

On the Causes of the Civil War in Nepal and the Role of the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist)

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Introduction

Nepal, a small Asian country situated between India and China, experienced a bloody civil war that lasted from 1996 to 2006. The aim of this article is to identify the factors that led to this civil confrontation and the conditions under which an initially small leftist party, the CPN-Maoist, won the leadership of the popular layers, emerged as the hegemonic rival to the autocratic royal power and modified the balance of forces, contributing to the abolition of the monarchy and the transformation of Nepal into a secular state. For all this to become comprehensible, however, what is required is that one embark on a detailed presentation of the political and social history of Nepal, subsequently highlighting the particular issues that have put their stamp on this specific course of social development.

Review of the recent political history of Nepal

a) From the establishment of Nepal to the fall of the Rana Dynasty (1769- 1951)

The history of Nepal begins essentially from the time that it was constituted as an independent state in 1769. It was then that the Hindu Shah dynasty, which originated in the Gorkha district, moved into action and gradually conquered the princedoms of the Kathmandu Valley, on the Eastern and Western hills. This process was to continue from 1769 until the beginning of the 19th century. A new, militarily strong, state was thus brought into existence, covering quite a large geographical area. The whole dynamic was checked when the new state came into conflict with the East India Company and suffered a military defeat, with the result that Nepal was reduced to the state of a quasi-protectorate. In addition to certain territorial annexations, Britain thus acquired de facto control of the foreign policy of Kathmandu. Nepal may not formally have been relegated to the status of the Indian protectorate princedoms but in reality British priorities defined the limits of Nepalese political power (Parajulee 2000: 31).

The situation in Nepal throughout the 18th century and until the mid-19th century therefore displayed the following characteristics: a number of independent princedoms were violently annexed into a larger state stamped by the presence of the Shahs' military apparatus and the Hindu religion. The consequence of this at the socio-economic level was that the mode of exploitation of the land that had prevailed up until its conquest by the Shah was abolished, community property was converted into state property and the central state rewarded its various office-holders by ceding to them parcels of land in recompense for their services. In this way a variant of the Asiatic mode of production¹ came into existence whereby the conquered non-Hindu national groups became objects of exploitation by the dominant political group, with the leaders of the subaltern nationalities playing the role of intermediaries (Adhikari 1980: 148-150).

The Nepalese elite was nevertheless marked by serious internal conflicts linked to the controversy over who was to enjoy primacy, the King or the Prime Minister. This would be resolved by the Kot Massacre (1846) in the course of which, under circumstances that remain unclarified, the greater part of the Royal Family was exterminated – a turn of events that would enable the military administrator of Nepal, Jang Bahadur Rana, to take power and establish the Rana Dynasty, which as Prime Ministers dominated the country until 1950. From that point onwards the King was confined to certain forms of ceremonial presence, deprived of any kind of power. The Rana family was to perpetuate its power through continual palace coups and compromises with the British, who were gratified each time that the Nepalese assisted them in their various expeditions.²

In this way a framework of domination was constructed whereby the British tolerated the power of the Rana insofar as in every circumstance Nepalese military assistance was forthcoming, while at the same time within Nepal a succession of significant social transformations began to take place. On the one hand a type of caste system was established, with people being separated into four hierarchically

¹ Very briefly we note that the Asiatic mode of production is characterized by the absence of private ownership of land and the presence of state ownership. For this reason the greater part of the social surplus product, in the form of tribute tax, is appropriated by the central government. Management of this surplus brings into existence a ruling class linked to the administration of state functions and sustained by this surplus. The state functionaries did not possess any hereditary rights to their position but were appointed by the central power as executive instruments for implementation of its decisions (Mandel 1996; Milios 1996).

² Expedition against the Sikhs (1849), suppression of the rebellion in the Awadh district of India (1857), war in Tibet 1903-1904, 1st World War, Third Anglo-Afghan War (1919).

structured castes, while on the other a hybrid production system prevailed. State property (Asiatic mode of production), based on relatively autonomous functioning of the power of the different statelets, underwent transformation with the emergence of a variety of paternalistic feudalism, with a hybrid productive system where a significant proportion of the land was ceded to private persons, particularly among the members of the Rana family. Bulwarks of public order were the different varieties of middlemen tax collectors. The state began to privatize the land, availing itself of different legal constructs and ceding it to individuals (Birta), religious and humanitarian foundations (Guthi), government officials (Jagir), royal vassals and former governors (Raija), local tax farmers (Jirayat, Ukhada, etc.) and others, making it possible for intermediate rent-collecting interests to start to operate between the immediate producers and the State (Pridle 1978: 62).

This feudalistic phase reached its climax at the beginning of the 20th century with the imposition on the peasant farmers of a series of oppressive extra-economic measures by the State including a labour service requirement known as “jhara” that entailed performing occasional unpaid work to deal with conjunctural needs, and “rakan,” which was a tax on labour in exchange for regular exemption from special duties. But there is no evidence of widespread use of the hiring out of labour power as in feudal Europe and in that sense there is no perceptible “feudalism” in the history of Nepal except as a specific and peculiar variant on classical feudalism (Bhattarai 2003: 68).

At the political level, the internal conflicts within the Rana may indeed have continued unabated but they did not lead to any destabilization of the regime. The first serious challenges were to arise under the influence of the movements opposing colonialism that were beginning to emerge in Northern India and the movement of civil disobedience headed by Gandhi. An important role was also played by the gradual rise in the educational level of the Nepalese, particularly through the medium of people returning to their homeland after studies abroad. The result of all this was that some initial reactions were generated against the Rana without them leading to any specific outcome. One of the factors contributing to the defusing of the situation was that, appreciating the repeated instances of military assistance that Nepal had given them, the British after a certain point, in the 20s, recognized the country as an independent state, a development that helped to legitimate the regime.

It was not until the end of the Second World War that the regime of the Rana finally collapsed. An important role in this was played by India's achievement of independence in 1947 but the most important factor was internal: the never-ending conflicts within the Rana between supporters of a conservative and of a progressive line had weakened them as a power centre, the more so because the first timid stirrings of capitalist growth were demanding a different political framework in which to expand. The catalysts for these developments were on the one hand the autonomization of the monarchy³ and on the other the creation of the Nepalese Congress.⁴

b) From the fall of the Rana to the end of the Panchayat system (1951-1990)

The fall of the Rana came when King Tribhuvan fled to India, from where he began to denounce the regime of the Rana, with the Congress at the same time commencing armed resistance. Finally, after intervention by India, there was an agreement between the opposing sides and a transitional government was formed (with the Rana also participating). This government was supposed to usher in a system based on Western-style constitutional monarchy.

