

Setback in Nepal

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The split among the Maoists at a time when there is yet another deadlock in the Constitution writing process in Nepal is a major setback for both the democratic process as well as the left movement in that country.

The Unified Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) has finally split. Vice chairman of the party, Mohan Baidya, who had given way to Pushpa Kumar Dahal aka Prachanda to lead the earlier avatar of the Maoist party in the 1980s, has now formally led what many commentators believed was bound to happen, a rupture from the party and the creation of a new radical outfit, the Communist Party of Nepal, Maoist. Baidya is now the chairman of the new party while Ram Bahadur Thapa "Badal" has been elected as its general secretary.

This is a significant development in Nepal politics. It also marks the beginning of a major crisis in Nepal's radical left movement. Differences between the Baidya faction (comprising a large chunk of the party leadership and cadre) and that led by chairman Prachanda and prime minister Baburam Bhattarai (their support base was among the former People's Liberation Army cadre and in the party's "united front") were too large to be bridged by attempts at consensus anymore. There was too much asymmetry in the political lines of the two factions - Baidya's faction was vehemently opposed to the direction taken since 2005 by the Maoists that culminated in the peace process and the federal democratic nation-state enunciated by them, which abandoned the principle of the formation of a "peoples' republic" in the immediate future. The differences became sharper after some of the moves made by the Bhattarai-led government to reconcile with the Indian establishment in order to take the peace process and constitution writing process forward.

Interviewing Mohan Baidya last year

Gongabu is a distinct working class locality in Kathmandu. It was an unusual place to meet a major political leader of Nepal in the sprawling city in the hills in September last year. Most other political leaders - in the otherwise crowded and congested city - were based in plusher locales and lived in slightly more luxurious abodes. A friend of mine commented that it was unusual to see even communist leaders living in such well to do quarters, when he accompanied me as I, for the first time, went around Kathmandu interviewing a cross

section of Nepal's Kathmandu- based polity.

Mohan Baidya "Kiran" lives in an upscale apartment that is distinctive in the sense it doesn't look like a place that was the abode of a senior leader - the senior most in the strongest political outfit in Nepal. It seemed that Kiran had chosen this place specifically to underline his stature and position in the party - as a "truer" representative of the proletarian party. He came across as very matter-of-fact, serious and somewhat wary about the two (of us) Indian reporters who had wanted to interview him about the current state of affairs in Nepal. But as we asked questions that were related to his ideological positions, his wariness disappeared and he was answering us keenly with a glint in his eye. In fluent Hindi, he was condemning his party's "*navashanshodanvaadi*" (neorevisionist) leadership, accusing them of betraying the revolution and saying in no uncertain terms that the party was headed in the wrong direction. He then went on to explain what he thought the path to revolution was; laying out in no uncertain terms that the current (then) model of engagement with the bourgeois parties to write a Constitution and compromising on the goal of a "new democratic revolution" was foolhardy.

Baidya's belief was that the party leadership had strayed from their agreed endeavours to construct a "peoples' federal democratic republic". The word "people" is of importance and not just a semantic construct. Baidya certainly did not believe that there was a need to go back to "peoples' war" and to fight for a "new democratic republic" by smashing the existing state apparatus. He nonetheless believed that it was futile making concession after concession, especially on the issue of the integration/rehabilitation of former PLA combatants into the Nepal army or on the nature of the prospective government following the CA process.

Baidya had also expressed deep concerns with the role India was playing in the process, seeing no difference in its change from a position attempting to isolate the Maoists in 2009-10 to a more conciliatory approach that sought to engage with them provided they were willing to concede ground on the PLA integration issue. Baidya found fault with his party leadership's cosiness with the Indian establishment, arguing that this course of action for a "democratic Constitution" went against their party's cherished nationalist principles - a cornerstone of their differences with other political outfits in the country. Baidya was clear that the Maoists had to reconstruct a "patriotic alliance" to take on the external influence in their state's affairs. When we asked if by that, he meant an alliance with pro-monarchic forces, he corrected us by saying that he was talking of alliances with sections of the populace beyond parties or political forces alone. The overriding theme of his views was the need for "popular movements" even as the CA process was on and to prepare for an insurrection against anti-patriotic forces.

Our interview with Baidya was before the visit of Bhattarai in late October 2011 to India , where the latter was feted by the Indian establishment, civil society and sections of the media for presumably being the cornerstone of the process of changing Nepal from a

monarchy to a republic. The signing of a bilateral investment treaty with India did not go too well with Baidya's faction either and they in fact ratcheted up their opposition to the party leadership after Bhattarai's return¹.

