been described in the following words :

"We, on our part, and keeping in mind our national context, have added several significant points in the content of this revolution, the field of politics, economy and the foreign relations. We have incorporated in this some far-reaching and decisively important political content such as supremacy of the constitution, multi-party competition, pluralistic open society, rule of law, formation of the government by the party in the majority and the opposition of the party in the minority, human rights, democratic fundamental rights and the

constitutional guarantee and safeguard of peace. It is because of these characteristics that we have defined this as people's multi-party democracy. This revolution is a people's democratic revolution led by the people themselves under the leadership of the proletarian working class. It will establish the people's democratic state power. This is not a system with bourgeois dictatorship. Rather, it is a democratic system with the people's democratic dictatorship. Moreover, this is not a system of one party dictatorship. Rather, it is a system of people's multi-party democracy. In this system all the transactions and business of the state will be conducted according to the existing constitutional law of the country."²

While this reveals the tension between considerations of ideology and those of governance, it also became evident over the last one decade how considerations of governance were affecting the ideological stance of the Party (Hachhethu 2002 : 209-237). It was since February, 1996 that under the auspices of the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist), agrarian violence began to rapidly spread all over Nepal. Its ideological roots go back to the strong undercurrent of left extremism within the communist movement in Nepal, marked by the idea of armed struggle with focus on agrarian revolution, which drew its inspiration from Mao as well as the Naxalite movement in India in the 70s. In fact, the very formation of the CPN(UML) was the result of integration of a number of communist groups which, through a long historical process, came to recognize the futility of exclusive acceptance of the strategy of armed struggle. Even then, however, those who continued to adhere to the old line, began to now rally around the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist), since 1996, under the leadership of Prachanda³. Taking the cue from Mikesell's research on Nepal, it may be argued that, following the CPN(UML)'s adoption of the parliamentary path, as ideology has to be overshadowed by considerations of governance in many respects, the real problem of poverty, inequality and radical land reform affecting the countryside, to a large extent remained unattended, leading to frustration, anger and revolt, especially among the youth. This in a way provided a major support base to the Maoists as well as proved attractive to many militant cadres of the CPN(UML) too. Thus, the repression of the Maoists would simply escalate alienation of the rural poor and increasing isolation of the Government, leading to loss of credibility of the Government's talk of any negotiation, peaceful solution or dialogue with the extremists (Mikesell 1999 : 111-112).

It was the royal proclamation of King Gyanendra in 2002, postponement of mid-term elections, followed by the royal coup in 2005 whereby he dismissed the Government, and declared himself as the country's supremo, which contributed directly to the rise of the Maoists as the decisive force in shaping political developments in Nepal. While the royal proclamations were made to justify the necessity of putting down the violence and armed action of the Maoists, ironically, this lent credibility to the Maoists in the

² For the full text of the Programme of CPN(UML) see www.cpunml.org seen in November, 2003.

³ For an understanding of the position of the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist), see *Occasional Information Bulletin of the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist)* under www.rwor.org/s/nepal.htm; Statement by Comrade Prachanda, Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) dated 27 August, 2003 in *Revolutionary Worker*, 14 September, 2003 in www.rwor.org seen in November, 2003.

eyes of the ordinary people, especially the poor peasants. Consequently, when the final struggle to oust the King from power was launched by forging a seven-party alliance involving both the Nepali Congress (Democratic) and the CPN (UML), the Maoists too joined the movement for restoration of democracy, following which King Gyanendra ultimately succumbed and accepted the people's verdict on 24 April, 2006. While the driving forces of this unprecedented people's struggle were the ordinary masses, the organizational lever was largely controlled by the Maoists whereby they now came to the forefront of Nepalese politics.

