

Prachanda Interview on the eve of the republic

By Mary Des Chene and Stephen Mikesell, MRZine, May 27, 2008

You may become Nepal's new head of state within a few days, but the parliamentary parties are putting up a lot of blockades. Yesterday your party put forth a 9-point proposal to address the current political impasse. What are the main barriers to formation of a CPN (Maoist)-led government at this point? What are the challenges and what are the proposals you've made to the parliamentary parties?

Intensive debate, discussion and struggle is going on, on the question of formation of the government, and mainly on the questions of the head of the state and the head of the government. These questions raise so many ideological and political issues, involving the class interests of the parties.

Yesterday we had a very serious discussion. The parliamentary parties, mainly the Nepali Congress and the CPN (UML), want to have their own person be the head of state. They want to check, they want to block our party from forming the government and filling the position of head of state. Therefore intensive struggle is going on right now. As we discuss these issues with the leaders of the other parties, it seems to me that intensive and serious class struggle is going on, on the level of ideology and political line. Because we have the status of the largest party through the constituent assembly election, the initiative is in our hands, but nevertheless intensive struggle continues. I think that by tomorrow we'll not be able to have consensus about the questions of the head of state and the formation of the government. Therefore right now we are thinking that we'll make an agreement only for the declaration of the republican system. And on that there will be consensus -- there should be consensus.

Your party has a clear mandate from the election to form the next government. The transitional government of the past two years has functioned on the basis of political consensus governed by the Seven Party Alliance accords and other formal agreements. From election day onward you've stressed the CPN (Maoist) commitment to continue with coalition government under those accords. The major parliamentary parties have set a number of conditions for participating in a Maoist-led coalition government, several of which you've stated directly contravene signed accords. At this point, if a coalition government under your party's leadership cannot be formed, what will be the main reasons?

I think that before the elections the parliamentary parties, especially the largest parliamentary party, the Nepali Congress, never expected that we would become the largest party through the election. Therefore they made so many agreements and compromises with our party, like those concerning the questions of a two-thirds majority and a simple majority [to change the government]. At that time they were in the leadership. Therefore they thought that a two-thirds majority requirement for changing the government would be just fine. But later on, when they saw that the Maoists had become the largest party and were going to lead the government and be head of the state, then they changed their position. Now they hold that a simple majority should be the means to change the government. Previously, up until the election, they didn't expect that they would lose through the election, and they thought that they could easily disintegrate our organisational structure and exert control over the PLA [People's Liberation Army] cadres and so on. But now, after the election, they think that it is going to be a very serious question. Therefore now they are making a proposal that our arms should be destroyed, and the PLA cadres should be disbanded or they should join vocational training or something like that. They're trying to raise those kinds of ridiculous things. This is against the peace agreement. This is against the spirit of the interim constitution.

The major parliamentary party, the Nepali Congress, has changed their positions after the election and are showing themselves to be against peace. It is going to be proved -- I think within some days, maybe within one or two weeks -- it will be crystal clear that the major political parliamentary parties are against

peace, against any kind of change, against forming a coalition government under the leadership of the Maoists. They are against the people's mandate, you know. It will be clear. If they will not move ahead in keeping with the spirit of the interim constitution, if they will not follow the peace agreement we have already made and all the other agreements and accords, ultimately it seems to me that it is a question of class outlook. The opposing classes are struggling in a very new contest. And one thing that is quite clear is that the proletariat and our revolutionary party have taken the initiative in our own hands. They [Nepali Congress and UML] are the losers. Right now, in this battle, in this electoral battle, they are the losers and we are the winners. Therefore a big debate and discussion and struggle is going on.

If they were successful in disbanding your army, how would that affect the possibility of creating the republic?

It would be very difficult. But I think they have already agreed to implement the republican system from the first meeting of the constituent assembly.

Right. But if your army was not there, then what force would you have against the king [who] remains in the background?

