

Comrade Rashmi: Mobilising Youth for New Democratic Revolution

Report of a conversation with representatives of the WPRM – Britain, on Sept. 20, 2009



One evening in Kathmandu, we had the pleasure of meeting Ganesh Man Pun, Comrade Rashmi, which translates as 'Moonlight'. Coming to our hotel, Rashmi arrived in the middle of one of the daily power cuts which occur every evening, making his name more apt for the occasion as we talked over the light of the moon coming through our third floor window and one small oil burning lamp. Rashmi is a Central Committee member of the Unified Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) as well as the Chairman of the Young Communist League (YCL).

He began our discussion by telling us his own background in the party.

Becoming involved in politics as a student, Rashmi was soon a whole-timer cadre for the All-Nepal National Independent Student Union (Revolutionary) before becoming a district member of the YCL. Rising through the ranks Rashmi led one of the four attacks that comprised the initiation of the People's War on 13th February, 1996. As commander of one of the groups, Rashmi led the attack on a police post in Rukum district, capturing many weapons and explosives. He explained to us that "after capturing many policemen, we told them the reasons for our action. We told them they are our brothers, but we are fighting for New Democratic Revolution, against feudal and comprador rule in Nepal. We released them and told them not to fight against us in the future." 29 days after this, Rashmi's father, a local party and Peasant Association member, was martyred, being caught in his home by the police who had been summoned by a local feudalist. The police promptly led him outside into the yard and shot him. Rashmi spoke of this incident without bitterness, but with an intense pride in the martyrdom of his father, who, he said, died for the people.

Four months later, Rashmi became District Secretary of Rukum. He led a boycott of the local election, making sure that most VDCs in the district returned a vote of zero, with the others only returning partial results. In 1997 however, Rashmi was captured by the police in Nepalgunj on his way to a Central Committee convention. He was imprisoned under the Security Act and subjected to the norms of prison life,

where beatings were commonplace. In 2001 he was suffering from appendicitis and was taken to hospital in Nepalgunj, from where he masterminded his own escape. With the help of sympathetic nurses and students, Rashmi managed to communicate with the party outside, and some days after the operation an urban guerrilla group successfully liberated him from the hospital. Rashmi spoke in his usual jovial style of his time inside, saying that "in prison, four years only felt like four days. But when I was rescued and I met my comrades and the people in my district again, I realised the People's War had developed to such a height. Then I felt that four years had really been forty years."

After his release, Comrade Rashmi was a Central Committee member and soon became a political commissar of the People's Liberation Army (PLA). He was present at the Chunwang meeting, where the party decided to form a United Front with the bourgeois parliamentary parties against the monarchy. Rashmi then became a division commander of the PLA 4th Division, covering the Rapti region, but after the 2006 People's Movement-2 he was transferred from the PLA, which was soon to be put in cantonments, to the YCL. According to Rashmi, "when the PLA were put in cantonments the reactionaries thought the Maoists would surrender. But we reorganised the YCL into a militant force to change society. Our organisation became famous throughout the whole country." When the Maoists merged with another communist party, the CPN (Unity-Centre-Masal), the YCL also merged with its youth group, the Democratic Youth Association. While Rashmi's life so far seems to be one of sacrifice and struggle, he married a comrade who is also a Central Committee member and they have one son, named Azad, the Nepali word for 'liberation'.

Rashmi went on to describe to us the history of the YCL, which is seen as the continuation of the first communist youth organisation in Nepal set up in 1951. In the early 1980s this organisation, which had gone under various names, was led by Comrade Prachanda, before he became a Central Committee member. After the initiation of the People's War, the YCL carried out mass work and public service under the slogan of Chairman Mao, 'serve the people', but only worked at the local level because of security difficulties. Rashmi described it as "the kindergarten of the party," as many YCL members went on to join local militia and the PLA. In 2006, after the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, the YCL was reorganised and became known at the national and international level. At the national convention Rashmi was reelected as chairman and there was a 45 member Central Committee. Now the YCL is working under the slogan of "civilian supremacy and national sovereignty." In the last three years they have been working in urban areas to widen roads, in sanitation and also planting trees. They have also been struggling with people, including corrupt people and policemen and also members of humanitarian organisations.

