

World Peoples' Resistance Movement (Ireland)

Nepal: The Martyrs Road:

An Interview With An Irish Based Maoist On A Visit To Nepal (2006)

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An Interview with An Irish Based Maoist On A Visit To Nepal

Working On The Martyrs' Road

An Irish based Maoist and member of World Peoples Resistance Movement recently visited Nepal as part of an International Brigade to construct roads in the Rebel Maoist held areas of Nepal. As well as observing the protests in the cities and villages as he made his way to the Red areas he also worked alongside rebel soldiers, farmers and workers on the Martyrs Road.



During our time in Nepalgunj, we met a young man from Kathmandu who was working for a human rights group. One evening, this man who was unaware of our political affiliations, told us of the day that the PLA had attacked the town only several weeks previously. Greatly shaken by the experience, he was to tell us that together with the uniformed soldiers of the PLA, large numbers of local Maoists with guns also appeared, some firing from rooftops in support of the guerrilla fighters.

In the revolutionary strongholds people's courts have been established where along with other issues, cases against women's exploitation have been brought to book with the combined efforts of Village Defence Committees, women's mass organizations and the people. Many

cases of land usurpation of widows or single women have been restored to the injured parties through such courts. Not only those guilty of sexually exploiting women, but also many defaulting husbands who have taken to drinking and beating their wives or practicing polygamy, have been disciplined through such courts.

Forty percent of PLA soldiers are women (the largest representation of female combatants in any army), 80% are party members, and all of them are volunteers. In practice, this “thinking army” is one where everybody knows whom he or she is fighting for, and why. They are fighting for the people, and so, they are fighting for themselves.

There have however, been instances whereby exclusively female guerrilla squads have been organised, most often taking on the task of dealing with feudal tyrants that have been guilty of sexually exploiting women.

PC: Why did you choose to visit Nepal? ,

WPRM Ireland: The Chinese are said to have a curse that masquerades as a blessing: ‘May you live in interesting times’. Right now Nepal is going through an interesting and pivotal period of its history. It is a time where, the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist)'s liberated base areas extend to over 80% of the national territory, including most rural areas, which are home to 85% of the Nepalese people. Landlocked between China and India, the Nepalese interior is largely inaccessible other than by foot, having only an estimated 8,000km of road suitable for motor vehicles in the whole country. Consequently, distances are measured in the number of hours or days it takes to walk, and the majority of Nepalese are cut off from health facilities, schools, and national trade, despite astronomical amounts of foreign aid that had peaked in 2001 to around one-third of the national budget.

In the liberated base areas, the CPN (M) has been engaged in building the new People’s Republic of Nepal. An important element in this in recent times has been its project for the construction of 91 kilometres of what is known as the ‘Martyrs Road’. Organised by the people-elected Magarat Autonomous People’s Republican Government in the main base area, mass organisations have been engaged in building what will, on completion, be a motorable road. With the moral and material support of the masses helping to create the infrastructure of the new people’s society, the MAPRG called for international volunteers to come to visit the Martyrs’ Road, participate in its building and take the opportunity to learn from the ongoing revolutionary process that was taking place there, on the ground.

PC: So have International volunteers taken part in the road construction?

As the Nepalese people’s struggle against the feudal monarchy to establish a democratic republic hit a high point during the month of April, it coincided with the arrival from India of the Second International Road Building Brigade of which I was a member. Drawing its members from several countries, including Afghanistan and Iran, the brigade was gathered with the aim of journeying to Rolpa to work on this road.

The Martyr’s Road on completion, will eventually link the town of Nuwagaon to Thawang and Chunwang, and connect many of the villages in the interior of Rolpa with the main district capital of Dang, the city of Gorahi. It is believed that the road will greatly improve travel within the district, making it easier for young people to enter higher education and

enable better access to the likes of medical treatment. We were impressed by the general enthusiasm of the majority of the road workers and spoke to two volunteers who told us that they had come to work on the road, “for the development of the region and the country”.