The problem that arose, however, is that through the 1950s the role of the king gradually grew stronger and stronger: under the Interim Government of Nepal Act, which was ratified in March 1951, Tribhuvan acquired executive powers and the right to issue edicts. Subsequently, taking advantage of the continual conflicts between the political parties he began to appoint governments of his preference, at the same time assuming the title of supreme military commander. In a new Act of September 1952 all executive power was transferred from the Ministerial Council to the king. The monarch was no longer required to act on the advice of his ministers but, on the

³ In this period too the Rana continued the policy of confining the king within the four walls of the palace. But on the pretext of going on a hunting trip he managed, in 1950, together with his family, to escape from the palace and seek asylum in the Indian Embassy in Kathmandu and then finally, with Indian assistance, take up residence in India. The Rana immediately installed his three-year-old grandson, Gyanendra Bikram Shah, on the throne, hoping – in vain – to secure recognition from the USA and Britain. From the outset the Indians condemned this move of the Rana, warning them that India would continue to support King Tribhuvan.

⁴ In a meeting that took place in Calcutta in April 1950 the Nepali Rashtriya Congress, together with the Nepali Prajatantrik Congress (Nepali Democratic Congress) joined forces in a single political organization, the Nepali Congress (NC). The Nepali Prajatantrik Congress had been established by dissidents from the Rana family. It had more substantial funds at its disposal but the Nepali Rashtriya Congress was superior in organizational terms.

contrary, could at his discretion exercise executive power directly or delegate this power to another. The movement towards absolute royal power was accelerated when in January 1954 there were new institutional reforms, the most important of which was the forfeiture of the powers that had been granted to the High Court under the Constitution of 1951.

The King's basic objective had now become unmistakably clear: a return to the situation prior to 1846, with the Throne all-powerful. Given the stance of the King in the period of the anti-Rana movement and the situation of political paralysis that prevailed in the country, Tribhuvan appeared as the embodiment of political unity, with substantial political legitimacy. By contrast, the parties whose most cherished aspiration was to participate in the government had an aura of political opportunism about them (Parajulee 2000: 42). The death of Tribhuvan (17/3/1955) and the crowning of Mahendra (2/5/1955), who reigned from 1955 to 1971, did not change anything in the strategy that had already been adopted by the Throne. Mahendra continued to rule directly, with the assistance of an Advisory Assembly (Pruthi 2007: 108).

But after a certain point the authoritarianism of the King started to provoke widespread reaction, resulting in the formation of a front comprised of the three biggest parties: the Congress Party, the Rashtriva Congress and the Praja Parishad, which organized a powerful civil disobedience movement. Faced with this situation, the King was obliged to accept the holding of elections on 18th February 1959. The elections did indeed take place on 18th February 1959, and the results were announced in the first week of April. The Congress Party emerged as the first party in size, with 37.2% of the votes and occupying 74 of the 109 seats owing to the institution of a majority electoral system. Its leader, B.P. Koirala, assumed the prime ministership of the country on 27th May. The policies pursued by the Congress Party met with reaction from all points of the political spectrum: the social layers that had benefited from the Rana period saw the feudal rights they had been accorded taken away from them, while an axis of parties sometimes including the Communist Party of Nepal accused the Government of corruption, of running a party state and of making unacceptable concessions in agreements they negotiated with India and China.

The persistence of the mobilizations, which objectively strengthened the position of the King, made it possible for him to exercise his institutional prerogatives and put an end to the parliamentary experiment in Nepal. On 15th December 1960 he

dissolved the Parliament and dismissed the government. A few weeks later he banned the functioning of the parliamentary parties.

The parties were to make it impossible for an opposition movement to be created that could succeed in mounting effective opposition to the King's coup d'état, with the result that monarchical government was to prevail for 30 years by virtue of the Panchayat system. The term *Panchayat* is a Hindu word meaning village council. In this way the King wanted show that there should be a return to Nepalese roots and that the country should distance itself from the influence of the two great states that bordered it on both sides, and particularly from India, for fear had been aroused that India was threatening the sovereignty and the independence of Nepal.

In reality the new dispensation did not in any way usher in a more participatory presence of the popular layers in the government of the country, simply because the monarchy occupied the central position in the Panchayat system. The King was the source of all powers (legislative, executive and judiciary). He was able to exercise these powers either in person or via instrumentalities provided for in the Constitution and the related legislation. He also had the right to declare a state of emergency in the country, meaning that he could suspend certain or all of the articles of the Constitution for as long as he deemed expedient. No financial or military expenditure could be debated by the National Panchayat (Rastriya Panchayat) without the consent of the King, and his imprimatur was required even in the event of the National Panchayat approving some such expenditure. The continuation of the Prime Minister in his post depended on the will of the King, and the ministers were both individually and collectively answerable to the Monarch and served his desires. At the judicial level the King had powers of granting a pardon, was able to suspend, postpone or abolish any decision made by any court and there was no right of appeal against his decisions in any court. All these powers are explicable by the fact that he was regarded as the protector of tradition and the symbol of national unity. At the religious level he was seen as the incarnation of the Hindu god Vishnu (Singh 2007: 110, 114).

Albeit with a number of revisions (1967, 1975), the system was to remain essentially intact until the student movement burst onto the scene in 1980. The demands were initially student-related but the dynamic of the mobilizations acted as a catalyst for more general discontent with the regime. The violent response of the police was to lead to the deaths of demonstrators, further sharpening the reactions,

with the result that the government was obliged to accept some of the students' demands. Things had seemed to be ending there when the most radical wing of the student movement (CPN Marxist-Leninist and CPN [Fourth Conference]) denounced the agreement, to which other Communist groupings had consented, as a betrayal. This stance, to judge from subsequent developments, appeared to resonate with broader social forces, so that the conflict spread to half of the regions of Nepal. Following this, the King was forced to announce the holding of a referendum on the future of the Panchayat system.

Nevertheless, the framework within which the 1980 referendum was conducted was widely regarded as unfavourable for the opposition forces owing to their fragmentation. On the other hand the pro-Panchayat forces, in spite of their surprise at the conduct of the referendum, soon mobilized their support networks. Kathmandu radio broadcasts only views supportive of the regime, state officials exerted a variety of pressures, particularly in the countryside, in favour of the system, and the stance of the King was only formally neutral. The result was that on 2nd May 1980, 57.4% of the votes were in favour and the Panchayat system remained in force.

