

Nepal: The Maoist general strike and its limits

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The street demonstrations, without a revolutionary strategy behind them, are feeble attempts to resolve internal party contradictions, argues Muma Ram Khanal.

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There is a kind of stalemate between warring sides. The crucial reason behind the impasse is that there are no concrete objectives with which to proceed.

Peaceful struggle

The Maoists' struggle started a year ago when party chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal "Prachanda" resigned from the post of Prime Minister. Ever since that moment UCPN (Maoist) has been claiming the need to establish a national government comprising every political party in the Constituent Assembly. The existing class character of society has not been challenged. Rather, the Maoists want the opportunity to form a government under their leadership, and they have calculated that this may be possible through the general strike.

Some commentators maintain that the present general strike may be transformed into a revolt that will capture political power. There is no objective basis for such an assumption. It is true that some Maoist leaders talk of revolt of such a kind. But this is the consequence of the leadership choosing only a short-sighted path to power within the confines of a bourgeois parliamentary system. This is revealed by the dialogue with the other political parties and the demonstrations the Maoists have called within and outside the CA throughout the year. The current peaceful struggle, with its singing and dancing, is only being used to bargain with the parliamentary parties for the leadership of an all-party government. There is no other revolutionary objective.

Ever since the 12-point agreement, settled in New Delhi in 2005, the Maoists have been strategising in a number of different ways, both apparent and invisible. They have approached the agreement by dissolving the base areas and local level people's governments, promoting the restoration of parliament, imprisoning the PLA in the cantonments under the surveillance of UNMIN, and supporting the so-called freedom of bourgeois democracy and its parliamentary contest.

The imperialist powers, Indian expansionism and parliament have all played roles in bringing the Maoists to this juncture. That is how the Maoists, with their revolutionary roots, attained the leadership of a bourgeois government. So the general strike is a struggle that is being carried out within the parliamentary system. Let us not be confused by this brutal fact.

Dissatisfied mass

Understanding this history and the peaceful landing of the Maoists in 2006, it is then possible to trace their journey to bourgeois government. Nevertheless there is a dissatisfied mass that has accompanied this venture into the bourgeois system. This dissatisfied group does not possess any political or ideological readiness to fight against alliances made between the Maoist leadership and rightwing parties in the mainstream.

At the organisational level, there is a majority of revolutionaries in the party except at the central level. To make the things worse, the Maoists have transformed themselves into a mass that is integrated with the various opportunists. That is why the section of the leadership that is still revolutionary has fallen into a minority and become pessimistic about the possibility of something more than a democratic revolution. It has actually broken its revolutionary schooling by fully allying itself with neoliberal parties. The present strike is the expression of that process.

Even now the party still has a huge number of professional cadres and the poorest across the country are still supporting it. This is because the other mainstream parties, Nepali Congress and CPN (UML), are virtually absent in the villages. In the most remote villages the Maoists have been able to sustain the support of the poorest of the poor.

The general strike includes these masses, which the Maoists have brought to the city. But the strike fails to capture the type of revolution the people actually want. Rather the Maoists have been lobbying or bargaining with other parties for the leadership of the government. So the strike lacks a comprehensive plan and suffers from a lack of preparation. The activists have been patient but the Maoists want to control the whole struggle within the confines of parliamentary struggle. If the Maoists are serious about radical change they must declare the end of every agreement done with different national and international forces, starting with the 12-point agreement.

They must also accept the historical mistakes committed against the revolutionary movement, and apologise to the people. The PLA must be taken out of the cantonments. But the leadership is not prepared to do this. It is now deeply tied up with the bourgeois political system. The street demonstrations, without a revolutionary strategy behind them, are feeble attempts to resolve internal party contradictions that have accumulated over time. They have become the means to justify the need for the people's war and subsequent entry into government. The primary objective of the strike therefore has been the reorganisation of the bourgeois government.

Revolt

Lastly, the general strike in particular is mere pressure to lead the new government. This is not an exercise in revolution. The Maoists have moved to the right, with the strategy of bourgeois parliamentarianism. All of their tactics have been focused to this end. They talk about revolution with emotionally-charged activists while engaging in peaceful dialogue with reactionary forces.

The Maoists have become a parliamentary political power. They have exposed this character by focusing only on reforms within the parliamentary system. They desperately want to lead government, despite being a party with a remarkable number of revolutionaries within it, both in the leadership and the rank and file. In time those revolutionaries will have to revolt against conservative elements within the party and revitalise the idea of revolution from below by forming another revolutionary party.

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