It is widely recognised, even among non-Maoists, that the road is an important step in this development. Built purely by the people with no outside help, using basic tools such as pickaxes and spades, the road-building project consequently avoiding most of the main developmental problems associated with such a project. These include the tendency towards over-reliance on capital-intensive techniques, and the mindset that if modern technology is unavailable the job cannot be done. A country swamped by ‘foreign aid’, the people of Nepal are well placed to recognise the problems inherent in such solutions. Given that under such a scheme, labour would normally be paid to build the road, such a project tends to be open to wide-scale corruption. This however, is not possible in this project, the people seeing the immediate results of their labour.

As for the frequently made accusations by western media that the road-building project depends on forced labour, workers are required to work no more than 15-20 days, once a year. Carried out during the slack agricultural seasons, people work for 8 hours a day, a fact confirmed by people we spoke to who were working on the road itself. There were also frequent breaks, the working days broken up by occasional cultural activities. Party leaders, cadres and Peoples’ Liberation Army (PLA) members also do voluntary work on the road throughout the year.

PC: How does this tie in with the CPN (M)s development plans?

WPRM Ireland: The CPN (M)’s attempts to develop the country without depending on imperialism are due to these international forces having their own agenda that doesn’t coincide with Nepali interests. The peoples’ interests therefore lie in the development of the country for all, while the imperialist agenda lies in keeping countries that they call, “developing” underdeveloped and dependent on foreign aid, loans, technology and expertise. Using their own strengths to develop their own methods the CPN (M) has utilised the road-building project to raise consciousness among the masses. Working under the slogan, “Our Development, Our Effort”, this process involves the finding of what can be achieved collectively, increasing the self-confidence of the people, as their own techniques are developed to overcome problems as they emerge.

The Nepalbandh however, extended for far longer than we had expected and although it was a beautiful thing to witness an unbreakable strike, it certainly presented problems with regard to our wish to travel to the liberated zones, and indeed to the Martyr’s Road. Although it was both interesting and exhilarating to participate in the people’s movement, every day we were meeting to discuss ways in which we could fulfil our task of reaching the Maoist-held areas. In our eagerness, it must be said, our ideas at this time were approaching desperation and eventually, there appeared to be no alternative but to cross the border into India to buy bicycles so that three of us could continue. Cycling across the flat plains of the Terai and up into the mountainous district of Dang, we eventually reached Gorahi, the last city garrisoned by the Royal Nepal Army (RNA) before Rolpa. Here, our group encountered more large protests. As in all such protests, villagers were coming in from Maoist areas to increase the protestors’ numbers, playing a decisive role in the successes of the people’s movement. From Gorahi, cycling was impossible due to the mountain roads and we were forced to trek on up into the mountains, a journey of over 50km. What most surprised us here was that the RNA

and police influence ended abruptly outside the exit from the city. From then on, the villages were hung with the banners of the Maoists, people we met on the mountain trails greeting us with calls of “Lal Salaam!” (Red Salute).

PC: Did you have preconceptions?

WPRM Ireland: Certainly the western media had always suggested that the monarchist structure was very popular among the Nepalese people, a claim that Michael Palin was also to make in his ‘Himalaya’ book and TV series. While I have never rated Palin as any kind of a worldly wise individual, and I have never trusted the Western media, naturally the doubts remained. Reactionary propaganda, when continuously churned out, does tend to be absorbed passively by anyone that is exposed to it. When our group arrived in Nepalgunj however, the country was in the grip of nation-wide, anti-monarchist protests and a bandh (general strike) that not only closed all the shops and commercial outlets but also cleared all motor vehicles from the roads.

PC: Did you join in any Anti-Royalist demos?

WPRM Ireland: Trapped in Nepalgunj across the border from India, we were ideally placed to witness one of the many anti-monarchist protests outside of Kathmandu. Containing large numbers of women, these protests drew many from the Hindu, Muslim and Christian communities. As well as workers, peasants and students, civil servants, including doctors, lawyers, teachers and bank officials marched through the streets. At most of the intersections, the remains of burning tyres were a constant feature, new fires breaking out at regular intervals. A major focus for mass anger was Gyanendra Square, the central monument dedicated to the king that was frequently surrounded by such fires in spite of having been given 24-hour paramilitary police protection.

