

“There is no dispute within the party about the political line we have pursued so far”

Interview with Vice Chairman Baburam Bhattarai of the UCPN(Maoist)

Monday, December 12, 2010

The just-concluded plenum of the UCPN (Maoist) in Palungtar was expected to provide the party with a clear future political course, which would have an impact on the ongoing peace and constitution writing process. But party leaders deferred the discussion to the Central Committee and instead agreed to formulate an ‘interim strategy’ for the next six months. Akhilesh Upadhyay and Pranab Kharel met Vice Chairman Baburam Bhattarai of the UCPN (Maoist) to solicit his views on the party’s internal dynamics post-plenum, its relationship with India and Bhattarai’s relationship with Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal.



Has the party come out stronger or weaker from the plenum?

The party has come out stronger after the plenum. The party is the unity of the opposites, and in that sense the ideological and political struggle that we call the two-line struggle has made the party stronger.

In our party’s history this was the highest form of manifestation of the two-line struggle, which took place among some 7,000 party cadres in the most democratic manner. In that sense, this democratic exercise has strengthened the party.

Could we then conclude that the chairman has grown a little bit weaker in the party?

It is not the question of somebody getting stronger or weaker. Overall, the party has grown stronger. When the party becomes strong, naturally, all the members associated with the party become stronger. We should see it that way.

As you correctly pointed out, and as we have also noticed in the media, democratic discussion was more encouraged this time. Is the party making more roads towards democratic polity or in the opposite direction as pushed by the hard-line faction? Isn't the party in flux?

I would like to clarify that our party believes in democracy. And democracy doesn't only mean the West Minister bourgeoisie democracy. Real democracy is for the oppressed masses. In that sense, we had passed a resolution a few years back which we termed "Development of Democracy in the 21st Century". In that document we tried to rectify the mistakes committed by the communists in the 20th century, especially in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. We wanted to go beyond that. Our debate is in that tradition of democratic development in the 21st century. And it should be seen in a positive light. After this democratic exercise, our party is moving in the direction laid out in the proposal of democratic development in the 21st century.

As we see it from outside, none of the three factions have prevailed on the issue of the future line of the party. There may be some interim strategy, but there seems to be a struggle between all three fractions regarding the line of the party in the future. And this struggle may impact whether the party moves ahead as a united front or not.

I don't know whether it is correct to use the term three fractions. Of course, three documents were put forward for discussion and they were debated upon. And, none of the three documents were passed. The decision of the plenum was that all three documents should be unified. By the time this interview is published the Central Committee meeting should be over and we should have taken some decisions on this issue. What we are discussing right now is some of the ideological and political issues which are of a long-term nature and which we can debate and settle through the national convention. Such things should be put forward to debate and immediate issues should be resolved by the Central Committee with an action plan worked out at least until May 28 when the term of the Constituent Assembly expires. The next six months we will have a unified action plan whereby the party will move ahead in a unified manner and some of the ideological and political issues will be debated.

There were a lot of expectations that the Palungtar plenum would resolve these contentious issues. But if anything, the plenum has only brought these issues to the fore, which is good for the party. But the party, as said earlier, is in a state of flux.

In one sense everything is in flux. But that doesn't mean we will stay in a state of indecisiveness. We will take decisions which are important for the democratic and communist movements and the party will remain unified. And some of the ideological and political issues need to be debated, like the question of Marxism, the nature of imperialism, what the correct revolutionary line for the party should be. What should the relation between democracy and nationalism be and

how should the party deal with India. These are the broader questions under discussion within the party.

If I understand you correctly, your comment in Palungtar was that there are two lines of struggle. And there seems to be a larger understanding between all the factions on the issues of peace and constitution. Do you plan to apply that in other issues as well?

To make the constitution on time and to implement the Comprehensive Peace Accord it is important to mobilise the masses. Unless there is pressure from the people, the old parliamentary forces will not go for a progressive constitution and implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Accord. In that sense, we will continue with the constitution making process and we will also go to the masses to put pressure for the timely completion of the constitution and the peace process.

Since there are differences within the party, don't you think it will impact the peace process as they cannot be compartmentalised, the way you do so conveniently in your deliberations with the media?