The remarkable thing about this movement which contributed to the end of the longest surviving Hindu theocratic order of 237 years in the world is the way it sustained itself in the face of violent repression, unleashed by the King. First, the entire movement rested on one single strategy, namely, mass strike and demonstrations. The people's protest was expressed most graphically in the non-stop strike actions, which continued for days without break, leading ultimately to the collapse of royal authority and the country's economy. Second, although repression was intensified, killing at least 18 people (it has been calculated that over the last one decade about 13,000 people were killed in Nepal in various acts of violence, two thirds of them by the security forces, especially the Royal Army it did in no way deter the people. On the contrary, resistance mounted, marked by the grand spectacle of thousands and thousands of people coming out in the streets of Kathmandu, the capital, proclaiming death to the King. While the political parties sided with the masses, including the Maoists, the mass action was to a large extent spontaneous. Many of the slogans, which sent shivers down the spine of the King were: "Death to Gyanendra", "Blood of the martyrs crying out: Republic, Republic", "Gyanendra and Paras (the Crown Prince), don't leave the country, we have scores to settle", "Hang Gyanendra" etc. Third, the remarkable feature of the countdown to the surrender of the King was the unity of the movement. Despite unprecedented hardships which the people encountered because of strikes without break, together with violent repression, they exhibited remarkable maturity in sticking to the cause of putting an end to royal autocracy by remaining united. Fourth, it is the intensity of the anger and wrath of the people against the King which defined the agenda of the future in the sense that the people were not just concerned with the restoration of the 2002 situation; they now were asking for a qualitative transformation of Nepal's social and political life, which the political parties now would have to take into consideration. The people, in other words, were no longer ready simply to get back what they had lost, as they now articulated new demands, hoping for a better future.

The surrender of royal power was the turning point in the modern political history of Nepal. Its significance is two fold. On one level it marked the beginning of a political revolution, the beginning of which was made with the coming to power of a mixed coalition and the resolve of the multi-party coalition to transform Nepal into a Republic, the first step in this direction being the recently held election of the 601-seat Constituent Assembly (people have directly voted for 240 seats, while the rest will be filled up through proportional representation of the political parties and nominations) in April, 2008. On another level, the demand that the monarchy must give way to the republic and that there cannot be anything short of it has been raised most uncompromisingly and vociferously by the Maoists. That this issue is non-negotiable was most forcefully put before the people by the CPN(M), which led to a kind of stand off between the Maoists and some of the partners of the present coalition, which has resulted in the delayed holding of the election of the Constituent Assembly. This has

further strengthened and widened the support base of the Maoists among the Nepalese masses.

Future Projections of the Maoists

While these are all evidences of how the historical conjuncture has helped the rise of the Maoists in Nepal as a hegemonic force, an interesting question would be to understand how the Maoists look at themselves in the changed context. The question becomes crucial, since even a decade ago the Maoists were working deep underground, cut off from the political mainstream, accused of terrorism and violence. Today they have joined the mainstream, are partners in the coalition, formed following the Agreement signed between the Seven Party Alliance and the CPN(M) on 16 June, 2006 and there is every possibility that in near future they will sweep the polls whereby Nepal could emerge as the first state in Asia where the communists would come to power through constitutional means. In fact, speculations are already rife that the forthcoming elections for the Constituent Assembly would go to the full advantage of the Maoists. The issue, thus, can be addressed on two levels. One : how do the Maoists in Nepal explain their meteoric rise during the last one decade? Two : now that the situation has changed, especially after their resounding electoral victory, what are their future projections concerning Nepal ? A careful scrutiny of the related materials would suggest that the strategic position of CPN(M) is the classical illustration of a shift from the war of movement to the war of position, to take the cue from Gramsci. The phenomenal rise of the Maoists and the rapid expansion of their influence were analysed by Baburam Bhattarai, a top-ranking leader of the CPN(M), in an article "Birth Pangs of Democracy in Nepal", written in 2002, where he attributes their success to the strategy of People's War, launched in 1996, against royal power. While the military factor at this stage was crucial it could, however, triumph because of the deep entrenchment of the People's War among the poor masses. Thus, he writes :

... the historic People's War (PW) for a New Democratic Revolution (NDR) was initiated under the leadership of CPN (Maoist) in 1996. Surpassing all expectations the PW made rapid strides and within five years almost all of the countryside came under the control of the revolutionary forces. In addition to the vast majority of poor peasants, the main support base of the NDR constitutes women, dalits and people of oppressed nationalities and regions, including Madhesis of the Terai region bordering India. Also a large section of the urban and rural middle strata owing traditional allegiance to the ruling Nepali Congress (NC) and the main parliamentary opposition CPN (UML) have rebelled against their parent parties for their meek surrender before the feudal monarchy and joined the NDR (Bhattarai 2002).