We will not disband our army. How could we agree to disband our army or destroy our arms? It has been formally agreed that both the armies should be integrated and a new national army should be established and organised. And we have never agreed to go with DDR, you know, this DDR formula [Disarmament, Demobilisation, Reintegration]. What we said is that, here in Nepal it is quite necessary that both armies should be integrated to form a new army. It is the essence of our agreement. Now, when they see that the Maoists have won the election, they want to change the previous agreement. Therefore at the moment we do not want to focus our discussion with the parliamentary parties on the questions of integration and so on. We want to focus our discussions on the questions of implementation of the republic and the republican system.

It is quite clear, and the masses know it very well, the masses are clear that the first sitting of the constituent assembly will implement the republican system and even all the parliamentary parties have already agreed to go with the republican system. In this phase of the struggle, we Maoists want to focus our whole effort to implement that previous agreement. I think that they cannot reject or retreat from the previous agreement on the question of the republic. If they hesitate to implement this republican system tomorrow then ... It is going to happen you know. This is the historical turning point against the feudal system. If they will hesitate, I think that they will be crossed by the masses. The masses will not tolerate them. Because they have already lost through the election. If they hesitate to implement the republican system, then they will lose yet more, you see.

Tomorrow, on the day when the constituent assembly sits to declare the republic, the Kathmandu District Administration has declared restrictions on marches, rallies and assembling on the streets surrounding the convention centre, the palace and other places in the capital. But many marches and cultural programs have already been announced, and the people seem sure to come out, whether to ensure that their will is carried out or just to celebrate. How are you viewing that move to restrict the people's movement?

We have already decided to hold rallies all over the country. There will be mass rallies in all seventy-five district headquarters. And here in Kathmandu there will also be a victory rally, a republican rally. It will be a great day for us, for the people of this country. But they will not go to encircle the palace, or go near the Birendra International Convention Centre hall where the first meeting of the constituent assembly is going to be held. But they will be in the streets, near Singhadarbar [the usual parliamentary venue] and in other places. They'll be chanting slogans in favor of the republic and so on. But there will not be -- we are trying our best not to be in a confrontation tomorrow. It would not be good, it would not be proper to have any kinds of confrontation tomorrow. We want to show the masses who are in favor of the republican line. There will be a festive atmosphere. It will be like a people's festival, a republican festival. It will be very big, and a great thing for our people. But some reactionary people, mainly those who are loyal to the monarchy, they are trying to carry out some sorts of sabotage and some sorts of terrorist activities.

Yesterday they exploded some small socket bombs near the convention center hall, and in the houses of civil society figures. But I don't think they will be able to create some big sabotage or anything.

If you have to form a sole government without the cooperation of the other parties are you ready to do that?

Yes. If they are not ready, and if they want it so, then we'll form our own government without their cooperation. They may think that within three months or a hundred days -- there's the saying that 100 days is the honeymoon -- that after the honeymoon they can encircle us and dismantle our government. They think like that. But we believe that once we are in the government we'll take so many decisions, important decisions, in favour of the masses of the people and in favor of our nation, and that those kinds of decisions will allow us to have a broader mass base and broader organisation and will ultimately help us to move ahead.

You've used the term "economic revolution" and said that after forming the government the task is economic revolution. Tell us a bit about your first steps; the economy is in very bad shape.

Yes, I think that economic development and sustainable peace have a very compact relation. Without having development it is very difficult to have a sustainable peace. And here in our country there are huge natural resources: for example, we have a huge hydro potential, tourism can be a big industry in this country, this beautiful country. There are so many things we can do.

For the time being what we are seeing is that we should have to follow a mixed economic system. I also want to qualify that it is not exactly a mixed economic system; we are trying to develop some new approaches in our transitional economic policy. We have not completed the democratic revolution, you know. We are in the process of the completion of the democratic revolution. But after 10 years of peoples war we have achieved some political and some socioeconomic change, which is already in process. Because that revolution is in the transitional phase we are trying to develop some new tactics and new policy according to the overall economic situation and national situation of the first decades of the 21st century. Therefore we shall have to follow a transitional economic policy. Not exactly the economic policy of the New Democracy, not exactly the economic policy of the bourgeois system, but something in-between. We are saying that this is a transitional economic policy, and we want to decide our own priority by ourselves.

