

Nepali Stalinist parties form a new alliance

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Ahead of elections in the coming weeks in Nepal, the country's two main Stalinist parties—the Communist Party of Nepal–Unified Marxist–Leninist (CPN–UML) and the Communist Party of Nepal, or Maoist Centre (MC)—have formed an electoral alliance and decided to merge after the elections.

The parliament was dissolved on October 14 and the elections are scheduled for November 26. Elections for the country's provincial bodies will take place on December 7.

The CPN–UML is the main opposition party, while the MC has been the principal partner in the coalition government led by the Nepal Congress. The new alliance is a political trap for the working class and oppressed masses under conditions of growing opposition to the government and the political establishment as a whole.

Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba of Nepal Congress reacted immediately by inducting eight new ministers from the Hindu right-wing Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP) into his government. The coalition also includes several other minor parties, such as the Federal Socialist Forum (FSF) and Rastriya Janata Party Nepal (RJP).

Initially the MC refused to leave the government. Its leader Puspha Kamal Dahal said his party would remain until the elections were over. When the Maoist leader refused to call for the resignation of his party's ministers, Deuba sacked them all, including 10 ministers and 10 state ministers.

The alliance between the CPN–UML and MC marks a sharp political turn. UML general secretary, Ishwor Pokarel, told the *Kathmandu Post*: “Now the leftist forces realize the need for unification and a strong alliance to fuel stability...” In other words, these two Stalinist parties are coming together to prop up capitalist rule.

Social tensions are rising in the country. Hundreds of

part-time teachers from Tribhuvan University protested on October 5 demanding permanent contracts, better pay and working conditions. Rural farmers in the Rautahat district protested last month against damage to their paddy fields due to toxic chemicals released by the nearby industries.

The political establishment in Nepal as a whole, including the CPN–UML and MC, is corrupt, parasitic and widely discredited. Tribhuvan University political science professor Krishna Khanal recently told the media: “Both the UML and the Maoists have huge stakes in private banking.”

Far from being socialist or communist, the CPN–UML and MC both defend capitalism and have played crucial roles in propping up bourgeois rule. The CPN–UML, formed in 1991, has always been closely integrated into the political establishment, supported the monarchy and backed the war against the Maoist insurgency that claimed 16,000 lives and trampled on basic democratic rights.

The Maoist Centre, founded in 1994, waged a protracted guerrilla war, not to abolish capitalism, but to end the monarchy. In 2006, amid mass protests in the main cities, the Maoists came to the rescue of the ruling class by entering into the so-called comprehensive agreement backed by New Delhi. In exchange for the king's abdication, the MC disarmed its fighters, used its influence to suppress further protests and integrated itself into the political establishment.

In government, the MC has implemented pro-market, pro-business policies, leading to a rapid erosion of its support. The number of MC members in the parliament plunged from 240 in 2008 to 80 in 2013. In recent local polls, it came third with 106 seats, while the CPN–UML and NC won 296 and 264 respectively.

Nepal is in a deepening political crisis. Over the past decade, there has been a succession of 11 governments, including the present one. After the abolition of the

monarchy in 2008, it took nearly a decade to pass a new constitution in September 2015. However, that constitution has faced severe criticism from the parties based on ethnic minorities, including the Madhesi and Janajati, for alleged discrimination against their communities.

To placate the minorities and end violent protests, the government drew up amendments to the constitution in August but failed to pass them in parliament due to the opposition of the CPN-UML and a section of the RJP.

All the parties claimed that the abolition of the monarchy would bring prosperity and democracy. However, the social crisis facing working people has only worsened.

According to the latest Asian Development Bank report, 25.2 percent of the population lives below the official poverty line. The proportion of the working population living on less than \$US1.90 a day is 12.5 percent. For every 1,000 babies born, 29 die before their first birthday.

According to the 2017 global hunger index, Nepal ranks 72. The percentages for those under five suffering from undernourishment, wasting, stunting and death are 8.1, 11.3, 37.4 and 3.6 respectively. While the official unemployment rate was 3.2 percent in 2016, thousands of young people and women are migrating abroad to look for jobs.

Nepal is increasingly being dragged into geo-strategic rivalry as China and India, backed by the US, have both sought to expand their influence in Kathmandu.

China is the country's main donor and investor. The previous CPN-UML government led by K.P. Oli signed 10 agreements with Beijing, including on trade diversification, cross-border connectivity and infrastructure development. In April, Nepal held its first-ever joint military exercise with China.

India sought to pressure the Oli government to distance itself from Beijing by backing the Madhesi protests demanding constitutional change. New Delhi also imposed a five-month economic blockade against Nepal last year in support of the Madhesi demands.

Behind the scenes, India helped to engineer the ousting of the Oli government and installation of the current NC-led administration of Deuba in July last year. The MC, by entering into the coalition government, effectively became a partner in this regime-change operation to secure the strategic interests of

India and the US.

US has directly intervened in Nepal as part of its efforts to undermine and encircle China. In September, senior US State Department official Alice Wells told US Congress: "Nepal has been selected for one of the US's most high profile projects to increase regional connectivity within the Indo-Pacific."

If the alliance between the CPN-UML and MC does win the election and form government, it will continue the attacks on social and democratic rights, and drag the country even further into the sharpening geo-political rivalries that are leading to war.



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