But being now on the threshold of power, following the surrender of monarchy and the electoral verdict, which is going to result in the holding of the key governmental positions by the Maoists, the CPN(M)'s strategy has steadily changed in a markedly different way, which deserves attention. But what is significant is that the CPN(M) leadership views the new strategy as inseparably linked with the People's War strategy, since it is the political gains of the People's War strategy which have propelled the CPN(M) into power and it is argued that the mandate of the People's War justifies the

new line of the party. *The Red Star*, organ of the CPN(M), explains it in the following words :

The goal of the great People's War is to move ahead to the direction of Socialism and Communism by establishing the New People's Republic in Nepal. At present, we are advancing ahead energetically to the direction of to built (sic1) new Nepal through the election of the constituent assembly (CA) as the starting point of achieving the goal. ... Now the country has been made a secular state. Nepal is declared a Federal Democratic Republic. The commitment is expressed to go ahead by addressing all the problems including class, caste, region and gender. Objectively, these all are the achievements of the great People's War. But it is not enough and it is necessarily needed to concretize all these in the new constitution and implement them by institutionalizing through the election of CA. ... (The Red Star, 2008).

That the military factor and the political factor are not mutually exclusive but inseparably interconnected in Nepal was made sufficiently clear by Prachanda, the legendary leader of the CPN(M), in a BBC interview on 13 February, 2006, when he pointed out :

As you know, we have made an agreement with the parliamentary political parties and we want to get to Kathmandu militarily too. This is certain. We are not thinking of this in a purely military fashion and that is why we are talking about democracy and peace, and for this we have made agreements with the political parties. This proves that we do not want to get to Kathmandu in a purely military way but also in a political and military way. ... When we started the people's revolution and when we first attacked the feudal elements' Royal Army, we believed that we could conquer Kathmandu militarily. ... Today's reality is to move forward both politically and militarily, with a balance of the two. Only with this balance can we gain something for the people and the people's democracy. That's why we are organising on both fronts, political and military (http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/4707482.htm seen in March, 2008) .

In an interview given by Prachanda, the legendary leader of CPN(M), to *L'espresso* on 9 November, 2006, the future agenda of the CPN(M) was outlined as establishment of a federal republic, land reforms, multi-party system and formation of a coalition of the radical and left - democratic forces in Nepal.³ In the Election Manifesto entitled "New

³ For the full text of this interview visit <http://espresso.repubblica.it/dettaglio/Prachanda:%20Our%20Revolution%20Won/1431107> seen in March, 2008. In the BBC interview, mentioned earlier, Prachanda made it categorically clear that the CPN(M)'s project of democracy was not a tactical question but a question of principle born out of political experience and conviction. He thus stated : "Three years ago, at a Central Committee meeting of our party, analyzing the experiences from 20th century communist states, we put forward a proposal for the development of democracy. In the 21st century we cannot have a state like those of the 20th century. That's why our Central Committee unanimously passed this paper on the development of democracy in the 21st century. The spirit of this paper is that there should be peaceful competition between all political parties against feudalism and foreign imperialist forces. And that there should be multi-party competition. Since then we have said that within a certain constitutional provision