And we want to encourage the national capitalist, or "national bourgeois" as we say, we want to encourage them to invest and to generate employment, and to invest in the industrial sector, which will create some new possibilities. And through them we want to attract the foreign investment, but according to our decision, according to our priority. Until now, all the decisions have been taken not by the Nepali people and the Nepali government, but by the foreigners and international institutions, like the World Bank. But this time we want to change that pattern. We want to decide our own priorities, we want to encourage our national bourgeois to have a conducive atmosphere for investment and generation of employment, and through them we want to attract the foreign investors according to our decision, according to our priority. In the rural area and in the hydro sector we want to have small hydro projects, medium-level hydro projects, and big hydro projects. Not just the large ones.

One problem is that you are being handed over a practically bankrupt state, one heavily in debt, and that won't leave you much leeway, at least if you work in the old terms, so how are you going to address that?

I think it is a challenge, and we are taking it as a positive challenge. The first question is to mobilise the millions of the masses to rebuild this country. Until and unless we mobilise the masses, nothing can be done. We will transparently divulge everything to the mass of the people: this is the situation here in the country, the world government and world state has led this country to this bankruptcy. Now, if everyone of this country, every citizen of this country will not make a commitment to go ahead to build the country themselves, it will be very difficult for us sustain and undertake development. Therefore our first priority

will be to educate the masses of people about the real situation of the government and all these things that have happened in the past.

The second point is that we will try our best to mobilise the national bourgeois, the national capitalists. There are so many people who can contribute. If we draw up a scientific plan, an economic plan, according to our situation, we can mobilise those industrialists and those national capitalists or national bourgeois to invest in a more productive way. And I also think that, because we are in between China and India, both of which have very fast growing economies, we can benefit from their growing economies. I myself have tried my best to have serious discussions with China's Communist Party and China's government. How can they help to rebuild this country? How much will they be able to contribute, and how far can they mobilise their peoples to invest here in our country? And we were also talking with the Indian parties and Indian government officials: how can they contribute to our efforts in rebuilding this country? So I think that from both these countries, according to our plan and according to our priorities, we can mobilise positive economic input. This is something challenging, we know it, but this is something beneficial for this country.

What about the role of the youth of this country in all of these plans? The thousands who are migrant labourers outside the country, now the thousands and thousands who are unemployed here, and the Young Communist League, your own youth organisation?

Yes, we are working on drawing up a plan to mobilise the youth in rebuilding this country. Our YCL has already been mobilised: thousands and thousands of youth were mobilised before the election in a political mobilisation. Now we are going to mobilise them in the constructive work, in economic development. And we are also trying to make a connection with all the people working outside the country. Non-resident Nepalis are there, and the organisation of non-resident Nepalis; those people can contribute more in rebuilding this country, and we want to invite them to invest here in Nepal. We have already developed a plan for how we can mobilise thousands of peoples who are outside the country, who are doing business elsewhere. Some of them have done a very good job, they have earned substantial amounts of money, they can invest here, and we can contact them.

And also I think that we can bring back youth who are in Arab countries and all over the world, if we have a plan for building this country. I have already discussed some hydro power, medium-level hydro projects. And if there will be five, six or seven of such kinds of project all over the country, we can mobilise thousands and thousands of youth in that kind of project. And when they see that there are jobs in our own country, they will come back and we can mobilise that kind of youth.

And what about bringing young people back into agriculture, which is the base of the economy here?

Yes, we have already agreed to carry out scientific land reform. Here in Nepal there is a different situation in the Tarai [lowland plains], in mountainous areas and in the hilly regions. We have to make a complete plan of land reform for the hilly region, for the Himalayan region and for the Tarai. But the main focus of this scientific land reform will be the Tarai because the bulk of the agricultural land is there. There should be land ceilings and the land of absentee landlords should be redistributed among the peasants.

But our main focus will be commercialising the farming. Without commercialised farming we can't develop agriculture. And we want to establish agro-based industries. We can't mobilise the youth in the agricultural sector with only the traditional ways of farming. We have to create something new by creating jobs in agro-based industry. And that will ultimately commercialise the overall farming, and it will be a revolutionary step to raise the living standards of the people.