It should be noted, however, that the attested presence of a strong opposition induced the King to attempt to co-opt the dynamic of the oppositional forces through the constitutional revision of December 1980. The reforms instituted universal suffrage for the election of the national Panchayat and election of the Prime Minister by the Parliament, and they also made the government answerable to the parliament. (Mishra 2006: 14). These changes were indisputably in a progressive direction, but the establishment of another institution to operate as the new political general staff, the Panchayat Policy and Evaluation Committee, radically undermined its dynamic.

The 1980s were another decade of domination by the Panchayat system, though the end of the decade was to be marked by its collapse. A significant role in this evolution was played by the formation of a common political front by the opposition. But two other important developments were needed before this point could be reached.

The first development had to do with the socio-economic transformations taking place in Nepal in the 1980s. For a start there had been a substantial rise in the educational level of the Nepalese⁵ and it was much more difficult for conceptions to

⁵ The illiteracy rate in 1951 was 98%(!) and would fall to 61% by the end of the 80s.

predominate that justified the Panchayat system in terms of the importance of Hinduism and Nepalese traditions. At the same an increase became noticeable in the disparity between those finishing school and those finding work. For the first time in the history of Nepal the more educated layers were faced with unemployment at every level. The number of pupils finishing school was increasing four times faster than the rate of creation of new work-places (Hachhethu 1990: 191-192). Moreover the slow and long-drawn-out, but real, introduction of elements of capitalist economy contributed to the emergence of new urban strata aspiring to a different way of life more similar to that of the countries of the West. A significant role was also played by the development of a new petty-bourgeois class (lawyers, doctors, engineers, teachers) who wanted an extension of existing liberties and progressive modernization of the political system. Nor should we underestimate the influence exerted by an independent Press, which was particularly critical of the regime. Last but not least significant was the influence of the newly established NGOs, which began to pose questions of liberties and individual rights (Parajulee 2000: 77-78). To put it differently, Nepalese society had changed. It was being transformed from a closed agricultural/feudal society deeply imbued with Hinduism into a national formation in an industrializing phase and to a significant extent under the influence of the states of the West. The emerging middle class, especially, wanted a framework of institutions that would facilitate its own particular kind of exertions, not put a brake on them. Such economic progress as had been made greatly lagged behind the corresponding rates of growth of the neighbouring Asiatic countries.⁶ Nepal had to change its political regime so as to embark on a trajectory of bourgeois modernization. It was in this way that a social alliance was forged with participation from rising sectors of the middle classes (commercial, industrial and tourist capital), the new petty-bourgeois layers and the popular strata (workers, farmers). The goal they all shared was one of creating a new socio-political order disencumbered of the alliance of big landowners and compradors and the political personnel that were their mouthpiece.

The second development was related to the conflict with India. The expiry, in 1988, of the pre-existing trade agreement was to lead to cuts in imports of necessities, a rise in inflation and serious production problems. This happened because, given the

⁶ Between 1965 and 1985 Nepal was characterized by the lowest annual increase in real GNP of all the Asiatic countries at the same level of development. Nepal 2.6%, Bangladesh 2.8%, India 4.3%, Pakistan 5.6%, Sri Lanka 4.4%, Burma 4.4%, Thailand 7.2%, Malaysia 7.2% (Shah 1988: 948-949).

geographical situation of Nepal, the latter is obliged to maintain good relations with India in order to be able to conduct trade with the rest of the world. The crisis in the relations between the two states resulted in India closing all but two of its border crossings with Nepal, along with two trade routes, with Bhutan and with Bangladesh. The reasons have to do with the increased tariffs being imposed on Indian goods and an attempt by Nepal to initiate diplomatic relations with the rest of the world as well.

As a result of these two developments a very favourable terrain was created for the development of a mass opposition movement. On the central political stage a boost was given to this process by the alliance of most of the opposition parties. There was an agreement for joint action between Congress and the alliance of most of the Communist parties for the objective of political change.

The movement against the Panchayat developed in three different phases through the first months of 1990. The first was more dynamic, and involved the masses. In the second there was a broadening of the social layers participating. The third phase was marked by the end of the system. The bloody clashes resulted in dozens of dead and injured, and the whole edifice began to crumble. Such was the dynamic of the popular movement that in the end the King was forced to consent to the end of the Panchayat regime.

c) From restoration of democracy to abolition of the monarchy (1990- 2008)

The first development to follow the fall of the Panchayat was the elaboration of a new Constitution. The new Constitution clearly represented a break with the past, but it was a break within a continuum. It was a break because it provided for multiparty democracy, with the party commanding the majority forming a government and the executive being answerable to the legislature. The element of continuity was that the King remained head of the armed forces and was able to modify the penalties imposed by the courts. He also continued to have the right to deploy emergency powers. Moreover, Nepal remained the only Hindu state in the world, and only Nepali was recognized as an official language.

On the basis of the new Constitution, elections were called for 11th May 1991 to nominate the new members of Parliament. The most important parties with national representation were the Congress Party, the CPN (unified Marxist-Leninist), the United Popular Front, the Nepal Workers' and Peasants' Party, the National

Democratic Party (with Chand as chairman) and the National Democratic Party (with Thapa as chairman).⁷

Having cultivated a social-democratic profile, the Congress sought to reap the benefits of its long years in opposition against the Panchayat regime, at the same time expressing the interests of the strata linked to the social dynamic generated by the transition to capitalism.

The CPN (Unified Marxist-Leninist) was established in 1991 out of a fusion of the CPN (Marxist-Leninist) and the CPN (Marxist).

The United Popular Front was founded at the beginning of 1991, as a coalition of numerous Maoist groups. Although this new grouping believed that participation in elections would help to show up the weaknesses of the parliamentary regime, they judged that the basic terrain for social struggle would be extra-parliamentary mobilizations.

The Party of Nepal Workers and Peasants Party was another Maoist party, led by Naryan Man Bijukchhe, better known as comrade Rohit.

The results of the elections of 12th May were as follows: Congress Party 37.75% and 110 seats, CPN (Unified M-L) 27.98% and 69 seats, NDP (Chand) 6.56% and 3 seats, NDP (Thapa) 5.38% and 1 seat, United Popular Front (UPF) 4.83% and 9 seats, NSP 4.10%⁸ and 6 seats, Nepal Communist Party (democratic) 2.43% and 2 seats, Nepalese Workers and Peasants' Party (NWPP) 1.25% and 2 seats, with 2 independent candidates also being elected (Parajoulee 2000: 114).

The Congress had achieved a majority and so was able to form a single-party government. Right from the beginning of its term in office the new government faced significant opposition movements. The civil service employees came out on strike for two months demanding improvement in their working conditions and security of employment. They then proceeded to organize continuing demonstrations against everyday, and worsening, problems. But the most important issue was the constitutionality of the new agreement between Nepal and India.