Ideology and New Leadership for a New Nepal”, released by Prachanda on the eve of the forthcoming election of the Constituent Assembly in April, 2008, Nepal’s future political projection has been concretized as : a republic, to be headed by a President, and a three-tier federal structure, namely, centre, autonomous federal states and local bodies with specific rights and responsibilities. It has proposed eleven autonomous federal states and two other sub-states within them, keeping in mind the country’s ethnic composition, geographical contiguity, linguistic base and economic viability. While holding brief for a presidential system, it proposes to make the President more powerful than the Prime Minister. It thus proposes election of the President directly by the people and the election of the Prime Minister by the elected members of Parliament. The structure of the Union Parliament proposed is bicameral and unicameral in the federal states, the understanding being that the members of the Lower House of the central legislature shall be elected on the basis of population of the given districts, while the Upper House shall have an equal number of members from all the federal states. The president shall act as head of the state, commander-in-chief of the national army and the chief executive, while the Prime Minister shall bear the responsibility of the government and its daily administration. There shall be a governor and a chief minister in each of the federal autonomous states.

The centre shall have control over the security of international border, military management, foreign relations, inter-state trade and commerce, monetary policy and central bank, customs revenue, mega hydro-power projects, railways, airways and national highways, central universities and weights. All other rights shall vest in the state governments. The issues of local transportation, local taxation, education, sanitation and utilisation of local resources shall be handled by the locally elected bodies (Himalayan News Service, 2008).

multi-party competition [should exist] as long as it's against feudalism, against foreign imperialistic interference and all political parties can compete against each other. And this document was unanimously passed three years ago in very clear terms. In the agreement that we recently made with the political parties, we have clearly stated that we agree to multi-party competition.

What we have seen from the 20th century, and the lessons that we have learnt from the experiences of the 20th century, a very important question was - to understand the subject of democracy and dictatorship we need to develop a new consciousness for this. And we have passed this. Our opponents have understood us in a dogmatic way. We are not dogmatic but our opponents are. They are looking at us with 20th Century glasses. But we are already moving into the 21st Century. [We are looking at] the kind of state that is possible in the 21st Century, how to give people the maximum possible rights; how to organize competition; and how to guarantee that this competition does not lead to oppression and suppression. In short, democracy and dictatorship...How to make use of this conflict between them - we are developing on this. And from this process of development, we have termed, development of democracy. People think that our commitment to the multi-party competition is purely a tactic and that we are trying to cheat someone. But in reality we have taken the experience of an entire century, discussed it, analyzed it in our party, and we've come to a conclusion that the development of democracy is necessary in the 21st Century. That's why we take multi-party competition very seriously.”

Visit http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/4707482.htm seen in March, 2008.

Maoists : rethinking the past ?

While the CPN(M) has thus made the future political projection of Nepal unambiguously clear, another issue that now merits attention is the spirit of new thinking and self-criticism which characterize it in the changed political context. This touches upon two key questions, namely, one : the CPN(M)'s project of building up a united Communist Party by coordinating with other Left and Communist parties and groups, and two : highlighting the issue of democracy in the functioning of Communist Parties by drawing lessons from the history of international communism.

On the first question Prachanda made the perspective clear in an interview given very recently to *Red Star* in which he stated :

Before entering this peace process, we united the thousands of revolutionary people in our Maoist movement. Recently our comrades from eastern Nepal reported that around 80 percent cadres are from other parties. Even after entering this new phase, our party has declared only one communist party should be formed and we've moved towards this.

Last year, our central committee meeting has passed this agenda and decided on it every unity is possible if the parties have common ideology and political tactics. Formally, we got unity with four groups in this one year i.e. CPN (MLM centre) led by Krishna Das; CPN (2006) led by Keshav Nepal, Democratic Republic Forum and Democratic Forum of Bhim Bahadur Kadayat and Ramman shrestha respectively. Very soon, one Marxist party is getting united with us. Similarly, our talk to CPN (Unity Center-Masal) and CPN-United is going on positively. Our unity with first group is too near. We agreed in it and both sides are sincere enough to unite the revolutionary group. Only procedure is yet to be finalized and we'll talk on it. Our talk to CPN-United is positive. Hence, there's a sufficient room to do a progress on party unity. Definitely, it's the influence of People's War. It will make a new power center and lead the nation. Again, there are some parties with whom we've some fundamental differences in terms of party principles, we have proposed them to make a common platform, which can go against imperialism, feudalism, in order to make an easy journey. I think, only in this case, we can lead the Federal Democratic Republic Nation and complete the revolution obtaining the height of full democracy (The Red Star, 2008).