In recent times, a national campaign to safeguard the border with India has come to prominence, especially in the eastern part where there have been encroachments by India. The YCL has held discussions with the Indian border security force, erected border stones and mobilised people against these encroachments. In this respect it seems that the YCL is carrying out many activities that the bourgeois state is unable or unwilling to carry out. The YCL has also benefited from the Maoist "1 in 3 policy," which means that one third representation for youth in Maoist organisations is guaranteed. The YCL are campaigning to scrap the "feudal" minimum 45 years old age limit placed on some positions and also for lowering the voting age to 16, the age at which Nepali youth receive their citizenship certificate.

We then discussed the question of the portrayal of the YCL as a terrorist organisation. These days it seems not one day passes without an article in the Nepali bourgeois English-language press in condemnation of YCL violence. Rashmi however explained that "as the imperialists and expansionists propagate the YCL as a terrorist organization, so this is a sign of their imminent defeat. They want to diffuse and defeat our organisation, but we are not terrorists. The people of Nepal know this, not only the peasants and workers but also intellectuals and humanitarian workers. They all expect the YCL to do good work and struggle against corrupt people, against imperialist and comprador forces.

We asked Rashmi for his opinion on the shift in the struggle, from one of People's War in rural areas, to one of legal open struggle centred mainly on urban areas in general and Kathmandu in particular. He emphasised that the struggle now has to be fought in a different way and that the struggle is very complicated. He went on, "now we are in urban areas, like Kathmandu. As the revolution is still unfinished at

this time, there are some problems with our links to the countryside. But we are struggling to open some local bodies and our organisation is there continuing the revolution and the class struggle in the villages, carrying out development work in infrastructure and transportation.”

Of interest to us is the news story from this morning’s Himalayan Times (18/09/2009), about the reestablishment of people’s governments in Jajarkot. Rashmi continued, “the reactionary forces wanted us to become reformist. They wanted us to become the third party of Nepal, like another UML [the revisionist party currently leading the government]. But with the force of the people and the force of the strategy and tactics of our party, we have not become reformist. We took up the leadership of the government and the reactionary forces accepted us because they wanted to make us become another UML. However, we have not become another UML. We are fighting for civilian supremacy against the actions of General Katawal. This question was a crucial question, a borderline question over whether our party was revolutionary or reformist. If we had surrendered on this issue, we would have become a reformist party. But we proved that we are still revolutionary. We left the government and because of this we have united with many revolutionary and nationalist forces since then, many writers and people in the public domain.”

Indeed, the affair over the general has been made into a somewhat unimportant affair by the bourgeois media here, an example for them of Maoist contempt for coalition politics. But for the Maoists it has become a focal point showing the continued domination of Nepal by foreign powers, principally India, and the role of the Nepali Army leadership in preventing the development of the country and the consolidation of the victories gained through the People’s War and the People’s Movement-2 of 2006.

The topic of conversation soon turned to the increasing level of talk amongst the Maoists and in the papers of the People’s Movement-3 and popular insurrection. Rashmi emphasized that the role of the YCL was essential in this, that they would mobilise the people and make the struggle militant. The situation now is centred on the writing of the new constitution. As is popularly known, both the Maoists, who are in favour of a People’s Republic of Nepali characteristics, and the other forces, who are in favour of institutionalising a bourgeois parliamentary system, lack the strength in the Constituent Assembly to write the constitution, which requires two-thirds votes to ratify each component part.

Rashmi explained however that “the mass movement as well as the PLA in the cantonments will be a massive pressure on the opposition forces. The recently convened United National People’s Movement, a united front organisation under the leadership of Baburam Bhattarai, will also pressure them and lay the basis for a successful people’s movement and New Democratic Revolution. It will also warn US imperialism and Indian expansionism against intervening in our revolution.” He also stressed that while the PLA are in cantonments there is still the possibility of armed struggle in the future. However, in the current situation, the most important thing is to create a peaceful mass movement for New Democracy.

As we walked out into the street to wave a ‘red salute’ in goodbye, Rashmi shook us warmly by the hand. He had skipped his dinner for this meeting but seemed full of vigour as he walked away. Again we have been impressed by the way in which the leaders of the Nepali revolution have interacted with us, clear and confident in their goals and down-to-earth and friendly in their personality, inspiring in us a great level of confidence in the future course of the revolution.

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