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AT CROSSROADS

By KIRAN PUN

CPN-Maoist general convention

“The Shining Path of Peru was finished after the arrest of President Gonzalo; Nepal’s revolution was finished when Maoist Chairman Prachanda entered Kathmandu. Prachanda had assured us that he would make plans to successfully complete the revolution, and change the mindset of national and international forces. But instead, it was he who changed. Now I am eagerly awaiting the general convention of Dash Maoists,” said comrade Bijuli aka Bir Bahadur Khadka from Jajarkot, who had given all his ancestral property to the Maoist party, following the policy of sarbaharakaran [proletarianization]. Now, his Chairman Prachanda lives in a luxurious apartment at Lazimpat, while comrade Bijuli works in a small hotel in Kathmandu to earn his livelihood.

Both the Maoist parties of Nepal—‘Cash’ or UCPN (Maoist), and ‘Dash’ or CPN-Maoist—are holding their 7th general conventions after two decades. The Dash Maoists’ convention is being held in Kathmandu from January 9 to 12, while the Cash Maoists’ convention is starting on February 2 at Hetauda.

There are many reasons to keep an eye on the Dash Maoists’ general convention; one of the most important being that this convention will decide if they will go the peaceful way, or go back to armed struggle.

The Dash Maoist Party was formed due to ideological differences between chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal and Vice-chairman Baburam Bhattarai (of the Cash Maoists) in one camp, and Mohan Baidya, now chairman of the Dash Maoists, on the other. Dahal backed Bhattarai’s political line (Federal Democratic Republic), while Baidya was for a People’s Republic. Baidya-led Dash Maoists now accuse Dahal of being ‘red renegade’, arguing that he betrayed the revolution.

Dahal has repeatedly claimed that the Dash Maoists are going to launch a people’s war, while Dash leaders have countered it, alleging that it is Dahal’s propaganda to stop Cash cadres from joining Dash. The gist of Dash Maoists’ current political documents is that they can launch an armed struggle at any time if they are forced to do so. But we have to wait until the end of their general convention to know for sure.

The general convention holds other significances. First of all, it is being held after 21 years. Secondly, it has to prove that Dahal and Bhattarai betrayed the essence of people’s war by entering the parliament. Dash leaders need to justify their break from Cash Maoists, and put

forth a new model of a 'new democratic system' in Nepal to prove that they are the right heirs to the revolution, and will successfully complete it.

As a new party, the Dash Maoist has challenges as well opportunities. Its challenge is to establish itself as a major political force, a status hitherto denied to it by Cash Maoists, as well as NC, UML, and the President.

The next challenge is to stand out among the political parties. Without unique political programs, cadres and people will not accept them as a new entity. The party is at such a crossroads, where, if it turns one way, it will become the same as Dahal-led Cash Maoists, and if it turns another, espousing only classical communist theories, it will be the same as Mohan Bikram Singh-led CPN (Masal) or Narayan Man Bijukchhe-led Nepal Workers Peasants Party. To establish its identity, it must develop a new model of revolution. Clearly, just a copy-paste of the past will not lead to a new people's war.

The party's next challenge is to convince the people and its cadres (who see the preceding armed revolutions of 1950, 1972, and 1996 as just ladders for leaders to get to power) that it is not ready to sacrifice any more. This generation has witnessed the people's war first-hand. They saw the meteoric rise of people's war, and also its tragic fall. They saw Dahal and Baburam Bhattarai deploy the state army to control their own former army—People's Liberation Army. Many members of this generation lost their dreams and productive ages, some even lost their body parts and family members, but no one got what they were promised. Finally, they saw how Maoist leaders misused their dreams and sacrifices for their personal benefit.

Now, Dash Maoist leaders, who include some former Cash Maoists, face tough questions: Is there a guarantee that Baidya, Ram Bahadur Thapa 'Badal' and Netra Bikram Chand 'Biplav' will not turn into another Dahal or Bhattarai? When the Dash Maoists gain power, isn't there a possibility that they will become the new editions of Cash Maoists? In the face of these questions, it is no joke for Dash Maoists to convince the people and their cadres.

The party also faces the challenge of developing collective leadership culture. Baidya, CP Gajurel, Badal, Dev Gurung, and Biplav were all in the 'periphery' of leadership in the past. They will want to develop central leadership from their midst; but not centralized leadership, keeping in mind how unproductive Dahal's centralized leadership had been.

Whether or not national and international situations are ripe for a revolution is a never ending debate, but Dash Maoists will meet with the fate of the Shining Path of Peru if they fail to develop a new model of revolution without fact-based analysis of national and international situation.

Amidst these challenges, the Dash Maoist party also has some advantages. Except for Dahal, a core group of key persons involved in the initial phase of the people's war is with it, along with many honest cadres and leaders. So, it can easily revive the spirit of revolution. Since its leaders and cadres are more honest and uncorrupted as compared to those belonging to Cash Maoists, it can claim the legacy of the 'unfinished revolution.'

It also has a chance to cash in on the sympathy of people and party cadres against the failure of major parties to address national problems, and the potential to emerge as an alternate new force.

While Cash Maoist cadres were assured that the revolution would change Nepal into a class-less society without any discrimination, they have seen no improvement in their lives. Instead, Dahal and Bhattarai became the new elite and perpetuated the culture of corruption and nepotism. The Dash Maoists can benefit from this contradiction.

The Dash Maoists will also have an interesting combination of former cadres and youths who are always eager for change. In 1996, the then CPN (Maoist) had cashed in on the same demographic, more so in rural areas.

The polarization also will help Dash Maoist. The negation of the major political parties including President Yadav by the Cash Maoists and the latest arrests in relation to Dekendra Thapa killing will further destabilize the party.

The situation will force Dash Maoists towards a revolutionary course. The statement of Dash Maoist spokesperson Pampha Bhusal seems relevant here: “After the general convention, we will launch people’s movement, getting ourselves ready for either people’s war or people’s revolt. We will choose the path that we are forced to.”

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