In joining the daily protest marches, we found that the slogans chanted by the protestors left little room for reconciliation. As one of these marches approached the statue of Gyanendra’s deeply unpopular grandfather, Tribhuvan, a man with a loudhailer called out, “What does Arayghat want?” the crowd responding with, “Arayghat wants Gyanendra”. This was a reference to the royal cemetery. Also popular was the call to “Hang Paras from a tree”. Gyanendra’s son, Prince Paras is also much hated as a man who has committed both rape and murder but who has so far proved immune from legal action. These minor protests, the crowds becoming increasingly antagonistic, were set to rise in both numbers and militancy as the campaign intensified. After our work brigade had left, we were told on returning to the town by people that had been there, that a child had been shot dead and a woman had died after having first been beaten and then having a tear gas canister explode next to her. This occurred during a large protest that saw the destruction with lump hammers of both the Gyanendra monument and the statue of Tribhuvan.

PC: Did the visit change your views?

WPRM Ireland: It would be wrong to say that I had any ‘Road to Damascus’ conversions, as I was already fully supportive of the Maoist project when I arrived there. Rather than say that my views were changed, I would be more conscious of having gained a deeper understanding of the revolutionary process that is going on in Nepal. As Mao Tse-tung once said, “All true knowledge comes from direct experience”.

Reaching the town of Tilla Bazaar deep within the liberated zones, nine days after we had been due to rendezvous there and afflicted by blisters the size of Denmark, the District Secretary of Rolpa, Comrade Kamal, on hearing of our arrival, walked for two hours across the mountain roads (on flip flops) to meet with us. A man who in spite of his high rank, displayed no airs or graces, Kamal had no hesitation in bedding down in the same dormitory room that the local cadre had billeted us in.

Announcing that he would remain with us throughout our stay in the liberated zone, Kamal was to accompany us to the Martyr's Road, introducing us to Comrade Surya, the Co-ordinator of the road-building project. In the short time that we were there, we spent much time in the company of these two men. Although as I said, my views were not changed as such, I was by no means certain that our group would be treated in such a comradely manner.

PC: How important was the Maoist insurgency in bringing down the King?

WPRM Ireland: The People's Movement was distinctly anti-monarchy, retaining a general line of being anti-Congress. This is due to the Nepal Congress party being perceived as both too close to the monarchy and renowned for its corruption and its inefficiency in previous governments. Most of the protestors by far appeared to be in favour of a republic, this being recognised as a more modern form of government in contrast to the existing feudal autocracy. Many of those that we talked to in the cities, spoke of achieving a British-style constitutional monarchy, although the cultivation of a constituent assembly and a republic were infinitely more popular. Within these protesting crowds, it was acknowledged that the Maoists were very much a part of the peoples' struggle and therefore part of the democratic agenda. As I have said, the CPN (M) strategy at this time was to mobilise people in the villages around the major towns, organising them to swell the protests in the urban centres. In this way, the protests in the towns and cities tended to swell by tens of thousands as the campaign escalated.

With the current two-state situation, the emerging revolutionary state based in Rolpa and the dying monarchist regime in Kathmandu, the signing of a 12-point agreement between the seven parliamentary parties demonstrated that the latter had come to recognise this situation. Outside the major cities, the RNA controls little other than its barracks in the district headquarters and some parts of the Terai region along the Southern border with India. Even in government controlled areas, support for the revolution is evident in massive support for bandhs (general strikes) that are frequently called.

PC: What sort of government exists in the liberated zones?

WPRM Ireland: The new red power is exercised throughout the liberated zones in the form of People's Committees, co-ordinated at the central level by the United Revolutionary People's Council (URPC). These People's Committees, elected in general elections called by the Party, practice what is known as the three-in-one system. This organisational style was developed in China under Mao. Bringing together different sections of society, this system combines representatives of the Party, PLA, and other democratic and nationalist elements, representing the petit-bourgeoisie. Also present are local rebel cadres from the Nepali Congress Party and the Communist Party of Nepal (United Marxist-Leninists). Those who go against the reactionary policies of their parties are therefore eligible for election to the local committees. The committees carry out political, economic, social, cultural and educational activities at local level. In Nepal's western region, Journalists from all over the country are

frequently invited to the red zones to report on the massive open rallies there.

