

Whither Nepali Maoists?

Bharat Jhunjunwala

The three main points in the programme of the victorious Communist Party of Nepal (Maoists)–CPN(M) are land to the tiller, autonomy to regions and 'industrial capitalism geared towards socialism'. Land to the tiller is clearly a winner. India accomplished this substantially in the fifties. The political stability of India owes itself much to this initiative. This measure is of greater importance for Nepal. According to the World Development Indicators published by the World Bank, the dependence of people on agriculture and rate of unemployment are higher in Nepal compared to India and the share of national income of the poorest 10 percent people is less. The quickest and sure method of uplifting the masses is to distribute land.

The second point is of regional autonomy. The CPN(M) has said in its programme that the country will be divided in 11 regions. These regions will have substantial autonomy. They will also have the right of self-determination. This promise, it seems, has been inserted to avoid repeat of 'tyranny of Kathmandu' as undertaken by the monarchy. The fear of a region declaring it independent will restrain the central government from imposing unpopular measures aimed towards enriching the capital while impoverishing the hinterland. This is politically desirable. But this approach is contra requirements of building a modern economy. There is a contradiction between regional autonomy and industrial capitalism. Modern economy requires close integration of the entire country. For example, the most efficient way to supply electricity to farthest regions is to link them to a national grid fed by the least cost option. Local self-generation is not always the best option. The water of Bhakra is irrigating the fields of Jaisalmer because Rajasthan and Punjab are not 'autonomous' and Punjab cannot deny share of national waters to other states. CPN(M) has set before it the objective of producing 10,000 MW hydropower. This is possible only if the regions are bound to each other. Regional autonomy will encourage every region to use its waters for its own betterment rather than for national good. The success of India, China, European Union and United States is because these are held together by a strong central government. The CPN(M) may either build an industrial economy or give autonomy to regions. It will have to choose between one of the two objectives.

The third point of CPN(M) programme is 'industrial capitalism geared towards socialism'. The intention is to establish Public-Private partnerships. Indeed it is good to rope in the power of capitalism in the interests of the people. It is seen that private contractors usually do a better job than departmental workers. But such beneficial result is not necessary. The businessman is a short-sighted creature. He will change colours according to the inclinations of the government. He will make fictitious bills and cooperate with government officials in leaking the revenue. He will equally cooperate with them in making good quality roads. The character of the businessman is determined by the nature of government. The distribution of electricity has much improved in Delhi and Kolkata due to

Public-Private partnership. But the same partnership led to opposite results in Bofors and other scandals.

The challenge before CPN(M) is to maintain purity of governance. The history of communist victories is not very encouraging on this issue. Lenin led the Communists to victory in Russia. He allowed dissent. But his successor Stalin adopted a dictatorial attitude. He expelled opponents like Trotsky and sent others to Gulags. In due course the Communist Party became as corrupt as the Czar it replaced. Officials of the Communist Party lived in luxurious dachas and gave instructions to factories located far off regarding the type of goods to be produced etc. They became disjoint with the ground realities. Production by Russian factories consequently became 'inefficient'. But there was no mechanism by which this information would reach the top echelons of national management. Slowly, Russian industry fell behind international standards, Russian goods became expensive, Russia could not export goods to earn foreign exchange for its necessary imports and ultimately it had to embrace IMF-led structural adjustment programme. The Revolution was thus undone. This happened because the distinction between the Party and State was removed and the feedback-and-control mechanism was dismantled.

This problem was uppermost in the minds of Gandhi before his death. He was disillusioned by the mad desire for holding office that had seized the Congressmen in his own lifetime. Two days before his assassination, he wrote a draft constitution for the Congress: "India, having attained political independence, the Congress in its present shape and form... has outlived its use... The AICC resolves to disband the existing Congress organization and flower into a Lok Sevak Sangh." He wanted to build an organization that would stay outside power and force the state to work in interests of the people. Workers of the Sangh would engage in constructive work in the fields of agriculture, health and education. They would educate the people to vote in the elections so as to secure good governance. Gandhi saw that power corrupts, thus he thought of converting the Congress into an organization that checked power without acquiring it itself.

Lenin had similarly made distinction between 'Party' and 'State'. He wanted the Communist Party to remain independent of-, and outside the government. The Party will force the government to implement correct policies. It was not to be assumed that the leaders will always be honest. Stalin reversed this conception. He simultaneously became General Secretary of the Communist Party and Head of State. The controlling force of Party on the State was abolished leading to degeneration of governance and ultimately to the undoing of the Bolshevik revolution.

CPN(M) wants to make industrial capitalism geared towards socialism. But this requires a pure leadership. It is necessary for the CPN(M) to put in place a system to ensure that the leadership remains true to its ideals. This is possible only if the Party remains outside power as suggested by Lenin and Gandhi. The CPN(M) slipping on this issue. Leader of the Party, Shri Prachanda, is being proposed to be the President of the new government. That will leave no force outside the power structure that will control and give direction to the government. There will remain no corrective mechanism in case Prachanda or his successors degenerate. Gandhi made Nehru the Prime Minister and remained outside power, rooted in

the people. Similarly Prachanda should consider remaining outside power and exercising check on the government as head of the Party. That will ensure longevity of the CPN(M) victory and bring long-standing peace and prosperity to the people of that impoverished country. □□□