On the other hand internal problems were emerging inside the Congress Party, exacerbating the already tense social climate. The president of the party Bhattarai,

⁷ These are parties founded immediately after the fall of the Panchayat and before the 1991 elections. They defend the panchayat system and their leaders are two important cadres from the previous status quo.

⁸The Goodwill Party (in Nepali Nepal Sadbhavana Party - NSP) was founded in 1983 under the leadership of Gajendra Narayan Singh, and represented the interests of the inhabitants of Tarai. One of its basic demands was recognition of Hindi as an official language.

who had not succeeded in being elected to parliament, was on one side, and the prime minister Koirala on the other. The dispute between them was to result in the establishment of a tendency inside the parliamentary group, to which the Koirala loyalists belonged. The final outcome, as became clear from a routine vote, was that the government no longer commanded a majority in the parliament. Following bitter clashes over whether Nepal should go to the polls or whether an attempt should be made to form a coalition government, elections were finally called for November 1994.

Significant changes from 1991 emerged from the elections of 15th November 1994. The party with the greatest number of seats was the CPN (Unified M-L), with 88 parliamentarians and 30.8% of the vote, corresponding to an approximately three percent increase. The governing Congress party came first in terms of votes, with 33.8% of the total count, a fall of three percent but, because of the majority system, second in the number of seats, with 83 parliamentarians. The now united National Democratic Party (NDP- Rastriya Prajatantra Party) achieved a significant success, taking 17.93% of the vote, that is to say five percent more than the aggregate of the two initial parties, securing 20 seats and therefore transforming itself into a basic factor in parliamentary life. Given that no party commanded a majority, any negotiations conducted would have to reckon with it and its policies. A bridge was thus created to the old regime (Singh 2007: 212).

The formation of a minority government by the Communists (11/94-9/95) did not lead to radical changes, as was perhaps predictable. They had in any case made it clear from the outset that they would pursue moderate social-democratic type policies and would welcome foreign investment and foreign economic assistance. Within that logic the new government continued the policies of privatization, proceeded with the implementation of agricultural reforms, established old-age pensions. But it soon became evident that the minority government could not pass laws, particularly when the Congress Party opted for a course of vigorous confrontation with the CPN (Unified Marxist-Leninist).

The truth is that, apart from lacking a majority, this specific government seemed to lack a clear orientation. In its attempt to maintain a balance between its history and its adoption of policies of pragmatism, it vacillated continuously over issues to do with the scope of the privatizations and the role of the state. The final impression that was generated was that ultimately the government was moving

towards positions more radical than those it had initially proclaimed. The creation of an internal party opposition must have played some role in this. It was in this context that the World Bank decided to cancel its participation in an investment programme, primarily because it had been persuaded the government had reneged on its undertakings to implement neo-liberal economic policies.

The fall of the Leftist government paved the way for formation of a series of coalition governments in all possible permutations and combinations,⁹ a phenomenon that made clear the absence of significant lines of political demarcation and a tendency to cling to office for the sake of it. At the same time disagreements were breaking out continually inside the parliamentary parties, leading to a split in the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified M-L) into the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified M-L) and the Communist Party of Nepal (M-L) and the National Democratic Party into NDP with Thapa as leader and NDP with Chand as leader, not to mention the open conflict within the Congress between the tendencies of Koirala and Bhattarai. In reality the relentless and never-ending crisis in the world of the politicians was just a by-product of the inability to work out a hegemonic plan that could secure consensus, and the inability to formulate adequate policies to deal with the problems that were being posed by the Maoist insurrection (see below).

The new elections were held in May 1999 and the Congress emerged as the first party with 36.4% of the votes and 111 seats. After them came the CPN (Unified M-L) with 30.74% and 71 seats, followed by the NDP (Thapa) with 10.14% and 11 seats, the NSP with 3.13% and 5 seats, the RJM (Rastriya Jana Morcha – National People's Front) with 1.37% and 5 seats,¹⁰ the UPF/ Nepal with 0.84% and one seat and the NWPP 0.55% and one seat. It is worth noting that the CPN (M-L) received 6.38% and the NDP (Chand) 3.33% of the vote, but neither of them, because of the majority system, succeeded in electing a parliamentarian (Parajulee 2000: 284).

⁹ We mention, by way of example: a) The coalition government between the Congress, the NDP and the NSP under the prime ministership of Sher B. Deuba (11th September 1995-9th March 1997), b) Coalition government between the CPN (Unified M-L), the NDP and the NSP under the prime ministership of the NDP politician Lokendra B. Chand (10th March to 5th October 1997), c) Coalition government between the Congress, the NDP and NSP headed by the NDP politician Surya Bahadur Thapa (6th October 1997-11th April 1998), d) Minority government initially of the Congress under the prime ministership of G.P. Koirala and then (from 26/8) in coalition with the CPN (M-L) (12th April-22nd December 1998), e) Coalition government between Congress, CPN (Unified M-L) and NSP under the prime ministership of the Congress politician G.P. Koirala (23rd December 1998 to 31st May 1999).

¹⁰ In essence it was the front formation devised by such members of the United Popular Front of Nepal - Unified Centre, who did not follow the line of establishing the CPN (Maoist).

The Congress would have the majority in the Parliament but this would not be enough to bring parliamentary stability. Between 31st May 1999 and 4th October 2002 there would be three Congress governments.¹¹ This process of alternation in office can be attributed to a continuing inability to bend the resistance of the armed Maoist movement, and the questions posed by this inability, to personal conflicts and to the coronation of Gyanendra following the murder of Birendra and the royal family on 1st June 2001. The new King made it clear from the outset that he aimed to pursue a more autocratic policy than his predecessor.

Inability to form a strong government and/or find a solution to the “Maoist question” would lead the King to purge the last Congress government, with Deuba as prime minister, and in his place to appoint Chand, head of one tendency of the NDP and Prime Minister under the Panchayat system. But the political deadlock could not be resolved either by this government or by the other two governments that were to follow: a government of Prime Minister Thapa, head of the other tendency of the NDP (June 2003-May 2004) and a government of Prime Minister Deuba (again!) (May 2004-February 2005).

In reality what was taking place was a progressive delegitimation of all the solutions whose basis was the specific political framework that had been established after 1990.