Party cadres will often point out that such remarkable progress has been made possible by the political awakening of millions of people within the country. The masses are defined as the base for the people's war, the CPN (M) declaring that, "Unless they are politically conscious and actively participating in the revolutionary process, our program will fail." Without the Maoist Peoples' War and the widespread mobilisation and raising of consciousness that this brought with it, there is little doubt among those that honestly analyse the situation, the people's movement and the king's compromise would not have occurred.

PC: Did the Maoist Guerrillas have the Army on the run or was there a stalemate?

WPRM Ireland: The Maoist armed struggle began by using the principle of encircling the enemy, utilising the strategy of luring them into red bases, encircling their forces and delivering death blows at their weakest points. The Maoist strategy of Prolonged Protracted People's War is greatly suited to semi-colonial countries such as Nepal, the revolutionary fighters surrounding the cities from the countryside by establishing rural base areas. Beginning as a guerrilla struggle, what was to become the PLA operated in squads and platoons, pursuing mobile and positional warfare, the red fighters advanced towards the creation of company, battalion and brigade strength capable of large engagements with the forces of the state.

At this time there exists a military and political stalemate the CPN (M) now "making preparations for the Strategic Offensive through tactical offensives." The reactionary state itself however, attempting to regain lost ground, continues being inevitably drawn into increasing contradiction with the revolutionary forces. During our time in Nepalgunj, we met a young man from Kathmandu who was working for a human rights group. One evening, this man who was unaware of our political affiliations, told us of the day that the PLA had attacked the town only several weeks previously. Greatly shaken by the experience, he was to tell us that together with the uniformed soldiers of the PLA, large numbers of local Maoists with guns also appeared, some firing from rooftops in support of the guerrilla fighters.

A key component in this revolutionary process is the development of the PLA itself. Soldiers must seed, plough, dig, sing, dance, teach, learn, and, of course, fight. Declaring that, "Our weapon is our ideology", the PLA perceives itself as a thinking army, their successes in the past ten years being from more than just their military strength: they began with two rifles, only one of which worked. Forty percent of PLA soldiers are women (the largest representation of female combatants in any army), 80% are party members, and all of them are volunteers. In practice, this "thinking army" is one where everybody knows whom he or she is fighting for, and why. They are fighting for the people, and so, they are fighting for themselves.

It is commonly stated, most often by the Western media, that 13,000 people have been killed in the civil war. It is rarely clarified however, that of these deaths, 10,000 have been at the hands of the RNA and the police. Many of these are people who have been murdered in fake "encounters" in which dozens of "Maoists" are killed, but no weapons are captured.

The CPN (M) however, has taken the decision on many occasions, to participate in peace talks with the Kathmandu government, as a means to win public opinion and destroy many of the myths promoted by the monarchy. This front of struggle is one that the CPN (M) believes

most revolutionary forces must face. Historically, reactionary forces have rarely been able to defeat rebels by purely military means. However, the Maoists have pointed out, whenever rebel forces are brought to the negotiating table, it is usually there that they are vanquished.

PC: What role did the traditional Trade Union movement play in the resistance in the cities?

WPRM Ireland: Trade Unions have existed in Nepal since the All Nepal Trade Union Congress was formed in 1947, although this group only really came into power after the collapse of the Rana dynasty in 1951 and the movement towards democracy. The current line-up of Nepalese unions tend to be linked to the political parties both parliamentary and revolutionary and played a frontline role in the Peoples' Movement, their flags much in evidence on all protests. Among these were the Nepal Congress linked, Nepal Trade Union Congress (NTUC) and the CPN (UML) linked General Federation of Nepalese Trade Unions (GEFONT). The latter is a confederation of seventeen national trade union federations, declaring its goal to be "Socialism for the dignified working class and prosperous life". The Nepal Independent Workers Union, the Independent Transport Workers Association of Nepal, the Nepal Independent Hotel Workers Union and the Trekking Workers Association of Nepal established GEFONT itself in 1989. At the time of its foundation it functioned as the trade union wing of the then underground Communist Party of Nepal (Marxist-Leninist).

