

Left Alliance wins Nepal's elections

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The recently-formed Left Alliance in Nepal won the parliamentary and provincial elections held on November 26 and December 7. Two Nepali Stalinist parties, the Communist Party of Nepal-Unified Marxist Leninist (CPUML) and the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist Centre (CPNMC), established the Left Alliance in October, announcing that the parties would merge after the election.

The CPUML and CPNMC, respectively, won 80 and 36 seats in direct polls, and 41 and 17 seats under a proportional system. Nepali Congress Party (NPC) could secure only 23 seats in direct elections and 40 under the proportional system.

The remaining seats have been divided among smaller parties, including the Federal Socialist Forum (FSP) and the Rashtriya Janatha Party (RJP), which claim to represent ethnic minorities, including the Madhesi and Janajati people.

Having a total of 174 seats in the 275-member parliament, the Left Alliance is set to form a government. CPUML leader K.P. Sharma Oli is likely to replace Sher Bahadur Deuba as prime minister in mid-January.

The Left Alliance also won 239 seats in provincial assemblies, while the NCP won just 45.

The victory of the Left Alliance is not an expression of popular support. Every party in the Nepal political establishment is corrupt and widely discredited. Since the Constituent Assembly was formed in 2008, following the fall of the monarchy, all the major parties have led governments that implemented International Monetary Fund (IMF)-dictated austerity measures and suppressed democratic rights.

The CPNMC broke from the Nepal Communist Party in 1994, “rejecting” the parliamentary system and declared adherence to Maoism. It launched a decade-long guerrilla insurgency, from 1996 to 2006. In 2006, the Maoists effectively derailed mass unrest against the

monarchy, by laying down their arms and joined other bourgeois political parties under an Indian-backed “Comprehensive Peace Agreement.” The pact included the formation of a constituent assembly to draft a new constitution.

The Maoist CPNMC won the largest bloc of votes in the first constituent assembly election in 2008, but dropped to third place in the recent election, revealing the erosion of its base of support.

Launching the Left Alliance election manifesto on November 7, CPNMC chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal (Prachanda) said the alliance’s objective was “to end the country’s elongated political instability by forming a strong and a single communist centre, and ultimately achieve stability and prosperity.”

These parties have nothing to do with communism. Their perspective has always been to reform capitalism rather than abolish it. Since 2006, the CPNMC has rapidly evolved into a party of the political establishment.

In a revealing statement, CPUML chairman Oli told a media conference that countries such as China had become “superpowers and prosperous without adopting a parliamentary system” and “democracy can also be strengthened through executive government.” Both “left” parties have voiced support for an executive presidency, a form of autocratic rule.

Nepal is one of the poorest countries in the world, with only \$US862 per capita annual income. While the overall national poverty level is 25.2 percent, rural poverty has increased to staggering 45 percent. About 12.5 percent of working people earn less than \$US1.90 a day.

Officially, national unemployment is 2.7 percent. However, according to a recent International Labor Organization report, youth unemployment is 19.2 percent and graduate unemployment is 26.1 percent. Around 92 percent of young people work in the

“informal” sector—that is, without proper wages, working hours or job permanency.

The Left Alliance’s promise to establish “stability and prosperity” in Nepal is illusory. The geopolitical tensions in the Indo-Pacific region are sharply expressed in Nepal. The country is strategically located in China’s underbelly. India and US are seeking to strengthen ties with Kathmandu as part of broader efforts to undermine China throughout Asia.

The election results have evoked much concern among major powers, including the US and India, Washington’s regional strategic ally. International media outlets immediately declared that a pro-Chinese alliance had won in Nepal. The *New York Times* ran an article headlined: “Communist parties’ victory may signal closer China ties.”

India issued a face-saving statement, “welcoming” the election results. However, Indian analysts have commented that New Delhi is losing its influence in Nepal. India’s ruling elite considers South Asia, including Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Maldives, to be within its “sphere of influence.”

Analyst Kanwal Sibal told the *New York Times*: “China’s influence in Nepal is well known and one hopes that after he [Oli] assumes charge, he will behave with maturity and not cause fresh headaches for India.” He claimed that China would try to extract a price from the new government.

S. D. Muni of the Institute for Defense Studies and Analysis, a New Delhi-based think tank, said: “If India fails to establish itself as a credible development partner of Nepal; the Chinese will surely gain in popularity.”

During the election, the Left Alliance promoted anti-Indian chauvinism. Over the past two years, India’s relations with Nepal have been strained as New Delhi sought increasingly to undercut Beijing in Kathmandu.

In September 2015, India effectively imposed a trade blockade on Nepal for five months, sharply reducing the country’s oil supplies. India supported demands by the Madhesi movement for changes to a draft constitution, to give more autonomy to the Terai region that borders India. New Delhi used the Madhesi demands as a lever to pressure the Kathmandu government.

Land-locked Nepal depends on India and its ports for almost all its trade. During the embargo, Oli turned to

Beijing for fuel supplies and economic assistance, deepening the tensions with India.

In July 2016, the Oli government collapsed after the Maoist CPNMC withdrew its support. This was, in effect, a regime-change operation engineered by Delhi, which secured the CPNMC’s support to topple Oli and install Deuba’s NPC-led government.

In October, however, CPNMC leader Dahal removed support from the Deuba government and formed a new alliance with Oli’s party. The Indian media, without evidence, declared that China worked with the Maoist party to end the NPC government.

It increasingly appears that a section of Nepal’s capitalist class is seeking to break from its dependence on India. The two Stalinist parties represent the interests of these layers.

The US has stepped up its efforts to undermine Beijing’s position. On December 15, US State Department spokesperson Heather Nauert described the elections as a “historic milestone” and said the US was “looking forward” to working with the new government.

Assistant Secretary of US State for Central and South Asia Alice Wells told US Congress in September: “Nepal has been selected for one of the US’s most high profile projects to increase regional connectivity within the Indo-Pacific.”

As these comments indicate, the US and India will intensify their own interventions in Nepal to combat China’s growing influence.



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