What is especially significant is that in this interview Prachanda, the most authoritative voice of the CPN(M), strongly castigates the dogmatic mindset of the Indian Maoists in the following words :

We believe it applies to them too. We want to debate this. They have to understand this and go down this route. Both on the questions of leadership and on multiparty democracy, or rather multiparty competition, those who call themselves revolutionaries in India need to think about these issues. And there is a need to go in the direction of that practice. We wish to debate with them on this. If revolutionaries are not going to look at the need for ideological development, then they will not go anywhere (<http://www.countercurrents.org/prachanda100206.htm> seen in March, 2008).

That the CPN(M) really means business concerning the cultivation of democracy in inner-party life was evident when differences between Baburam Bhattarai and Prachanda, the former accusing the latter of authoritarianism, were publicized in *Monthly Review* in July, 2005 although eventually these were settled.⁴

Following the resounding victory of the Maoists in the election to the Constituent Assembly, their resolve to build a new Nepal through a strategy of consensus as well as their commitment to democracy and respect for the mandate given by the people has been confirmed by Bauram Bhattarai (he has already been projected as the future Prime Minister of Nepal by his Party) in a very recent interview given to journalists in April, 2008. Thus, he has made it clear that on four vital issues, namely, security (the Maoists are strongly in favour of reduction of the size of the armed forces), political structure (the Maoists are pleading for a presidential system), economy and international relations, the final decision has to be arrived at through consensus. The question of going back to the path of violence by the Maoists is thus finally closed.⁵

The following excerpt from this interview makes the position of the Maoists evident today.

Q: How would the CPN (Maoist), being the largest political force, approach other political parties in order to form the government, abolish monarchy and declare Nepal a republic?

Dr Bhattarai: First, we are going to hold discussions with the major political parties. We would need to seek their opinion and views before forming the government. We would have to work under the Interim Constitution for the time being which would require a political consensus. We shall move forward on this basis. The first sitting of the CA will declare this country a federal republic. For that, we have to develop a political consensus. After that the question would be forming the new government which will be done again on the basis of political consensus. And then we will proceed with the drafting of the new constitution of Nepal. Besides these issues, there are other political commitments such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, rehabilitation of displaced persons and revamping and integration of the security forces. I think there will be several challenges and questions. We have to review four things immediately – security, political structure, the economy and international relation. Such issues require a national consensus.

Q: How do you assess the election results? Did you expect that you would make such a strong showing?

⁴ While references to this episode and the ultimate resolution of the issue are to be found in Prachanda's above-mentioned interview given to Varadarajan of *The Hindu*, for materials on this debate see the following, namely, "Internal Debate within the Communist Party of Nepal (Marxist)" <http://www.monthlyreview.org/0705cpndebate.htm> and "Note of Dissent" Presented by Comrade Laldhwaj', <http://www.monthlyreview.org/0705cpndissent.htm> (seen in March, 2008) in *Monthly Review*, July, 2005.

⁵ Interview given by Baburam Bhattarai given to Prateek Pradhan, Ghanashyam Ojha and Puran P.Bista vide *Liberation News Service*, posted on 14 April, 2008.

Dr Bhattarai: The people were looking for total change. We advanced the political agenda for total change during the decade-long people's war. We have people from different castes, ethnicities, genders and people from different regions. The main agenda of the people's war was to restructure the state. It took 10 years of the people's war to establish our political agenda. The people felt that the country's socio-political and economic structure needed a complete overhaul. So we couldn't look at things through our old lenses. The media and the elite missed the picture. As a result, the CA results surprised many. The ground realities had changed and they helped us to emerge as the largest party.

Q: How can you restructure the state and achieve economic growth in a short span of time?