The trade union movement in general, has proved itself to be quite powerful due to the wider revolutionary situation, the bandh remaining unbroken until it was called off. In response, the monarchy called a nighttime curfew backed up by the threat that members of the RNA would shoot any who broke this. So far as I could see, all unions participated in the Peoples' Movement.

PC: Was there a more radical Union, which took a different perspective?

WPRM Ireland: It would be fair to say that the trade union affiliated to the CPN (M), the All Nepal Trade Union Federation (Revolutionary) would be the most radical of the unions. It did however; also participate fully in the two-week general strike and blockade of Kathmandu despite the ANTUF(R) being an underground organisation in the areas still held by the monarchy.

PC: What other left organisations exist in Nepal and what is their current strength?

WPRM Ireland: Of the seven parliamentary parties, four of these can at least be termed nominally communist. The largest and most significantly influential non-Maoist party is the aforementioned Communist Party of Nepal (United Marxist-Leninists). On leaving Nepalgunj and cycling out onto the Mahendra Highway our first stop as night was approaching was the village of Agaiya, around 54km from where we had set off. A CPN (UML) stronghold, the people appeared to be preparing to walk to Nepalgunj the following day to join the protests there. As darkness fell, the village children, sitting in a ring singing songs, suddenly decided to play a different game, that of protestors. Influenced by the events that were going on around them, a knot of children marched around the houses chanting, "Gyanendra is a thief, he must leave the country!"

PC: It has been reported that some leading members of the Maoist organisation left due to the agreement with the opposition parties. Was this a significant split?

WPRM Ireland: It would be wrong to categorise the recent expulsion of two former leaders, Rabindra Shrestha and Anukul from the Party as any kind of significant split. These were expelled due to, among other things, their going public with their dissent accusing senior leaders, Prachanda and Baburam Bhattarai of political deviation as well as lodging, personal attacks against them. Though the Party leadership had been trying to sort out the differences with them through inner-party debate and "had instructed them to present their discontents in a disciplined way ", they chose instead to attack the party and the revolution blatantly showing utter disregard of Party discipline and demeanour.

The duo had been previously "suspended from the central committee only a few days before". Chairman Prachanda has issued a Press Communiqué on 14 March 2006 to this effect, denouncing them as "traitors", "collaborators of the reactionaries" and deserters of the revolution.

PC: Do you see problems ahead after an election is held?

WPRM Ireland: I reckon that there is clear evidence of problems set to emerge long before any elections appear on the horizon. Talking to protestors in both Nepalgunj and Gorahi, there appeared to be a distinct concern among the protestors that the Seven Party leadership would compromise with the monarchy allowing the people's demand for a democratic republic to fall short in its ambitions. In discussing the issue with Comrade Kamal later, he was to remark that the Seven Party Alliance leadership lagged behind the forward momentum of the masses in their opposition to the monarchy. The masses therefore are more progressive than the aspirations of their parliamentary leadership.

PC: What is the position of women in Nepal?

WPRM Ireland: Women have historically in Nepal, had no land or voting rights, tending to live around thirteen years less than the average Nepalese man. Realising therefore, the double exploitative state of women, the CPN (M) has rightly targeted them for the unleashing of their doubly repressed energy to attack the system, which has been ultimately responsible for their present state. Added to the three mountains of oppression weighing down on the Nepalese masses, women are recognised as suffering a fourth mountain of patriarchy that is especially harsh upon those of lower castes, the Brahmin and Chetries castes being dominant.

Many Nepalese women have been trafficked to India as prostitutes from ages as young as ten and it is currently estimated that up to 300,000 Nepalese women and girls currently work abroad as prostitutes. Marginalized from education and denied a share as heir to family property, women are often married to much older men before the age of thirteen. Those that are widowed are forbidden to re-marry and are obliged to slave for their husband's family. It is this oppression that continues to bear women to the front ranks of the PLA and the CPN (M).