Let us be more precise: the dynamic of the movement of 1990 was to lead the political system of Nepal to what we call a “break in the continuum.” In the new reality the parliamentary forces emerged greatly strengthened but the constitutional framework permitted the King to retain a substantial proportion of his traditional supreme powers. When, for reasons we will examine below, the politicians did not succeed in providing satisfactory solutions to the problems of the Nepalese people, then, on the one hand, the Maoist movement would break out (February 1996; on the other, the scenery of the political stage would begin to collapse, initially with splits, then with factionalism inside the larger parties.

From that point on, developments would lead to an ever-steeper slide into authoritarianism. On 26th November 2001 a state of emergency was declared in the

¹¹ Namely a) the government led by Prime Minister K.P. Bhattarai (31st May to 22nd March 2000) b) the Congress government with Prime Minister G.P. Koirala (22nd March 2000-23 June 2001) and c) the government headed by Prime Minister S.B. Deuba (23rd July 2001-4th October 2002).

country and the Army commenced operations against the Maoists. It soon became evident that the military confrontation was facing difficulties and at best it would take time to turn the tide against the insurgents. On the other hand, from the moment that the application of many basic laws began to be suspended, the declaration of a state of emergency raised questions of democracy and respect for individual rights. Every case that was linked in any way to the Maoist insurrection was being tried by a special court. Within the space of a few weeks thousands of people were being held by the secret police without being allowed access to legal assistance. In October 2002 the King suspended the operations of parliament and the governments that followed were exclusively of his own choosing. It was impossible to hold parliamentary elections and the local government elections were being postponed. Faced with a proliferation of impasses and an inability to bring the civil war to an end, on 1st February 2005 the Monarch personally assumed the government of the country, with Tulsi Giri and Kirti Nidhi as vice-chairmen of its government, both of them having served as Prime Minister at different times under the Panchayat system.

A state of emergency was thus declared again in the country followed by a host of new repressive measures and hundreds of arrests, making it clear what the Monarch had in mind when he referred to an ending of the civil war. It was not a question of seeking a compromise, even if weighted to the advantage of the Throne. It was an endeavour to formulate an ultimatum to the Maoists so that they would surrender.

The turn of events proved entirely different from what the King desired. On 30th October 2005 the Congress, the CPN (Unified M-L), the National Democratic Congress of Deuba, the Janamorchha Nepal, the Nepal Workers and Peasants Party (NWPP), the Nepal Sadbhavana Party (NSP) and the United Left Front (ULF) agreed to co-ordinate their actions so as to overturn the authoritarian regime of Gyanendra. Negotiations started between the alliance of seven parties and the CPN (Maoist) culminating in the signature of a document on co-ordination of action for the abolition of the Monarchy.

The first move of the alliance of Maoists and the seven opposition parties was to denounce the imminent local government election and to demand that the population boycott them. And indeed in January 2006 demonstrations got under way organized by the seven-party alliance. The demands were not only that citizens should not vote in the municipal elections but also that there should be a restoration of

democracy and that the King should abdicate. This was followed by a four-day general strike called by the Maoists. The end result of these two moves was that there was only 21% participation in the elections. It was obvious that the regime was suffering from a legitimization deficit.

The next phase involved four days of demonstrations, at the beginning of April, against the royal power. They succeeded in displaying the breadth of the social alliance that had been brought into existence: civil servants, journalists, lawyers, trade unions, NGOs, actors, even regional chambers of commerce and industry, declared support for the mobilizations, and participated in them (International Crisis Group 2006). Having lost almost all social support, the state power resorted to naked violence, with the result that dozens were killed and hundreds injured. The seven-party alliance and the CPN (Maoist) then announced that the strike would be prolonged indefinitely. At that point the King attempted to initiate a compromise, coming out in favour of multi-party democracy. This, however, was regarded as a manoeuvre by the opposition and the mobilizations continued. In the days that followed the King would persist in his delaying tactics, asking the seven parties to nominate a prime minister. The proposal in question fell very far short of the radical demands that they, along with the Maoists, had put forward, and was rejected out of hand. As a result there was an intensification in the climate of hostility against the regime because the insurgents gained the impression that the King was trying to make them appear ridiculous.

Finally, on 24th April, the King was forced to back down and in his address announced that the parliament would be reconvened. As new prime minister he appointed the chairman of the Congress Party, Koirala. From that point on the changes came thick and fast: the new ministry was sworn in in the presence of the prime minister and not the King, and two days later the Parliament unanimously resolved that elections should be held for a constituent assembly that would decide on the character of the polity in Nepal. In the following days a radical curtailment of the powers of the King was voted and Nepal was proclaimed a secular state. The King finally had no more than a ceremonial presence as all these changes were being implemented.

The Maoists for their part at first appeared hesitant to consent to this new situation, considering that there were no clear guidelines for the developments that were to follow. But the rapidity with which the progressive changes unfolded induced

them to agree to a truce and to the commencement of negotiations with the new government. Finally, on 16th June 2006, an eight-point agreement was reached between the two sides stipulating that a provisional government should be established with the participation of the CPN (Maoist) and the formation of a multiparty competitive system, and that pending the election of a constituent assembly a provisional constitution would apply based on the preceding 12-point agreement. The two sides also agreed that management of all their weaponry would be placed under the control of the United Nations and that the Parliament and the local Maoist governments would be dissolved. The negotiations were to continue over the following months and the final agreement to put an end to the ten-year-long civil war would be signed on 21st November 2006.

But the course towards constitutional reform and the abolition of the monarchy would require more time to be completed. Finally in December 2007 the parliament decided on the abolition of the monarchy and in January 2008 it was decided that elections for the Constituent Assembly would be held on 10th April. The elections duly took place in April, with the CPN (Maoist) emerging as the first party. On 28th May 2008 in the course of the first session of the Constituent Assembly the institution of the monarchy was formally abolished and Nepal was declared a Presidential Republic. Shortly thereafter a coalition government was formed between the CPN (Maoist) and the CPN (Unified M-L) under the prime ministership of the Maoist leader Prachanda.

The social dimensions of the Nepalese problem and the stance of the CPN (Maoist)

Introduction

What we have seen from the previous section is that Nepal is a country with notably authoritarian structures, contributing to the reproduction of relations of domination and acute exploitation and fostering inequality and poverty. These structures were present at the time that the Nepalese state came into existence and continued throughout the 19th century with the rule of the Rana and the transformation of the country into a quasi-protectorate by the British. This situation was not to undergo any significant modification in the 20th century as the indomitable power of

the Rana continued for the first half of it, followed by the supremacy of the King as the all-powerful centre of decision-making.

This reality had brought the following issues to light: a) the very limited freedom of political expression and action; b) the existence of acute social inequalities and widespread poverty; c) the oppression of non-Hindu nationalities; d) the social discrimination generated by the caste system; e) the oppression experienced by women. These are questions that emerged over a course of more than two hundred years and could not be coped with by the powers of the day of any period, or for that matter by the parliamentary governments of 1990-2002.

