

Nepal, A Promising Revolutionary Advance

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An Authentic Revolutionary Advance

Imagine. A liberation army that supports a generalized revolt of the peasantry reaches the gates of the capital, where the people, in their turn, rise up, drive the royal government from power and welcome as their liberator the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist (CPN-M), whose effective revolutionary strategy needs no further demonstration. What is involved here is the most radical victorious revolutionary advance of our epoch, and, for this reason, the most promising.

This victory in Nepal has created the conditions of a national and democratic people's revolution and is characterized as an antifeudal/anti-imperialist revolution by the CPN-M itself. Indeed, the generalized urban revolt, uniting the poorer classes with the middle class, has compelled all of Nepal's political parties to proclaim themselves, in their turn, "republican revolutionaries." Before the victory of the Maoists, the other parties had taken the road of "peaceful combat" on the path to reformism, having invested their hopes in "elections." The other leading communist party—the Communist Party of Nepal, Unified Marxist-Leninist (UML), had joined the royal government as late as 2004, and denounced "the adventurism" of the Maoists.

The CPN-M deliberately chose to make a compromise agreement with the parties in question (the Nepali Congress, the UML and others), estimating that by rallying to the revolution these parties had regained a minimum of legitimacy that could not be disputed among the masses.

A compromise—characterized as a "peace agreement" by the United Nations authorities that recommended it—conferred on a Constituent Assembly the responsibility for writing the new democratic and popular republican constitution. These multiparty elections gave the CPN-M first place among the parties making up the victorious coalition, thus entrusting the responsibility of prime minister to their leader, Prachanda. The parliament for the first time in the history of the country (and of

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the entire Indian sub-continent) contains proportionate numbers of poor peasants, informal urban workers, dalits, and women from the popular classes.

Five Major Challenges for the Future

The compromise agreement does not resolve all the future problems, on the contrary it reveals their wide range. The challenges confronting the revolutionary popular forces from this point on are gigantic. We will examine them in the five sections that follow.

1. Land Reform

The peasant uprising was the product of the CPN-M's correct analysis of the land question and of the strategic conclusions, also correct, that they drew from it: the great majority of the peasantry could be organized in an united front and go over to the armed struggle, to the occupation of lands, to the reduction or abolition of the ground rents paid to owners, expulsion of usurers from the villages, etc. The rising, for these reasons, gradually spread through the country, and its army, organized by the CPN-M, inflicted defeats on the state army. But it is true that at the moment when the revolt in the capital opened its doors to the Communist Party (Maoist), the popular army had not yet managed to destroy the state army, which was strongly supported and equipped by the government in Delhi and the imperialist powers.

In the current moment of "compromise" two lines have been put forward by political forces associated with and represented in the parliament:

(A) The line defended by the CPN-M, that of a radical revolutionary land reform, guaranteeing access to the land (and the means necessary to live from it) to all the poor peasantry (the great majority), but without touching the landed property of the middle and rich peasants.

(B) The vague line defended by in particular the Congress Party, of a more "moderate" land reform, which requires in addition, before the law sets up the new rules, a return of the old feudal/usurer order in the areas that had already been liberated by the peasant revolt.

2. The Future of the Armed Forces

The two armed forces coexist at the current time. This coexistence obviously cannot last indefinitely. The CPN-M suggests their fusion. The Maoists' adversaries fear (and admit this publicly) that such a fusion could lead to the rank-and-file soldiers of the state army being "infected" by Maoist ideology! But, hopelessly, they propose nothing beyond meaningless phrases about the "rehabilitation" of the Maoist army.

3. Bourgeois Democracy or People's Democracy?

This major question animates all the debates within Nepal. There are in Nepalese society defenders of the conventional formula of democracy, reduced to the multiparty system, elections, the formal separation of powers, and the proclamation of human rights and fundamental policies. This is the general form in which the dominant ideology, spread on a worldwide scale by the major media (among others, those of the Western countries) tries to channel the debate.

The Maoists point out that the basic rights on which proposed “democracy” rests place the respect of private property at the top of the hierarchy of so-called human rights. As a counterpoint, the CPN-M defends the priority of social rights without whose implementation no social progress is possible: the rights to life, food, housing, work, education and health. Private property is not considered “sacred”; its respect is limited by the need for implementing social rights.

In other words one group defends the concept of democracy identified with sanctified property rights, and dissociated from the questions related to social progress (the bourgeois and dominant concept of “democracy”), while the other defends that of the democracy associated with social progress.

The debate—in Nepal—is not confused, but it is often polemical. The defenders of “Western democracy” count in their ranks authentic reactionaries. But they also count in their ranks undoubtedly sincere democrats who are not very sensitive to the real miseries that the popular classes suffer. The “defense of democratic rights” NGOs, largely supported from abroad and massively mobilized, plead the “moderate” cause as well as they can. Some are satisfied with saying that conventional and limited democracy is better than nothing, as if more were impossible. Others draw up a list of charges against the CPN-M, calling them “inveterate Communists,” “Stalinists,” “totalitarian,” imitators of the Chinese autocratic model, etc.

The Maoists don't do a bad job of defending themselves regarding these vicious attacks. They remind everyone that they do not challenge private peasant property nor even capitalist property, national or foreign. But they do not rule out the nationalization of property if required by the national interest (prohibiting foreign banks from imposing the integration of the country into the globalized financial market, for example). They call in question only “feudal” land and buildings, whose recipients had been the clients of the successive kings, authorized by them to dispossess the peasant communities. They do not challenge

personal rights and an independent judiciary responsible for guaranteeing respect for those rights. They add to this program, without reducing it, by inviting the Constituent Assembly to formulate not only the great principles of the social rights, but also the institutional forms necessary to implement them. The people's democracy that they define in this manner is, of course, to be put into effect gradually, and through both the intervention of the self-organization of the popular classes as well as by the state.