PC: To what extent are women involved in revolutionary organisations?

WPRM Ireland: Now, more than two million women participate in the All-Nepal Women's Association (Revolutionary), which is spearheading many of the drastic changes that are

taking place in Nepalese society, mobilising women and men alike around the issues of women's liberation. At all village, area and district levels, women have been mobilised under the women's mass organisations. In the revolutionary strongholds people's courts have been established where along with other issues, cases against women's exploitation have been brought to book with the combined efforts of Village Defence Committees, women's mass organizations and the people. Many cases of land usurpation of widows or single women have been restored to the injured parties through such courts. Not only those guilty of sexually exploiting women, but also many defaulting husbands who have taken to drinking and beating their wives or practicing polygamy, have been disciplined through such courts.

With the provisions of these people's trials women now tend to feel more secure within and outside their homes as defaulting husbands and roving men are duly punished. Also the women have become more aware of their legal rights and the realities of the feudal state, the repeated rape and molestation by members of the police force and the protection given by the state to such people has exposed the class character and gender bias of the regime. Because culturally women have been associated with household work, women activists have been most effective in mobilising masses in new areas as they are easily accepted at household level. It has been generally observed that in areas where local women have been mobilised, such places eventually become stable bases for sustaining the movement.

PC: Did the war have an effect on womens involvement?

WPRM Ireland: It was only after CPN (M) started the People's War that women from grassroots, mainly rural women, started to mobilise. Historically, whenever women have been called upon to make a contribution to political movements they were looked upon as a reserve force, whose function was merely to act as "helpers". Today however, there are many leaders, commanding guerrilla squads that are made up of both men and women. Each guerrilla squad, consisting of around 9-11 members, due to Maoist policy, contain at least two female guerrillas. There have however, been instances whereby exclusively female guerrilla squads have been organised, most often taking on the task of dealing with feudal tyrants that have been guilty of sexually exploiting women.

The Maoist movement has found that women tend to take time to decide whether or not to join the movement, but once they have made the commitment are inclined to be much firmer than many of the male cadres. This is demonstrated by the fact that there have been fewer cases of surrender or fleeing under fire among the PLA's female combatants. Women have also been found to be less likely to disclose party related secrets when captured and are also found to have greater perseverance and patience than men. This reality is thought to be due to the fact that women have more to gain from the revolution than men, i.e. for them it is not only the question of escaping away from class oppression but also gender oppression.

The revolutionary process in Nepal has certainly brought an alternative life to many young and aspiring men and women. In the case of women's lives, particularly in rural parts of the country, the daily existence is highly monotonous, set in a repeated pattern of reproductive activities and with marriages being arranged at much younger ages, they have no way of escaping from this beaten track life cycle. Thus for aspiring women, the Peoples' War offers them challenging opportunity to work side by side with men on equal terms and to prove their worth both mentally and physically.

The Peoples' War, vilified by a short-sighted Western media as a "terrible thing", has in

Nepal given an alternative and dignified life to many socially abandoned women, women abandoned by their husbands, and women who could not afford to get married. For them a heroic death in the course of PW is more attractive than the living death that is imposed on them by the society.

In discussing this issue with Kamal, he was to recall, “When we rebelled against the feudalist and the semi-colonialist system here, women, that means our sisters and mothers, were with us from the beginning. These came to our rebel group, and they worked very hard with us. Now they are with us in our military formations, in our party organisation and in our mass organisations. Although as women, the old traditional, conservative society rejects them as leaders, we accept them, and they can work freely without hesitation. They take commanding roles and are very good in the field. They are also taking leadership roles in the war fronts.”

PC: What were your own observations on womens involvement?