The reason that the CPN (Maoist) managed to broaden its sphere of influence in a very brief space of time is that it formulated a political programme that provided an answer to these questions, understanding that for them to be implemented it was necessary to resort to popular violence so as to bring about a radical overturn of the existing balance of forces. In reality the CPN (Maoist) was undertaking to play a dual role in Nepalese society: on the one hand to lead it in a type of bourgeois-democratic revolution and on the other to create the preconditions for institutions of popular power to begin to be established in a second phase. Let us examine all this in detail.

Nepal's transition to the capitalist mode of production

From the beginning of the 1980s and up until the beginning of the 21st century Nepal was in the process of moving beyond its almost entirely agricultural foundations and undergoing transformation into a semi-agricultural country with conspicuous signs of transition to a capitalist economy. The reason for this was that although two thirds of the population continued to be employed in agriculture, by the 1990s¹² the greater part of the GNP had begun to be generated in the secondary and tertiary sectors. At the same time a pronounced internationalization was observable, essentially a product of the steep increase in the proportion of GNP derived from trade: a doubling between 1980 and 2000, a tripling of exports and doubling of imports.¹³ This development was however accompanied by an approximately 50%

¹² In 1981 91% of the economically active population were farmers but by 1991 this had fallen to 81% and by 2001 to 66% , with a great expansion of the secondary sector, which from 3% in 1991 rose to 13% in 2001. A small increase was also noted in the tertiary sector, from 18% in 1991 to 21% in 2001. In 1981, however, only 6% of the economy had been in the tertiary sector.

¹³ Trade as a percentage of GNP underwent a steep increase from 21.9% in the 1981-1985 period to 42.1% in 1996-2001. By comparison, for the same periods the volume of exports rose from 4.9% of

increase in the trade deficit. This occurred because in absolute terms the volume of imports had increased more rapidly than that of exports, exposing a lack of competitiveness in the Nepalese economy, which after a certain point was to lead to a significant increase in external public debt.¹⁴

That said, the increasing strength of industrial capital is registered in the composition of Nepalese exports, with the proportion of industrial products soaring from 30% of the total in 1980 to 75% in 2000. This growth is not however attributable to large-scale investment being carried out in mechanical equipment but rather to low salaries and high rates of exploitation. In other words within the space of twenty years Nepal experienced a rapid growth of its industrial and commercial sector based primarily on the low cost of labour (see below). There was a great expansion of banking capital due to the huge growth in reserves but also to the establishment of stockbroking firms.¹⁵ Tourist capital also saw considerable growth.¹⁶ Last but not least, one parameter that was certainly conducive to the development of Nepalese capitalism was the relative downgrading of the countryside and agricultural production. There were cutbacks in every kind of developmental expenditure,¹⁷ initiating a drastic decline in Nepalese agriculture. The final result was both an increase in rural poverty and a widening of inequalities between city and countryside,¹⁸ leading to the conclusion that Nepalese capitalism had its foundations not only in the super-exploitation of wage-earners but also in the impoverishment of the peasantry.

GNP to 12.1% and of imports from 17.0% to 30%. The trade deficit therefore increased from 12.1% to 17.9% (Karmacharya 2004: 366).

¹⁴ From 10.4% of GNP in 1980 it rose to 49.6% in 2000 (Sigdel 2004: 515).

¹⁵ Bank reserves increased dramatically from 4.2 billion rupees in 1982 to 154.53 rupees in 2000-2001, that is to say a 36-fold increase in 18 years (Bhattarai 2003: xiii).

¹⁶ The historicity and distinctive geophysical features of this state exerted an attraction on hundreds of thousands of tourists from the early 60s onwards. Nepal's tourist revenues thus leapt from 78,000 dollars in 1961/62 to 11.5 million dollars in 1974/75 and from there to 64 million in 1990, exploding to 168 million in 1999.

¹⁷ It is characteristic that agriculture, which on average employed 80% of the workforce in the period under examination, did not receive any more than 26% of the funding of any developmental plan. As a result Nepal, which among the countries of South Asia had the highest rate of agricultural production per hectare at the beginning of the 60s, by the 1990s had fallen significantly behind (Lawoti 2007: 26). Typically, in the first half of the 1990s when GNP was rising at a rate of 5% annually, the agricultural sector recorded a growth rate of only 1.6%, with a negative growth rate in most years of the second half of the decade.

¹⁸ Between 1988 and 1996 the nominal income of people living in urban areas increased by 16% annually (from \$126 to \$285) as against only 4% for the farming population (from \$95 to \$125). If we take inflation into account, farm incomes were in fact experiencing negative growth.

Aggravation of social inequalities

As already mentioned, capitalist development in Nepal has been based largely on an intensification of social exploitation. In the twenty years between 1976 and 1996 there was a significant increase of poverty in Nepal: the proportion of the population living in poverty rose from 33% to 42%, largely as a result of the impoverishment of the agricultural sector, and particularly in mountain areas, where the poverty rate rose from 44% to 62%.

This increase in poverty signified widening social inequalities. In the decade preceding the civil war there was a huge transfer of wealth to the richest 10%. The latter's share of produced wealth skyrocketed from 23% to 52%, with the corresponding share for the poorest 40% falling to 11% and the median 50% from 54% to 37% (Bajracharya 2004: 89). The conclusion is that the significant economic growth that Nepal was experiencing brought the ruling class an enormous accumulation of wealth while the middle classes and the poorer layers saw a vertiginous widening of the gap that separated them from the wealthier strata. The political implication: the expansion of capitalist relations in Nepal could not be underwritten by a convergence of broad social alliances. What happened in reality was precisely the opposite. The greater the development of capitalism the more the material prerequisites were created for a challenge to the political framework that was abetting this development. Conditions had ripened for the social explosion that was to find expression in the Maoist insurrection.

Another contributing factor was that social problems proved insoluble because of inadequate public investment in social sectors. In the 1990s state expenditures for basic social requirements such as education and health remained at low levels. The annual state expenditure for a child going to primary school at the end of the 1990s was \$20, as against \$40 in India. Public expenditures on health were among the lowest in the world, at \$2 per person annually (1999), at a time when the average for the underdeveloped countries was \$12 (Lawoti 2007: 27). And health care was accordingly extremely problematic, with less than 1% having coverage beyond the very basic essentials and 58% having less coverage than the very basic essentials and with there being dramatic differences between the various regions (Pathak 2005: 292).

