

# People's Power in Asia: Lessons and Prospects

By Bhim Rawal\*

1. People are sovereign. No power in the world has so far been proved supreme then the people's power. However, the level of contradictions and balance of power temporarily cause setbacks and difficulties to the people's democratic movements the world over. Common people's struggle and movements have always transformed societies in different stages of civilizations. Especially the working people's movements have provided dynamism to the world towards democracy and social justice through the ages. This movement is continuing in different form and extent. The organized people's movement with clear objectives and political orientation can bring results according to the will of people. It needs initiation and leadership of political and social organizations recognizing objective realities of the given time.
2. The dictators, autocrats of all forms and faces are defeated before the people's movement in different parts of the world. In Asian context, people's power has toppled colonial and dictatorial regimes. Defeat of the Marcos dictatorship in the Philippines and autocratic king in Nepal and downfall of Suharto tyranny in Indonesia are some of the glaring examples of the recent past. In these countries, hundreds of thousand of people took to the streets and voiced for democracy and people's rights. Military dictators are toppled down. Armed violence of undemocratic states is defeated in various countries. It has a long-term political significance.
3. Participation of all communities, sections and classes of society has contributed to make people's movement strong and effective. Demands and aspirations of all sections of people are brought together and expressed in the form of people's movement. The higher form of consciousness is created for the protection of people's rights. In the course of people's movement, the people have made tremendous sacrifices and achievements. Political systems and leadership also are changed. However, the fulfillment of people's aspirations and demands are left unattended after the success of the people's movement at low ebb of the people's power. It is a matter of analysis and retrospection for all.
4. The collaboration of different forces, classes and communities sometime fast polarize according to the narrow interest of those sections of society and the main goal is again obliterate in post movement period. Previous ruling classes capture power in different pretext downgrading the achievements of people's power into a formal democracy. Deprivation, hunger, disease, illiteracy, unemployment, violence against women and children remain unsolved. People are disillusioned and frustrated when their needs and aspirations are not met after political struggle and change. They do not see proper outcome of their blood and sweat spent in the struggle. In such a situation, political parties, including the leftist forces, generally confront to difficulties to arouse and mobilize the people again. They have to take considerable time to convince people.

Therefore, the pro-people progressive forces have to be cautious to institutionalize the achievements of the mass movement from the very beginning. The show of the people's power does not automatically institutionalize people's democratic rights and interests. It requires

organized concerted efforts and actions. Economic prosperity, development and effective delivery of the state and government become essential.

5. The forces of regression always try to stage counter-revolution creating chaos and confusion collaborating with various national and international forces. In such a situation, the hard won achievements do not bring desired results for people. Undemocratic forces and elements of reaction try to reap the fruits of people's movement. It is an aspect that needs serious attention and analysis. Nepal has a bitter experience that the leftist forces have played almost decisive role in every mass movement since 1950 together with other pro-people organizations. Nevertheless, the rightist forces again control the state power and the country is deprived of transformation according to the will of common masses.

6. Clarity in political and economic system and orientation and structure of state and society is essential to drive the people's power to the destination. The lack of clarity also provides an excuse and opportunity for the reactionary forces to recapture and reassert power. Pro-people democratic and leftist forces have to chalk out appropriate and clear road map for all phases of the people's mass movement. The issues of political, economic, social and cultural inclusion and participation, national sovereignty and independence, gender equality, justice in distribution of resources and opportunities are very important to that regard.

7. There is a good prospect of mobilization of people's power to bring political and social transformation according to the need and will of people in Asian societies in contemporary international and various national situations. Inclusive political policy and program can contribute to utilize the potential and prospect of the people's power.

8. In the Nepali context, the Communist Party of Nepal has been fighting at the forefront for democracy, people's livelihood, social justice and national dignity since last six decades. It has played decisive role in the historical mass uprising in last April too. The King was forced to accept the people's demands. However, the rightist Nepali Congress again placed in the post of the prime minister in the coalition government. The rightist forces are now trying to use delay tactics to hamper the election of the constituent assembly that is expected in coming June. Undemocratic and regressive forces are trying to misuse the increasing expectations of the people to creating anarchism, chaos and disturbance in the country. If this situation is not properly handled, there may be danger of delay in the election of the constituent assembly. Delay in the election of the constituent assembly may cause more tension and uncertainty in the society virtually providing ground for undemocratic forces. The coalition of the eight-party alliance has to manage all dissatisfaction and dissent while moving towards the election of the constituent assembly and restructuring of the state.

9. In Nepal, the people's power defeated the king's autocracy by a three-week-long nationwide movement. Hundreds of thousand of people were ready to make every sacrifice in the mass movement. It was not so much difficult in reaching to a peace accord and to form an interim parliament too. However, it has been not so much easy to maintain law and order in the country after the promulgation of the interim constitution and formation of the interim parliament. Now violent agitation and discontent is spreading in the Southeastern and central Southern *Terai* (plain) of Nepal. It is posing threat and challenges before the task of the election of the

constituent assembly. Some groups are trying to fueling communal disharmony and hatred to spoil the peace process. Similar scenarios are seen in the post revolution or popular uprising in several countries. Thus, the lessons of the past should seriously be taken while exploring the prospect of people's power for democracy, social justice and independence and better life of people. #

*\*Presented by Bhim B. Rawal - Central Committee Member of the Communist Party of Nepal (UML), to the Asian Conference jointly organized by the International Left Forum and the Transform Asia Gender and Labor Institute Inc. in Manila on 30-31 January 2007.*