WPRM Ireland: Attending a cultural activity for the road workers on the Martyrs’ Road itself, which was also arranged as part of our welcoming ceremony to the liberated areas, Comrade Surya explained the reasons behind such events. “Under our policy and program we do not only make a timetable for work but we give recreation and enjoyment to the people. We give our ideology through this, by dance and song. We want to raise their consciousness and people are very eager to grasp ideology through art. We try to give our ideology through our cultural programs. If we want to take something from the people then we must give them something back, what we give them is ideology.” Having set up a stage surrounded by brightly coloured drapes, we were all invited to address the crowd before the entertainment began. Performing traditional dances, interspersed with revolutionary songs, girls stood with boys, their fists raised in the Lal Salaam at the beginning of each performance.

What I found interesting was that when we met female comrades here they would Lal salaam and shake our hands like the men, showing a degree of confidence that we hadn’t seen previously. On our journey through the Terai, we had met and talked with many men who were eager to share their views and opinions with us, women tending to remain in the background. As we left the celebrations, which were continuing, some of the performers, who were changing from the traditional dress of the Magarat people into PLA uniforms, saluted us as we passed. The boys, displaying wide smiles, punched the air enthusiastically, the girls, sombre and unsmiling raised their fists to their temples. The difference was slight but tangible.

On our return journey to Gorahi, we encountered a group of elderly women returning from the protests there. One of these, on seeing the three of us in the crowd and being told why we were there, insisted on coming over to salute and shake our hands, declaring that, “The police used to come from Gorahi to suppress us, now we go to Gorahi to encircle them”. These of course are but two isolated perspectives but I would argue, food for thought nonetheless.

PC: In the field how have the Maoists dealt with the issue of equality?

WPRM Ireland: The Maoists' popular support is founded on their proven ability to lead the people in making radical, practical and much needed changes. Historically, the land has not provided enough food for subsistence, and men have had to migrate seasonally or indefinitely to cities in search of work. When the CPN (M) seized control of the Rolpa District from the monarchist regime, it drove out the local tyrants and carried out widespread land reform. In

more recent times, experimental co-operatives and communes have been implemented and new co-operative banks have replaced usurers. At one point we were introduced to Comrade Birat, the head of the People's Cooperative Bank in the Rapti Zone who proudly showed us the bank's documents and talked to us of the oppression of people during the old pre-liberation era.

Based on principles of "land to the tiller", the party's rural policy is to expropriate land from the landlords, redistributing it to peasants. This policy is designed to develop a self-reliant economic system with a view to domestic production being geared to the immediate and basic needs of the people. Alongside the application of the co-operative farming method, the People's Committees have also begun instituting collective production and collective farming. In the base areas, small industries have also been set up and supplied by the raw materials of the countryside that would otherwise be exported to India. This land reform has led to the implementation of new agricultural techniques and the creation of people's communes has made agriculture sustainable. Also, "cottage industries" such as cloth and bag making have sprouted from the extra time created through distribution of labour.

Within the liberated zones, many reactionary traditions, such as arranged marriages, have been done away with. Under the new power, widows can now remarry and also inter-caste and love marriages are permitted. New festivals are also being celebrated, including, 1st May, the birth anniversaries of Communist Leaders, the initiation date of the People's War (13th February), the Martyrs Day and International Women's Day. As both genders are granted rights of inheritance, the reactionaries tend to complain. Campaigns have also been launched for the teaching of hygiene, health and literacy. Special attention has further been made to the concerns of national minorities (janajatis) that collectively make up the majority of the country's population.

The official language, Nepalese, is spoken and enforced by the upper caste Hindu elite, who have prohibited the use of minority languages in any official capacity, including within education. Literacy rates are less than 50% nationally, Surya explaining that, "In Rolpa, under the old power, there were few schools and the children were not able to go to school because they were very poor. About 50-60% of children go to school at primary level but they cannot go to school at secondary level or upper level because they cannot afford it." This is being tackled in the liberated areas by the creation of "model schools" that teach mother languages, as well as Nepalese and English, within a curriculum based on the needs of the people, as well as through the establishment of adult literacy classes. On this issue, Surya was to continue, "Now new republican schools are being built and the children are able to go to school."

