

More on “Revolution and State Power in Nepal”

By the MLM Revolutionary Study Group, May 16, 2009

In keeping with the importance of supporting the people's revolution in Nepal, we have been following the rapidly changing developments after the attempted sacking of General Katawal, Chief of Staff of the reactionary Nepalese Army, by the Maoist-led government. We have also been looking more closely at the statements by party leaders following the National Conference of the Unified CPN (Maoist) held in November 2008. Finally we have developed our views on the particular circumstances posed by the revolution in Nepal. We have decided to make some further comments that clarify, correct and elaborate upon our paper of April 4, 2009. (See www.mlmrsg.com)

First, we have reassessed the results of the National Conference. Prior to it, Chairman Prachanda's views were coming under public criticism from a number of senior party leaders, including Kiran (Mohan Baidya), Guarav (CP Gajurel) and Biplap (Netra Bikram Chand). The main issue of political strategy that was brought to the conference was whether the party should go for a People's Republic, completing the new democratic revolution through the seizure of state power, or the revisionist position that the party should consolidate the present bourgeois republic and limit itself to a process of state restructuring. (See Bastola's "Historic National Convention: Milestone of Revolution," in the December 1-15, 2008 Red Star, and CP Gajurel's "The Role of Major Tactical Line in Developing a New Constitution" in the January 16-31, 2009 Red Star.)

The Conference united around a compromise that merged the two positions. This resolution delivered a partial blow that has restrained the revisionist strategy that had been dominant, and has given more freedom of action to the revolutionary forces in the party. Since the leadership of neither side was defeated, the line struggle has not ended but has moved out of public view in recent months.

The new formulation of waging struggle from the government, the parliament and the streets points to such a shift to the Left. (The revolutionary forces in the party have been stressing the struggle from the streets.) The efforts of the Maoist-led government to sack the army chief of staff, which has brought the Maoist mass base out into the streets in a way not seen since the April 2006 uprising against the monarchy, also points in this direction. Just the fact that Basanta could publicly state that "the Nepalese oppressed class has now arrived at a very glorious but more challenging juncture of seizing central power through a process of people's rebellion of the Nepalese specifically under the leadership of our party the Unified CPN (Maoist)" is another sign of this shift. (Red Star, March 16-31, 2009).

Thus, our statement that "the current strategy of the Prachanda leadership ... is guided by a revisionist line and strategy that is in opposition to a revolutionary line and strategy of preparing the masses and the party to wage a struggle to seize political power" is an unclear description of the current situation within the Unified CPN (Maoist). Both inside the party as well as publicly, Prachanda has been promoting the revisionist strategy of consolidating the bourgeois republic and restructuring the state by constitutional means. However, the party leadership as a whole is not following a revisionist line, as it has clearly not resolved the two line struggle.

This assessment is opposed to the position of the RCP, USA, which asserts that the UCPN (Maoist) has become a revisionist party i.e., that revisionist consolidation is complete and that no revolutionary line struggle remains within the party, and that the revolution has basically been defeated. In sharp contrast, the Kasama Project in the U.S. has performed a valuable service in popularizing the revolution in Nepal and developing support for it. However, in our view the materials of the Kasama Project do not pay the necessary attention to the two line struggle in the UCPN (Maoist). Without saying so explicitly, these materials promote the view that a revolutionary line has been in command of the party and has been implemented since the Comprehensive Peace Agreement was signed in 2006, in the face of substantial evidence to the contrary.

We believe we were correct to emphasize the decisive nature of the two-line struggle in the party for the future of the revolution: “The current transitional stage cannot last for long. There are two alternative paths of development: Either the bulk of the Maoist forces will get further submerged in administering a bourgeois/feudal state and trying to push it to the left--which will represent a serious setback to the revolutionary process--or a new wave of Maoist-led revolutionary struggle will lead to the seizure of power and the victory of the new democratic revolution as a transition to socialism in Nepal.”

A second point in our article must be revisited. We wrote that “there is no evidence that the party leadership is preparing its mass base and the party for an actual seizure of power.” It must be said that lack of public discussion of making plans for insurrection by the party doesn’t mean that such plans and preparations aren’t being made--which by necessity must be kept secret. We would expect the People’s Liberation Army, the Young Communist League and other organizations led by the party to have contingency plans in the event of a decisive showdown with the reactionaries, such as a coup by the army. However, these are plans for defensive armed struggle. An "offensive insurrection," on the other hand, is a strategic undertaking, and plans for this can move forward only if a revolutionary line and strategy wins out in the struggle within the UCPN (Maoist).

