

Communists sweep elections in Nepal

By [Sara Flounders](#)

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While focusing for weeks on Tibet, the corporate media in the imperialist countries have played down the earthshaking developments in the neighboring Himalayan country of Nepal, the poorest country in Asia. Yet the revolutionary communist forces of the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist or CPN-M won an overwhelming electoral victory for the national Constituent Assembly on April 10.

The defeat of the monarchy, the corrupt feudal forces, pro-monarchy parties and the capitalist Nepal Congress Party, which supported the monarchy, is a blow to U.S. imperialism in this strategic country of 27 million people, bordering China. Washington is unlikely to accept the present mass upheaval without attempting to intervene.

Pre-election opinion polls commissioned by the U.S. Embassy in Katmandu, Nepal's capital, gave the Maoists forces only 8 to 10 percent of the popular vote. Western and Indian media coverage also predicted widespread violence, intimidation and vote rigging.

Although the final vote count will not be confirmed for two to three weeks, it is already clear the CPN-M, out of 55 political parties participating in the election, swept the direct vote and won 122 out of 240 direct seats, more than half. This 122 is more than three times as many seats as either the centrist Congress Party of Nepal or the social-democratic, left party known as the Communist Party of Nepal (UML—United Movement of the Left). These are the two major parties that had participated in the Parliament under the King.

The added votes of the major parliamentary left and several other left parties will provide a potential bloc, led by the CPN-M, of more than two-thirds of the seats. The monarchist parties received too few votes to secure any seats. Although the counting is not yet finalized for the proportional delegates, the CPN-M is already the confirmed winner of over 100 of the 335 proportional seats.

The vote spells the end of the feudal monarchy and the establishment of a democratic, federal, secular republic. Great new challenges lie ahead.

Revolutionary composition of Assembly

The CPN-M only agreed to a ceasefire in June 2006 in the decade long “peoples’ war” after securing the agreement on the holding of a constituent assembly and on its character and structure. The composition of the new body indicates that it will have a revolutionary character regardless of the specific delegates seated.

In the proportional seats women must be 50 percent of the delegates and 33 percent of the total Assembly. This is a stunning accomplishment considering the low status of women in Nepal.

Nepal has 40 nationalities and seven major languages, along with 125 recorded languages. The ethnic minorities must all be substantially represented in the Assembly. The Dalits and most oppressed castes are also guaranteed seats in the Assembly.

The monarchy and the old state insisted that there was only one language and one people in Nepal, leaving the overwhelming majority of the population ignored and unrepresented.

Such a grouping of oppressed peoples sitting down, not within the existing framework, but to draft wholly new laws and structures that more closely meet their needs, means that even bigger changes lie ahead.

The demand for an election of a constituent assembly to draft a completely new constitution became a powerful mass movement. The masses saw it as a national referendum on ending feudal class rule and an unpopular, repressive monarchy.

Even with such a large electoral victory this is unlikely to be a smooth transition. The CPN-M will now head the Defense Ministry, managing the army that it fought for 10 years.

Prachandra, the leader of the CPN-M, has moved from having a price on his head, dead or alive, to becoming the probable next president.

The archaic forces that have ruled Nepal for hundreds of years had no choice but to agree to the present election, which for the first time is not for seats in an existing structure that favors the landlords and propertied classes. Mass general strikes and massive demonstrations that swelled into a 19-day uprising in April 2006 forced the collapse of the existing government. An eight-point agreement was signed to establish a cease-fire, set up an interim government and begin preparation for the election for a constituent assembly.

The uprising in the cities was preceded by a well-organized, peasant-based armed resistance that lasted from 1996 to 2006. It grew to control more than three-quarters of the countryside. In district after district, the movement in the impoverished and undeveloped countryside, led by the CPN-M, focused on radical land reforms, cancellation of peasants' debts, gender equality and political representation of oppressed nationalities.

The determination of the CPN-M to bypass the old parliamentary talk-shop in Katmandu and demand a wholly new constituent assembly takes a page from the experience of the Constituent National Assembly of the Third Estate in the French Revolution of 1789 and the role of the Soviet Councils of workers and peasants in the Russian Revolution of 1917. It is also a powerful reassertion of the validity of peoples' war tactics and mobilization of the peasantry in the 21st century.

The stated goals of the CPN-M are to work through the mass organizations and the process of the Constituent Assembly on deciding the character of the state. At this point 80 percent of the population is engaged in subsistence agriculture. Popular demands to cancel the debts of the rural poor and for land reform will be brought to the Assembly.

Only private schools presently exist in Nepal. Public education is the first order of business. More than 80 percent of the population lacks access to electricity and education. The first national campaign is to organize for full literacy within five years and electrification within 10 years.

Although the majority of the population of Nepal is desperately poor and a third of the population lives on less than \$1 a day, the country is rich in undeveloped resources. It has mineral resources of gold, copper, iron, coal, oil and gas. It has plentiful water resources and extremely fertile soil in the lowlands able to produce three crops a year.

The CPN-M and all the forces struggling for revolutionary change in Nepal have a formidable task ahead of them. Nepal is isolated, landlocked and almost totally underdeveloped. Even the most basic improvements in the standard of living are up against the global capitalist downturn and soaring fuel, construction and food prices.

U.S. intervention

After Sept. 11, 2001, U.S. imperialism asserted itself globally more than ever. Washington put the CPN-M on the “terrorism” list and sent U.S. military advisors to aid Nepal’s feudal forces, also providing a third of Nepal’s national budget. Of 13,000 killed in the 1996-2006 peoples’ struggle against the monarchy, more than 10,000 died after the 2001 U.S. intervention increased the slaughter.

In contradiction to the phony U.S. message of great “respect for human rights” in neighboring Tibet, in Nepal the Pentagon rushed to supply helicopter gunships, night vision equipment, M-16s, stores of ammunition and other military technology to combat the peasant insurgency. Currently, Washington still has the CPN-M on its “terrorist” list.

In a Feb. 13, 2007, interview in Global Eco Politics U.S. Ambassador Moriarty compared the attitude toward relations with CPN-M with the hostile U.S. approach toward the democratically elected government of Hamas in the West Bank and Gaza.

U.S. imperialism has again and again shown its deep hostility to any elected government that does not serve its interests, supporting or initiating coups against democratically elected governments in Congo, Chile, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Venezuela, Lebanon and Hamas in the Palestinian West Bank and Gaza. In an effort to frustrate and defeat popular movements for change, U.S. corporate power has used tactics of sabotage, economic strangulation, sanctions, invasions, arming contra bands of landlords and property owners and orchestrating military coups.

The Constituent Assembly opens new revolutionary possibilities in Nepal. This unfolding process is likely to have a profound impact throughout South Asia, where the majority of the population is still impoverished peasants facing a global capitalist market.

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Articles by: [Sara Flounders](#)

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