

COMMENT

Opting for the Impossible?

For the maoist Prime Minister of the newly constituted Nepalese Republican Government, simply reversing the old administration's policies won't be that easy. Before the election all parties promised a change from the monarchy. But the Communist Party of Nepal-Maosit [CPNM] promised a wholly radical approach to the specific Nepalese situation : land to the tiller, autonomy to regions and 'industrial capitalism geared to socialism'.

Land to the tiller is clearly a winner. The political stability of India even in this era of liberalisation and destabilisation 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.

As for regional autonomy, the CPNM 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. The CPNM may either build an industrial economy or give autonomy to regions. It will have to choose between one of the two objectives. Resolving this contradiction is equally difficult.

And in practical terms 'industrial capitalism geared towards socialism' is equally difficult. It means establishing 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.

The challenge before CPNM is to maintain purity of governance. The history of communist victories is not very encouraging on this issue. Lenin's Communist Party became as corrupt as the Czar it replaced. 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.

CPNM wants to make industrial capitalism geared towards socialism. Given the globalised economic culture which is based on the philosophy of unlimited liberalism, whether they can do it remains to be seen. □ *[contributed]*