

Nepal's Quest for A Democratic Republic

Thursday 23 February 2006, by [CPI \(ML\) Liberation](#) (Date first published: 21 February 2006).

Quite predictably, the municipal elections in Nepal have turned out to be a huge farce. We have seen similar farces enacted on a few occasions in India when voter turnout in Assembly elections in states like Assam, Punjab and Kashmir has dropped way below the 'normal'. As part of their 12-point understanding reached last November seven major political parties of Nepal as well as the Maoists had called for an active boycott of the polls and it proved highly effective. In spite of trying all kinds of intimidating techniques and fraudulent means, the Royal Palace could not inflate the official turnout beyond 20 per cent! King Gyanendra's attempt to claim international political legitimacy even as his regime denies basic democratic rights and civil liberties to the people, keeps major opposition leaders almost permanently under house-arrest and routinely attacks mass demonstrations for democracy has thus fallen flat - even the US has been compelled to describe the elections as a 'hollow exercise'!

The failure of the municipal polls has left the illegitimate Gyanendra regime further weakened and discredited. The popular movement for restoration of democracy is again gathering momentum and the King's attempt to check the movement by killing pro-democracy activists and putting senior leaders including the CPN(UML) General Secretary Madhav Nepal under renewed and extended house-arrest is only adding to the people's anger. The growing isolation of the King has also been underlined by the 12-point understanding reached between major political parties including the Nepali Congress and the CPN(UML) and the Maoists who have been waging a major armed struggle for the last ten years. The domestic balance in Nepal is daily tilting against the King and the regime has to rely increasingly on international (read American) support for its survival.

Where does Nepal go from here? The Nepali Maoists who have accumulated considerable military might in the course of their one-decade-long people's war now seem to be positioning themselves for a major political intervention. The first indication came in the form of the 12-point understanding which conspicuously did not mention the word republic but called for abolition of the present "autocratic monarchy" through a "nationwide storm of democratic protests" and holding of elections for the formation of a constituent assembly under the aegis of the UN or some other suitable form of international supervision. The political thinking underlying this charter has now been elaborated by the CPN(M) chief Prachanda himself in a couple of recent interviews.

Prachanda's interviews clearly convey the urgency with which the Nepali Maoists now want to have an effective political say. The understanding reached with the seven parties and the calculated silence regarding the future of monarchy, leaving everything to the constituent assembly and the people's verdict are all intended to create an immediate political space for the Maoist movement. While combining the military and political aspects, the CPN(M) also expresses its commitment to the multi-party framework and to international mediation. The proposal for suitable international mediation, not only to supervise elections but also to facilitate the dialogue process leading to the formation of an elected constituent assembly, seems to be an anticipatory move to pre-empt any possible US intervention in Nepal. In this context, Prachanda also expresses satisfaction over the positions adopted by India and China with regard to the present situation in Nepal.

The political imagination and initiative of the Nepali Maoists stands in a refreshing contrast to the dogmatic militarism and political bankruptcy of their Indian counterparts. In his interview

Prachanda also provides an example of 'international mediation' when he advises Indian Maoists to subject themselves to political competition while trying to persuade the Indian government that any positive contribution from India to the cause of democracy in Nepal would also go a long way to solve India's own 'Maoist problem'. At a time when Indian foreign policy is locked in a grand 'enlightened convergence' with the global military and political objectives of US imperialism, what positive contribution can New Delhi make to the cause of 'total democracy' in Kathmandu is anybody's guess. We in India must always remain alive to the danger of any kind of imperialist intervention in the region even if the intervention takes on an appearance of 'peaceful mediation'. Have we forgotten the IPKF expedition in Sri Lanka?

Following the failure of the February municipal elections, America's ambassador in Kathmandu James F. Moriarty has publicly asked the King and the seven political parties to resume negotiations and end the present deadlock. According to Moriarty, only the Maoists have gained from the current stand-off between the parties and the palace (the two pillars of Nepali democracy!) and if the stalemate is not quickly resolved Nepal would only be inviting the spectre of a Maoist victory, a terrorist and totalitarian takeover in American eyes. Does not Moriarty's 'advice' bear a keen resemblance to the kind of 'opinions' that Mr. Mulford is daily offering to us in India? The Mulfords and Moriartys are only acting in a manner that they consider to be the prerogative of American ambassadors in today's world. It is for us, the fighters for sovereignty and democracy in India and Nepal to give a fitting rebuff to this ugly imperialist arrogance.

P.S.

* ML Update, a CPI(ML) Weekly News Magazine, Vol. 9, No. 8, 21-27 FEB 2006.