The nationalities problem

The nationalities problem emerged together with the creation of the Nepalese state. The expansionism of the Gorkha king Prithivi Narayan Shah and his successors brought the inhabitants of the conquered regions under the domination of the Brahmins and the Chhetri, with Nepal emerging as the world's only Hindu kingdom. The situation worsened with the assumption of power by the Rana and the imposition of the new civil code dividing the Nepalese people into castes as prescribed by the Hindu religion, contributing in this way to even worse instances of social discrimination. In reality what was created was a system of twofold exclusion, both of the non-Hindu national group and of the "lower" Hindu castes. The situation remained virtually unchanged until the institution of the Panchayat system, which modified the situation of the nationalities but did not improve it. On the contrary, it attempted to "modernize" social discrimination, incorporating the distinctions into the structures of the capitalist nation state. To put it differently, the way that the caste system functioned up to the fall of the Rana was inseparable from the acquisition of wealth from land. The powerful landowners came from the higher Hindu castes and operated in collusion with the state power, whose personnel similarly comprised Brahmins and Chhetri. The slow, but real, development of the capitalist mode of production was to impel attempts at forced assimilation of indigenous populations and their adoption of Nepalese national identity, thus perpetuating the tradition of reproducing a whole complex of social distinctions.

All this great edifice of social exclusion has been documented in recent Nepalese statistics. The Brahmins are a very distinct presence in the ranks of the country's political representation, the state bureaucracy and the universities. Also significant is the fact that from the 1980s onwards the proportion of lower caste members and minority nationalities in the state bureaucracy steadily diminished.¹⁹ The intensified rates of capitalization required a nationally "purer" Nepal. Not because of any inherent tribalism but simply due to the fact that the stricter

¹⁹ Specifically, in the 1983/1985 period, under the Panchayat system, 69.3% of the third class officer positions in the civil service [Nepal Gazette] were occupied by Bahuns and Chhetris, 18.6% by Newars, and only 3% by Janjatis without the Newars. The Tarai castes (apart from Brahmins, Dalits and Rajiputs) accounted for 8.5% and Muslims for 0.6%. The point is that this tendency was to be reinforced in 2001/2002 when it emerged that the Bahuns and the Chhetris were occupying 87.0% of the positions in question and the Newars 8.7%. The Janjatis without the Newars were virtually non-existent (0.5%) and the Tarai castes (apart from the Brahmins, Dalits and Rajiputs) now comprised only 3.3% and the Muslims 0.5% (Lawoti 2008: 369- 370).

requirements of capitalist competition demanded a highly specialized and educated workforce. What had occurred in the previous years, when access to education, let alone higher education, was considered prohibitively expensive for the national minorities and the lower castes, created significant obstacles to potential social mobility. If one factors into this the consideration that all capitalist development has been based on low salaries and increasing poverty, it becomes abundantly evident who the primary victims were of the coming of capitalism to Nepal.

The women's question

Women comprise half the population of Nepal, but this has not prevented Nepal from being one of the most deeply patriarchal and male chauvinist of societies. The changes that have taken place in the last decades are extremely marginal and in no way affect the general picture. Even in the early 21st century women in Nepal were suffering the effects of 23 laws upholding gender discrimination. The gender inequality index is the highest of the countries of South Asia, reaching a figure of 1/6 compared to 1/5 in India and 2/3 in Sri Lanka (Onesto 2003: 170).

Maternal mortality is the highest in South Asia and abortion illegal. The result is that pregnant women are obliged to submit to abortions under extremely unhygienic conditions. The rate of illiteracy is 42% for women but as high as 65% for men. This should come as no surprise in light of the prevailing social situation in Nepal. A daughter is useful in a family primarily in her childhood years, when she can perform little chores and help with the housework. It is not worth the trouble of investing money in her education given that at some point she will get married and the knowledge that she will acquire will redound to the benefit of her new household and not to that of her paternal home. Under the existing civil code a daughter is not entitled to make claims against her paternal inheritance unless she remains unmarried until the age of 35. And if she subsequently marries she forfeits her inheritance rights (Gautam/ Banskota/ Machanda 2003: 100).

Not even 10% of women are in political office or public sector positions. Only in the field of education is this under-representation slightly less drastic (the figure there is 14%). Where the profound inequality is most evident is in the agricultural sector and in property ownership. A larger proportion of women than men are engaged in agricultural production (85% as against 66%), a phenomenon largely attributable to internal and external migration by men but also to the low educational

level of women, but this is in no way reflected in ownership figures (90% of the property belongs to men). This is not unrelated to the patriarchal character of Nepalese society, which makes property ownership by women almost prohibited.

Above and beyond that, even legal recognition of women's rights is limited and in practice ineffectual. Constitutional and judicial mechanisms have proved inadequate for securing justice in the case of women who have fallen victim to violence and discrimination in educational institutions or the workplace (Shrestha 2004: 402).

The role of the CPN (Maoist)

In March 1995 the Communist Party of Nepal - Unity Centre, led by Prachanda, conducted its third plenum, at which it decided to change its name to CPN-Maoist and embark on armed struggle. In September of the same year the party's Central Committee adopted the "Plan for Historic Commencement of the People's War," which asserted that protracted people's war would be based on the strategy of encirclement of the cities by the countryside in accordance with the specificities of Nepal.

On 4th February 1996 the party spokesperson Baburam Bhattarai presented the coalition government of Sher Bahadur Deuba with a list of forty demands concerning the nationalities problem, democracy and livelihood. The list included the demand for abolition of the two treaties with India (that of 1950 on peace and friendship and the Treaty of Mahakali on sharing of the waters of the river forming Nepal's western border), the introduction of work permits for Indians working in Nepal, the abolition of all of the privileges of the Royal family, the drawing up of a new Constitution by a constituent assembly, nationalization of the property of comprador and bureaucratic capitalists, the proclamation of a secular state in Nepal and a number of other secondary questions such as the construction of roads to the villages, electrification, provision of potable drinking water and full protection for freedom of speech and press freedom. It was rejection of these demands by the government that triggered the outbreak of the civil war.