When we first met Comrade Kamal, we had a lot of questions for him due to all that we had seen and experienced. This was largely as a result of our pretending to be tourists to all that we met until we reached Tilla Bazaar. Consequently, this was our first opportunity to ask questions freely and so we talked into the night. As darkness fell, Kamal broke off from what he was saying to ask me to flick on the light switch. This came as a surprise to me as I hadn't expected electricity in such a remote area. On asking Kamal about the electricity sources he told me to look up on the roof. Sure enough, all the houses in the area seemed to have solar panels on the roofs. This green-power has allowed local people not only to light their homes, but also to charge their torches and radios.

PC: How could Irish people support left / progressive forces in Nepal?

WPRM Ireland: Ultimately the CPN (M) has promoted Lenin's declaration that, "There is one, and only one, kind of real internationalism, and that is -- working whole-heartedly for the development of the revolutionary movement and the revolutionary struggle in one's own country, and supporting (by propaganda, sympathy, and material aid) this struggle, this, and only this, line, in every country without exception". Admittedly this is a somewhat daunting task given the current political situation in Ireland.

The CPN (M), sees itself as part of an international struggle, affiliated as it is to the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement (RIM), an embryonic Maoist international that includes among its fighting contingents, that of the Communist Party of Peru (PCP) and the Maoist Communist Party – of Turkey and Northern Kurdistan (MKP).

“The CPN (M) argues that in the present context of world development, that is, the maximum polarisation of property through the International Monetary Fund, globalisation and structural adjustment programmes, the unhealable gap between rich and poor, the development of electronics and communications, and, along with the internationalisation of capital and the capitalist class, the internationalisation of the working class and the poor people, and in essence at a time when the whole world is squeezed into a small village, the application of a single strategy is not sufficient to make revolution in today's world.”
(A World To Win, 2002/No. 29)

It is this consciousness that has led the CPN (M) to affiliate itself to the Co-ordination Committee of Maoist Parties and Organisations in South Asia (CCOMPOSA) whose function it is to help co-ordinate Maoist forces in the region. The fact that Nepal borders some of India's most inflammatory regions and with strong discontent boiling up in the country, the Indian Home Minister LK Advani has expressed some alarm over the prospect of a South Asian Soviet Federation. War with India's own Maoists it is believed, would be far more costly to the Indian government forces than those currently being waged against the Kashmir and Bodo national movements. As fellow contingents of the RIM, the Indian Maoists would see victory in Nepal as having the potential to provide a red beacon to the Indian masses. Such a victory, it is hoped, will introduce clarity into the line struggles currently advancing within the Indian movement. With such high stakes, India may soon see it as necessary to intervene in Nepal directly having already sent arms and helicopters to the RNA

The 12th May, 2002 issue of the British Independent newspaper, riding the tidal wave of emotion that followed in the wake of September 11th, attempted to slander the Maoists by claiming they had links with al-Qaeda. The basis for this is the oft-used “suspicions of Western intelligence agencies”. In June of that year, Britain, hosted an international consortium that included the US, Russia, China, India, Australia and several European countries with an interest in aiding Gyanendra in defeating the Maoists. The British Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs responsible for South Asia, Ben Bradshaw, speaking in Kathmandu said, “Britain will certainly help Nepal. We have also experienced in Northern Ireland a similar kind of problem for 35 years. There is a need for a robust attack on this type of terrorism.... After the 11 September attacks, there has been a greater obligation to stop terrorism in the world. We have already passed legislation to stop terrorist propaganda.”

It is important therefore, that progressives in Ireland and indeed the West should remain

vigilant against the falsehoods and distortions that the increasingly reactionary Western media has been promoting. Before we left the liberated areas in Rolpa, Kamal had said to us, “We from our party request heartily to the people, to democrats from foreign countries, to come here and see the ground reality here with their own eyes, and to describe it materially, and expose such illusions and propagandas, false sayings. We give our solidarity to the people and request their solidarity to our movement here. Now we are fighting to establish a democracy here and we request you all to convey our red salutes to all the people, to our beloved people, to democratic people, and the people who are supporters of the WPRM.

Lal Salaam!”