

Hisila Yami Interview in Norway

Interview with Hisila Yami, a member of the central committee of the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist). It was conducted by Frontlinjer/Campo Antiimperialista in English in Norway during December 2007. Some editing and notes were added by Skwisgaar Skwigelf of the Fire on the Mountain blog which made the interview available online.

F/CI: How does the CPN(M) see the current stage of the struggle in Nepal?

Hisila: We took a new course after the people's war; we chose a new form of struggle. From the outside it might look simpler, but seen from the inside, it was a much more difficult course. We took a zig-zag path, as we were near to the smashing of the old state, we felt that the US and India was closing in to smash us. This situation could have led to a never-ending war. Today we gain through the legal struggle and on the streets.

Before, we followed a military strategy, where the politics were influencing the military situation. Now we follow a political strategy, and it's much more difficult.

During the peace talks, our strategy was always to break up the alliance between the Ranas [*a historical ruling family of Nepal -ed.*], the King and Congress. After the second Jana Andolan [*the 2006 mass movement against the monarchy -ed.*] we began a new alliance, to expropriate the property of the king. The law has been passed, but only on paper. It has not been implemented.

We have today two basic demands: to declare the republic before the elections for the constituent assembly and to go for a full proportional electoral system in these elections. In order to achieve these aims we went into an alliance with the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) against Congress, which remains a feudal force. On the issue of a proportional system we could make compromises, but on the issue of the king we are not flinching.

Before it was only us who were in favor of a proportional electoral system. Now, the umbrella front of all ethnic groups ask us not to leave these issues. They have all been raising these issues. There's also increasing support in all the parties and mass organizations. The parties have realized that they can use the ethnic groups to create a vote bank. Also, the UML tried to outsmart us when we left the principle of a full proportional system. But it wasn't for real, it was just to trap us. After they criticized us, they went back on their position again. But we had to unite with them to smash the Congress Party.

After UML diluted our stand, they said that we should "go for the process" both in terms of elections and declaring the republic. It was a middle way, neither to declare a republic directly before, nor after.

Now, sections of congress are complaining that they are being "pushed by the Maoists" and are starting to talk about "returning to the constitution of the first Jana Andolan [*the 1990 mass movement against the monarchy -ed.*].

Before the elections the People's Liberation Army and the Royal Army should be integrated.

F/CI: Do you think there will be elections for a constituent assembly this spring?

Hisila: Chances are equal. Tomorrow I'm told that they are meeting with Koirala. There are efforts to come to some understanding and a republic may be declared.

F/CI: What will you do if the demands of a republic and a proportional system are not being met?

Hisila: We will go back to the mass movement. That's why we have the republican front. Prachanda has also said that "even patriotic forces which before were forced to ally with Gyanendra could come over to our side."

F/CI: How will a 40/60 proportional system affect the ethnic groups? Could this stir up new problems with for instance the Madhesi?

Hisila: This depends on to which degree the umbrella of the ethnic groups, Janjati Masan, is successful. They want to establish a round-table conference of all the parties, ethnic groups and all the other people. This conference should be the decision-maker on this issue.

F/CI: But if you're running for elections to a constituent assembly without it being a fully proportional system, what are your chances of success?

Hisila: We will make an alliance, preferably also with Congress, but at least with the UML and the other left parties.

F/CI: What are the goals of the Maoists with the constituent assembly?

Hisila: Our goals are the new structuring of the state, federalism, employment, a better health service and to take action against gender disparity. The end result will be what we've been addressing all the time. We'll get radical reforms, not New Democracy, as we initially wanted when we began the people's war. The New Democracy will have to wait for another wave of the people's struggle.

It's nothing new in our strategy, it's like before, when we went to parliament after Jana Andolan I. You never know—later, we might go for a higher leap.

F/CI: What's the power of the Maoists?

Hisila: We've got associations parallel to the state level. We'll be continuing like before, and if we fail, at least we'll fail in a new way.

F/CI: What's the importance of the Indian revolution to the situation in Nepal?

Hisila: In India, we can hope for another leap coming with the Indian revolution.

F/CI: How do you work on your international relations?

Hisila: With increased globalization we have to use all kinds of avenues. We are taking now intense diplomatic moves from the party headquarters. Before, Maoist leaders were denied entry to the United States, but now that we are in parliament they allow us to go there for talks. Now the US also wants to come to Nepal through the UN. That is why we press for the constituent assembly, because we want the UN to leave as soon as possible. In this we stand together with China and India.

The US wants to make us into a new UML.

F/CI: What's your relation to the Communist Party of India (ML)?

Hisila: There are no party relations with the CPI(ML). During the peace process there was some contact and we considered the CPI(ML) easier to deal with than BJP.

F/CI: What do you think of the Norwegian role?

Hisila: Norwegian businessmen are better in some regards, they are more sensitive to public and social issues.

Before, Norway was on the side of the US, now they are more neutral. But Norwegian neutrality can easily shift, they could soon lean towards the US.

F/CI: What will happen to the king?

Hisila: If the king is sensible, he'll run away. If he tries to act smart, he'll be killed or imprisoned. Unlike your king, he's had a lot of power, he even killed his own family! If he were ousted as a result of the people's war, we'd take other steps than we do now. But if he remains silent, we will not touch him.

F/CI: What about child soldiers in the People's Liberation Army?

Hisila: The last statement by Prachanda stated that if it's proved by the UN (they have a system to prove this) that there are children in the PLA camps, they should be sent back to their villages with some economic means. But during the war, we even had children's organizations. We had many orphans, as in tribal societies remarrying isn't a taboo. This leads to children being abandoned, and they would come to us. We even let them help to carry things with the army.

F/CI: Wouldn't it have been better to continue fighting while you were on top?

Hisila: Through all the peace talks, we had the strategy of isolation the king and coming to an understanding with the parliamentary forces. During the people's war we were able to limit and encircle the enemy to the district headquarters. The enemy was fortifying their bunkers and our effort was to bring them to their bunkers and fight. After the two-line struggle [*a struggle between Prachanda and Baburam Bhattarai -ed.*], you had two major military attacks, like the one in Kara, where we lost many people, and in Pili, where we won, but only because the bunkers was still being built.

We were feeling that neither they nor we could win. So the coup was a breakthrough. Whenever before we said to the other parties, "Look, you'll be cheated by the king," they refused this, but then they saw this with their own eyes.