At the level of strategy the CPN-Maoist proclaimed the necessity for a social alliance that would include the proletariat, the workers on the land, the middle peasants, the petty-bourgeoisie and the national bourgeoisie. This social bloc could mount resistance to the feudal oligarchs, the landowners and the comprador and

bureaucratic capitalists (*Some Important Documents . . .* 2004: 16-17). It was led in this direction through adoption of a detailed position statement against Nepalese society. Specifically, Nepal is a landlocked country, encircled on three sides by expansionist India and on one side by reformist China. Small in area, Nepal is also mostly mountainous, with only 17% of the country's area in the plain and the rest of the country surrounded by high mountains and by the Himalayas, where there are climatic differences, where a number of different national minorities live, where there are a plethora of cultures and many different languages are spoken. According to CPN (Maoist) his country is under the domination of a reactionary central state, equipped with a powerful modern permanent army and well-entrenched bureaucratic machinery. At the same time, Nepal has enemies, not only within its borders but also outside them. These are the imperialist and, first and foremost, Indian expansionists. The economic and political development of Nepal is uneven. Ninety percent of the population is comprised of poor peasants who live in their villages, and the urbanization process, though real, is proceeding very slowly. At the political level the peasant masses and other sections of the subaltern classes have participated in many different forms of social struggle, and communist ideas attract a significant section of the population in these categories. Last but not least, the reactionary ruling class of semi-feudal and semi-colonized Nepal is in a state of deep, and increasingly conspicuous, crisis (*Some Important Documents . . .* 2004: 17-18).

The period from 1996 to 2001 was to be characterized by a series of military successes by the Maoists, triggering, particularly from 1999 onwards, a gradual retreat of state power in a number of regions where the CPN-Maoist had a significant presence: Rolpa, Rukum, Salyan, Jajarkot, Kalikot, Pyuthan.

What is interesting is that in these regions an attempt was made to establish practices of parallel government. In Western Nepal, for example, co-operative communities were established, forms of collective cultivation of the land were implemented, bridges were constructed, public parks, schools, irrigation works, patrols were instituted for the security of residents, people's courts were created for the resolution of differences. At the same time they opened schools to educate the children, they introduced ways of imposing controls on alcoholism, on violence against women, and against corruption. They held local elections, they accorded equal rights to women, they abolished the caste system, they granted autonomy to

oppressed ethnic groups, they founded institutions for promoting local development, they made efforts to improve health care, they introduced a new taxation system.

These forms of self-government were introduced first in five areas, then very soon in 17 and then in 22. Consequently in 2004 an attempt began to be made to establish institutions of parallel government at the regional level. Following the elections for local committees, regional popular governments began to function in various parts of the country (Thawang, Bheri-Karnali).

Particular attention was paid to the tribal and minority nationality question. In the first nine autonomous regions that were proclaimed in 2003 there were seven that were organized on a nationalities basis (the autonomous regions of Tharuwan, Magarant, Tamuwan, Tamang, Newar, Kirant, and Madhesh).

The changes that took place in the regions controlled by the Maoists induced thousands of peasant and workers to support the CPN-Maoist because they saw that these policies were greatly improving their lives in a number of different ways. Exactly the same occurred with the oppressed nationalities and with women. To put it somewhat differently, the reason that the CPN-Maoist extended its influence was that it elaborated a political programme that improved the everyday lives of the lower social classes. The inability of the ruling class to conceive a viable programme of bourgeois modernization and oversee its implementation left Nepalese society disoriented. A vacuum was created, enabling the CPN-Maoist to intervene, devising a twofold plan: on the one hand to struggle for the interests of the lower classes and on the other to proclaim a plan for economic modernization.

The emergence of the political crisis and the elevation of the King to the status of sole embodiment of political power accelerated the internal transformations, contributing to the formation of a broad anti-monarchy coalition. Specifically, the impossibility of a parliamentary response that could provide a satisfactory solution to the questions posed by the Maoist insurrection led the parliamentary system to an even greater crisis, with the result that the King would initially dissolve the Parliament and then personally exercise governmental power. These developments would oblige the parliamentary forces to form an alliance with the CPN-Maoist. There were two aspects to the state of affairs that resulted: on the one hand it had been demonstrated that parliamentarianism was incapable of freeing the country from the authoritarianism of the monarchy, on the other it had become equally evident that the CPN-Maoist was not able to occupy Kathmandu and assume political power at the

centre. In other words, there were important material obstacles to the establishment of a regime of socialist transformation: a) The permanent position of the Nepalese Communist movement in favour of the secular state and of a constituent assembly combined with the stance of not projecting socialist objectives; b) the over-centralized character of Nepal, which made an overall challenge to the existing balance of forces impossible without the factor of a collapse at the centre; c) the need for economic development in one of the world's poorest countries; and d) the impact of religious metaphysics and the adherence of many people to traditional stances and behaviours (e.g., patriarchy, social conservatism). All these did indeed pose material obstacles to a regime of socialist transformation. This became particularly evident when, following the King's speech ceding real power to the reconvened Parliament, the CPN-Maoist wanted to continue its mobilization but found only limited reserves of support among the people of Nepal.

The contribution of the CPN-Maoist was that, opting for the course of armed conflict, it marked out the terrain for conflict and embarked on a trajectory that could assimilate radical modifications in the balance of forces, opening the way for Nepal to make a transition into a new historical period. In other words, the military occupation by the Maoists of the greater part of Nepalese territory, the exacerbation of chronic social problems, the crisis of the parliamentary system and the extreme authoritarianism of the regime all operated cumulatively to move the Nepalese social formation into a new era.

Conclusion

The reason that the Maoists managed in such a brief space of time to increase their influence, and indeed during a period that could not be said to be characterized by a flourishing of Leftist ideas, was that they linked a consciousness of the need for bourgeois-democratic change to an orientation towards the accumulated social problems of Nepal. This line may well be judged to have had contradictory implications for a Communist party which, instead of promoting socialism, gave priority to a line of Left-radical modernization. Our view is that such a position would not take us far in interpreting the specific state of affairs that the CPN-Maoist was being called upon to handle, namely that in a small country, isolated from the rest of the world, with dominant India as next-door neighbor and faced with incapacity to achieve a military conquest of Kathmandu (which was attempted twice but failed), the

Maoist movement was up against an apparent dilemma, which essentially, however, was non-existent from the outset, from the establishment of the Nepalese communist movement. The course of development of the Communist movement in Nepal was prefigured by the emergence of the demand for a constituent assembly²⁰ and not socialist transformation. This resulted from the view that Nepal was a dependent country that must first pass through the stage of bourgeois integration.

The achievement of the Maoist movement was thus that it managed to make a correct reading of the particularities of the Nepalese social formation (economic underdevelopment, great social inequalities, oppression of national minorities and women) and to devise an action programme that could provide a persuasive response to these questions. The adoption of armed struggle proved to be an effective tool for overthrow of the old regime.

²⁰ From the beginning of the 1950s this was the demand of all the political parties but with the king's coup d'état it was forgotten and only one section of the pro-Maoist Communist Left persisted in putting it forward.

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