Dr Bhattarai: What we need right now is political stability. We cannot think of rapid economic growth sans political stability. Now the CA results have given some hope for political stability. Secondly, there must be a strong leadership. Above all, we have yet to start restructuring the state. So, how can we think of the economy? The 30-year-long panchayat system promised us that it would deliver the people's needs, but it could not do so as it was a political system imposed by the royal regime to serve its own interests. The post-1990 parliamentary system created a sort of anarchy. It neither had any clear political vision nor could it deliver anything. During this interim period, it would be difficult to think of economic prosperity. We can only think of economic growth in the post-CA period. This mandate has just opened the door to a future Nepal. Now the job is to garner the support of all the political parties and maintain political stability. This would be the beginning. Second, the resources we have include land, water, jungle, herbs and people. I do not think that we run short of resources, but we need external support for technology and skills. We need foreign investments. I am sure if we really work together, we can achieve rapid economic growth in a short span of time.

Q: You mean the state's involvement in economic activities will increase from now on?

Dr Bhattarai: The state will play the role of facilitator. The state cannot intervene in business activities. It will encourage investors to raise productivity and generate employment opportunities.

Q: We have seen – especially after the restoration of democracy in 1990 – how political parties rewarded their cadres with jobs in the bureaucracy and other social sectors. How are you planning to restructure the bureaucracy and other sectors?

Dr Bhattarai: We have to, at all costs, restructure the bureaucracy and the judiciary as they have always been tools of the monarchy. But we have to follow certain norms. So let us leave it open. But we have to think of revamping the security forces as integrating the People's Liberation Army and the Nepal Army is part of the peace process. We can think of starting the restructuring process only after the monarchy has been removed. But it will be open to discussion. We want to reform the bureaucracy and other sectors in a democratic manner.

Q: You once said that Nepal did not need a huge security force. But if you integrate the Maoist combatants and the army, you are going to have a huge security force. Do you think Nepal needs such a large army?

Dr Bhattarai: The strength of the security forces after the two are combined would be roughly over 100,000. Going by the country's population, such a number may appear necessary. But we have to reduce the size of the army in the long term. I think that instead of having such a huge number of army, we could go for trained militias who would defend the country at times of war. I think it would be useful to train such a force. We should mobilize them during emergencies.

Nepal : Lessons for Indian communism

Communism in Nepal, under the leadership of the CPN(M), is thus poised for a real breakthrough. After working clandestinely for more than a decade in conditions of severe repression, its turn around in a new direction, without at the same time compromising on the fundamental question of loyalty to Marxism and the cause of revolutionary internationalism is, indeed, spectacular and unprecedented, at least definitely in Asia. This was made clear by Prachanda in a long interview given by him to Li Onesto of *Revolutionary Worker* (its full text is available online in *Revolutionary Worker*, 20 February, 2000 under <http://www.rwor.org> seen in March, 2008).

After the fall of the monarchy and the massive electoral mandate that the Maoists have got in the recently concluded election of the Constituent assembly, it is not only politics in Nepal but also communism in Nepal that stands at the crossroads today. Interestingly, the state of communism and the Communist Parties in India stand in lurid contrast with the situation concerning communism in Nepal although, ironically, the top brass of the CPN(M) have had their schooling and very long and close ties with the Indian Communists. Thus, in India, there is neither any move in sight whereby a strategy of building up a unified Communist Party can be worked out nor is there any possibility of rethinking the question of inner-party life or addressing the question of inner-party democracy, at least in the immediately foreseeable future. Communism in India continues to be deeply steeped in traditional thinking without any sign of change, although it has come of age after traversing more than eight decades since its foundation in the early 20s in the twentieth century. The traditional strongholds of the Communists in India have over the years given way to forces representing caste, religion and ethnicity. While the question of why and how it happened certainly demands an explanation, what is certain is that the leadership of the Communist Parties in India, in comparison with their Nepalese counterpart, seriously lack innovative thinking free from dogmatism and a closed understanding of Marxism. It is on this score that the CPN(M) has not only moved far ahead of the Indian Communists but communism in South Asia is also thereby going to experience a refreshingly new turn in the coming years.

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