It is important to understand that a revolutionary situation is an objective process, the conditions for which must mature before the time to strike comes. Going over to the insurrectionary offensive requires a qualitative change in the mood of the masses, where they have become convinced that a peaceful solution is no longer possible by the actual conditions they face and by the work of the revolutionaries. The masses of people do not arrive at such a position at the same time. The advanced forces must win over the intermediate among the basic masses, as well as vacillating allies, to the revolutionary seizure of power, and in the process disorganize and demoralize the backward forces. One important factor that can accelerate this process and bring it to a head is when the onus for the breakdown of a political stalemate—such as exists in Nepal today—can be laid at the feet of the reactionaries. This was successfully done by Lenin and the Bolshevik Party in the months before the October 1917 insurrection, and by Mao and the Chinese Communist Party during 1945 and 1946 before the outbreak of civil war with the Guomindang.

In his writings on the Kasama website, Mike Ely has emphasized that before an insurrection can be launched in Nepal, there must be “dress rehearsals” in the streets, where the party can assess the strength of their core revolutionary forces, determine how effective they are in bringing over broader sections of the people, and measuring the response of the reactionaries. The current confrontation over General Katawal, which has brought tens of thousands of Maoist cadre and supporters out into the streets, could prove to be such a political dress rehearsal if a revolutionary line drives the struggle forward and brings the masses into play in a way that is not limited to asserting civilian control over the army. Future political confrontations may arise when Maoist efforts to write a new revolutionary constitution, and to integrate the two armies in a way that keeps the People's Liberation Army politically intact, run into a wall of reactionary resistance. New popular initiatives in the struggle for land reform--which have been placed on the back burner since the Comprehensive Peace Agreement was signed in 2006--can also reshape the political landscape in preparation for the revolutionary seizure of power.

Third, we have held a view that the political and military strategy of protracted people’s war—which includes a tactical use of negotiations and, in some conditions, electoral work that exposes the system--is the only viable strategy in semi-colonial and semi-feudal countries such as Nepal, India, the Philippines and Indonesia. In Nepal, the question is posed whether, after the mass armed struggle in the countryside has been ended short of victory, is it possible to wage political struggle, including participating in elections and coalition governments, with the orientation of generating new forms of revolutionary struggle and organization among the masses in the cities and countryside--thereby gaining the political independence and revolutionary initiative that can enable and lead to a renewal of armed struggle and the conquest of nationwide political power. It remains to be seen whether such a path to the revolutionary seizure of power can be successfully pursued in Nepal, much less in other countries, but this possibility cannot be simply ruled out.

As a result of the people's war that liberated most of the countryside, and the ending of that war to wage political struggle as the main form of struggle, there is now a temporary and unstable dual power in Nepal. The Maoists share state power with the bourgeois/feudal forces in the government. Their armed forces are still separate entities—though the PLA is in an extremely vulnerable position. How does the Marxist-Leninist understanding of the class nature of the state comprehend this situation? Does the state everywhere and always have to be either bourgeois or proletarian? Or can there be particular historical situations where there is fierce struggle between these two antagonistic classes within the state apparatus for a limited period of time before the issue is settled?

In order to answer these questions, there are dangers in both dogmatic application of historical precedents, drawn from other times, places and circumstances, as well as from overdrawn "exceptionalism" and "particularism." The latter tendency acts as if nothing has been learned about the underlying laws of society, political economy, the modern state as an instrument of class rule, class struggle, and the necessity for the armed seizure of power and the replacement of the bourgeois state by a new revolutionary state. Both errors are denial of a scientific method and remove essential tools of analysis from the revolutionary toolbox of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism.

In the period ahead the political situation in Nepal will be in a high degree of flux as the two lines contend in the party, and as new flash points develop between the Maoist-led masses and the forces of reaction. With the triumph of a revolutionary line in the party, the revolutionary consciousness and power of the masses can be unleashed to the fullest extent, and the conquest of nationwide political power can become an actual possibility when the objective conditions ripen. These points--which differ from the wishful view that the UCPN (Maoist) is united in leading the revolutionary struggle forward against the forces of reaction, as well as the dogmatic and sectarian claim that the revolution has been betrayed by the party--are essential to include in materials aimed at popularizing and building support for the revolution in Nepal.

The people's revolution in Nepal is a just one. Its every step forward requires support by communists, revolutionaries and progressive people around the world.

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