Obviously there exists no "guarantee" for the future, protecting Nepal from backsliding, for example from the temptation of autocratic state power. Or in a not less likely opportunist alignment on what appears to be "possible" for the immediate future, with the rallying of the CPN-M to the "moderate" line of their rivals. But what right does anyone have to condemn in advance the experiment, when one knows that the questions raised here are the object of serious debates within the party? And that a plurality of opinions exists there.

These analyses and the strategies of pursuing the struggles go beyond the populist national liberation ideologies of the time of the Bandung Conference of 1955. At the time the regimes that arose from the national liberation struggles of Asia and Africa, which were legitimate and popular struggles, were less advanced. The ideology on which the legitimacy of power rested did not use Marxism as a reference; it was manufactured of a little of this and a little of that, associating a reading of the past broadly reinvented and presented as essentially "progressive" (through allegedly democratic forms of the exercise of power in ancient societies, through religious interpretations of a comparable nature) and nationalist myths, with a pragmatism hardly critical with regard to the requirements of technological and administrative modernization. The "socialism" that characterized the Bandung regimes remained extremely vague, difficult to distinguish from populist state control that redistributed and guaranteed "social justice."

The Maoists of Nepal developed a much different vision of the question of socialism. They refrain from reducing the "construction of socialism" to the realization even of the whole of their current maximum program (radical land reform, People's Army, people's democracy). They characterize this program as "national democratic popular," opening the way (but not more than that) to the long transition to socialism.

4. The Question of Federalism

The physical and human geography of the Himalayan valleys is expressed by the extreme diversity of the peasant communities of Nepal.

It is not a question of two, three, or four “ethnic groups,” but of a hundred so-called communities. The people of these communities aspire to recover the use of their land, expropriated by the clients of the conquering generals in the service of the kings. They also want recognition of their dignity and equal treatment. But they do not aspire to secede. This is also the case among the various communities of the “Terai” (the plains that adjoin India), who have recently been the prime target of foreign intervention.

The formula of the federal republic, promoted by the Maoists, can certainly satisfy the demands of the Nepalese people. This does not exclude the danger that adversaries of centralized state power, if necessary will manipulate this formula.

5. The Question of the Country’s Economic Independence

Nepal is classified by the United Nations in the category of “less developed countries.” The “modern” administration of the state, social services, and the development of modern infrastructure depend on outside assistance. The government in place appears to be conscious of the need for freeing itself from this extreme dependence. But it knows that this release can be only gradual. Food sovereignty is not Nepal’s main issue, although self-sufficiency in this area is associated with often deplorably low food intakes. But the organization of more effective and less expensive networks of marketing for the country producers and the urban consumers is a major problem, because it brings into play the interests of intermediaries. A program that develops small-scale production, half-craft and half-industrial and able to reduce dependence on imports, will require both hard effort and time to produce adequate results.

The Maoists propose an “inclusive” development model, that is, one benefiting directly and at every stage the popular classes, in opposition to the “Indian” model of growth associated with an “exclusive” social model, that is, profiting only 20 percent of the population, and condemning the other 80 percent to stagnation if not impoverishment. This testifies to a principled choice that one can only support. Its translation into programs that make the model real remains to be done.

Who Will Carry it Out?

Revolutionary Nepal clashes with the extreme hostility of its major neighbor, India, whose ruling class fears contagion. The endemic revolt of India’s Naxalites could, while taking as a starting point the lessons of the victories gained in Nepal, seriously call into question the

stability of the modes of exploitation and oppression in force in the Indian continent.

This hostility should not be underestimated. It constitutes one of the reasons of the military rapprochement between India and the United States. It mobilizes considerable political material resources. Among other things, India finances the attempted construction of an “alternative” Hindu political party, on the model of the chauvinist Indian BJP, the analogue of the political Islam of Pakistan and elsewhere or the political Buddhism of the Dalai Lama. The support of the United States and other western powers—Britain in particular—is coordinated through such reactionary projects. The crystallization of a powerful Nepalese Hindu political force would have a chance for success if the achievements—even modest—of the new Nepal were delayed for too long a time. Those intervening from outside could then also mobilize the Nepalese reactionaries and provoke “secessionist” movements. The use of outside assistance, always with strings attached even if this is not acknowledged, and demagogic speech-making concerning “human rights” and democracy fed by NGO networks, finds its place in this strategy of the enemy.

The compromise now in force delays the implementation of the radical reform program that is at the source of the popularity of the CPN-M. It encourages certain tendencies—in the ranks of the political leadership itself—to want to hang on to what this compromise allows, thus preparing the ground for the counter-offensive of the reaction.

But there is no need to despair. The Maoists publicly repeat that the popular classes have the right to remain mobilized and to continue their combat to carry out their program, whatever the results of the deliberations of the Constituent Assembly. The CPN-M did not fall into the electoral trap of seeking votes above all else. They carefully distinguish what they call their social base (“social constituency”), made up of the majority (poor peasants, urban workers of the popular classes, students and the young people, women, and patriotic and democratic sectors of the middle classes) from their electoral base (“electoral constituency”), which, as with all electoral bases, remains volatile. To build this popular social base into a ruling organized social block, an alternative to the feudal-comprador block thrown out of power, constitutes the objective of the long-term combat of the CPN-M.