No doubt what happens inside and outside will have an impact. What I would like to clarify is that there is no dispute within the party about the political line we have pursued so far. On the question of implementation, there have been questions whether we have implemented it correctly, or whether we are moving in the right direction.

Whether there will be complete socio-economic transformation in favour of the oppressed masses. But in general all agree that given the national and international situation, the basic line pursued by the party is correct. There should be no doubt on this. Some people think that the Maoists will abandon this path and go back to insurgency. However, the plenum has decided that we will pursue this path (of peace and democracy) only if the reactionary forces block this path, people will be forced to launch another movement and in that sense the party will lead the mass.

If we look back at history, the party has had very difficult relations with India or vice versa, depending on the point of view you look at it from.

And there are still a lot of differences in the way the top leadership of the party views India. Don't you think there is contradiction within the party?

There is debate within the Marxist movement in general regarding whether democracy or nationalism should be the principle (focus), given that neo-colonialism is prevalent today. Some people would say that a country like ours is basically dominated by external forces; therefore the national question is important. The other point of view says that since external forces come through internal reactionary forces, our fight should be directed against them—so we should give primacy to the question of democracy. As for dealing with India, we have had problems with India since the days of the Sugauli Treaty. There is no denying that. We would like to solve these problems through diplomatic and political means. We don't want direct confrontation with India. We would like to restructure this relationship. But there is some debate on how to deal with India.

How does your policy on dealing with India differ from that of the chairman?

We are trying to develop a unified position on this. My position has been that the question of democracy is still primary in our struggle. Even after the abolition of monarchy, reminiscences of feudalism remain, and the question of the oppressed mass of people—of different nationalities, regions, and genders—too remains. Unless the country is unified; we cannot fight external interference. But we seem to be arriving at an understanding. All agree that there has been interference from external powers. But there have been differences on how to deal with this. But after this plenum there has been a convergence of views that we should unify the country. Only then can we fight external domination.

How would you then define the current relationship your party has with India?

There are certainly problems with it. There is no point in hiding it. But these issues can be settled through political and diplomatic means. Only if this fails, then we will have to adopt other means, meaning we will have to mobilise the masses against external interference and domination.

We had run an editorial by The Indian Express, and the position of the Indian establishment seems to be that all the democratic forces should be put together to isolate the Maoists.

I think this is the old view. By democratic forces, they mean the old parliamentary forces. But in Nepal's context, Maoists are the most democratic force. I think the Indian establishment has already abandoned the so called two-pillar theory. After the 12-point agreement, their position has been to promote unity among the democratic forces and fight against the feudal forces. But India is not a monolith. There are differing views within India. One section still believes that they should isolate the Maoists and promote old parliamentary parties. But that won't work. We are the largest political party and have the most progressive agenda to transform the country and only we can maintain peace and stability in Nepal. Peace and stability in Nepal would be in favour of India. For their own enlightened interest they should promote peace, stability and democracy in Nepal.

How do you review Rakesh Sood's ambassadorial tenure?

I would not like to comment on it. He is the representative of Government of India. And it is up to the Indian government to review his performance. What we are dealing with is the policy of the Indian ruling class and we are concerned about that.

So you are happy with his performance?

It's not the question of being happy or unhappy. We have differences on some of

the policies of the Indian government, which we have voiced publicly. But we would like to resolve it through political and diplomatic means. In recent days there have been some

misunderstandings. I think these need to be cleared. We want to have good working relations with India.

Your differences with the chairman is said to be more of a clash of personalities than ideological issues?

That is not correct. It is not about a personality clash. Both of us come from the same background. He has certain qualities.

I have certain qualities. We have been working together for almost 30 years. So

people have this feeling that there is a personality clash between us. When we differ on issues, then we need to have a democratic discussion, which will produce higher unity among us.

Should a particular ideological line prevail in the party, is there a chance of change in leadership?

I think this is not the focus of the moment. Right now we are debating certain political and ideological questions. Only the congress of the party (General Convention) will decide on the question of leadership.

There is lot of talk about the split in the party.

This is baseless. This is the thinking of the reactionary class. Our party is united.

<http://www.ekantipur.com/2010/12/06/oped/monday-interview/326063/>