Interview with the prime minister last year

We had interviewed the prime minister soon after talking with Baidya to elicit his views on the dissension in his party's ranks over his government's manoeuvres (and before his India visit). Bhattarai, after mentioning that he was deeply respectful of the personal integrity of Mohan Baidya, placed his differences with the faction. He suggested that there is a deep ideological schism with the dissenters which originated with the decision in the Chunwang meeting in 2005 to end the peoples' war and to go for building a Naya Nepal. He expressed his concern that Mohan Baidya, who was, at the time of the Chunwang meeting, incarcerated in India, had never reconciled with that change in Maoist tactics made then.

A tactical line that favoured a socialist revolution instead of a democratic revolution by identifying the primary contradiction as that between nationalistic (patriotic forces) and imperialism (and external influence) was bound to fail, in Bhattarai's opinion. As there was popular support for the "bourgeois democratic revolution" - the creation of a constituent assembly, declaration of a republic and for state restructuring to create a "Naya Nepal" based on a truer federalism - it was imperative to complete the democratic process by negotiations with other forces in the Constituent Assembly. The prime minister was confident that the Nepali Congress and the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified-Marxist-Leninist) - in the opposition - would come on board as the government under his leadership had tried to achieve consensus as much as possible on major contentious issues and that the CA process will finally be completed². This democratic revolution - combined with measures in government to tackle economic issues in the country - would enable the defeat of the remnants of feudalism in the state structure despite the removal of monarchy.

The prime minister expressed the hope that, with the support of the party chairman, this line of leading the democratic revolution in Nepal would triumph in the two line struggle in his party and that the struggle would be managed well. After all, in his view, the new tactical line of leading a revolution was through "new weapons" - popular agitations on the street, using the constituent assembly and the newly written Constitution. This was in contrast to the older weapons of Maoist praxis - hegemony of the Maoist party, the people's liberation army and the united front - and was possible only if the party was united. The prime minister's was relying on his pet theme, the "unity and struggle" tactic - he was keen on uniting with his opponents in the party while at the same time engaging in an ideological struggle with them.

Failure despite successes

A year since assuming power, the Maoist-Madhesi government managed to notch up a few

successes. The long delayed peace process – held up because of differences over the integration/rehabilitation of Maoist combatants – was completed, following a comprehensive peace package that was arrived at after much deliberation. Yet, this only heightened differences with what Bhattarai and his party chairman called the “dogmatic” sections of the party. Many of the PLA cadre themselves chose to get due compensations for release from cantonments even as a chunk of them agreed to integrate into security roles in the Nepal Army. The Baidya-led faction termed this to be a betrayal to the revolutionary cause.

Nearly every move of the Maoist-Madhesi government was second-guessed or questioned by the Baidya faction. The other knotty issue that held up the constitution writing process – state restructuring – saw a return to rigid positions among the upper caste and hill elite dominated Nepali Congress and UML leadership. Unwilling to accept either a 10 state model (as proposed by an all party state restructuring commission) or a 14 state model (proposed by a CA committee on state restructuring), both these parties pushed a deal on the Constitution to the brink, [forcing the government with no other option but to dissolve the CA](#). The government was already under pressure from the Supreme Court for the repeated extensions to the CA beyond stated deadlines and with the NC and UML refusing to accept a majority proposal on state restructuring, little remained by way of building consensus over the issue.

The dissolution of the CA and the declaration of fresh elections to a new CA should have resulted in the Maoists closing ranks and proclaiming unity as there were no two voices on the issue of state restructuring despite the dissensions in the party. Yet, differences among the factions had reached a boiling point and the Baidya-led faction actually teamed up with the opposition to demand the resignation of its own party's prime minister. It also demanded a round table process to write the constitution – an extra-constitutional manoeuvre that had little legal or popular binding as the elected CA was the only legitimate forum formed through the people's will.

The split has therefore come at a most inopportune time. There is total confusion over the “caretaker” status of the present government. The opposition has continued to refuse to heed the call for fresh elections – announced by the government to be held on November 22nd this year – and there is little movement in positions on the state restructuring issue within them as well. The formation of a new party – formally positioning itself to the left of the Maoists but tactically seen to be in concert with the opposition on issues such as the present prime minister's continuance in office or the call for elections – has only complicated things further. It has also put in jeopardy the progressive project of writing and establishing a constitution guaranteeing a truly federal democratic republic.

It seems that the 20th century component of the Maoist party – still enamoured by the praxis of the Chinese Communist Party under the leadership of Mao Tse-Tung and unreconstructed in its tactical approach toward achieving socialism in Nepal – has found it untenable to

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continue with the 21st century component - which seems to be inspired by the success of innovative tactical methods as seen in Latin America for example and has forged a new indigenously arrived at path for itself in Nepal. In effect, it is a major setback not only to the left movement in Nepal but to all of those who wanted a break from the past in that country.

1 The EPW had commented editorially on this - "[Winning India Over](#)",

2 This author had shared that optimism in an earlier article for the EPW - "[Moment for Peace and Constitution building in Nepal](#)", October 8, 2011