

Nepali prime minister sworn in amid growing political instability

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Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre) chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal, known as Prachanda, was sworn in as the country's new prime minister on December 25. Underscoring the acute political instability of bourgeois rule in this poor, landlocked country, Dahal's party won only 32 seats in the 275-parliament in the November national elections.

Dahal became prime minister, not by winning popular electoral support, but via a series of sordid manoeuvres. His party contested the recent elections as part of an alliance led by the bourgeois Nepali Congress and in opposition to a political front led by the Stalinist Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist–Leninist [UML]).

Following the elections, Nepali Congress leader Sher Bahadur Deuba, who planned to become prime minister, refused to support Dahal's bid to be PM during the first half of the new government's five-year term. Dahal had promised to pass on the prime ministership to Deuba during the second half.

Dahal responded by turning to the opposition UML-led political alliance. Despite being bitter rivals during the election, UML leader K. P. Sharma Oli agreed to support Dahal and back him as prime minister in the first half of the five-year term.

Dahal had previously been part of the last UML-led coalition government which came to power in 2017 but collapsed in late 2020 after Prime Minister Oli refused to hand over the reins of power to Dahal. Nepali Congress leader Deuba came to power in July 2021 with the support of Dahal.

The Maoist Centre's flip-flopping alliances with Nepali Congress and the Stalinist UML are yet another exposure of the thoroughly opportunist and corrupt character of this pro-capitalist party.

None of the establishment parties came close to securing a majority in the November elections. Nepali Congress won 89 seats, far less than the 138 seats required for a majority in the 275-member House of Representatives. Its coalition partner, the Communist Party of Nepal–Unified Socialist (CPN-US), won 10 seats, and has now swung its support to Dahal.

The opposition UML secured only 78 seats and, with their allies, which includes the Hindu chauvinist and royalist Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP) and the Janata Samajwadi Party, have only 92 seats, 46 less than the required majority. With the support of a clutch of even smaller parties, the ruling coalition now has the support of 170 members of parliament.

The mass alienation and hostility towards the whole political establishment was also indicated in the fact that only 61.4 percent of the registered electors cast votes in the general election. This is 7.2 percent less than the last previous election.

How long this highly unstable coalition remains in power is yet to be seen. Nepal, which has a population of 29 million, has had 13 different governments during the last 16 years of parliamentary rule. Not one of them has finished its scheduled terms.

Following the eruption of working-class struggles against the monarchy in 2006 the Maoists ended their armed struggle perspective and joined bourgeois parties like Nepali Congress to save capitalist rule.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* noted in September 2008: “CPN-M leaders Prachanda [Dahal] and Bhattarai have been making it clear to business leaders and foreign governments that a Maoist-led government would guarantee private property and welcome foreign investment... [T]he Maoists have worked might and main to prevent the mass movement that erupted in April 2006 against King Gyanendra's autocratic rule,

from threatening capitalist rule.”

Dahal previously led the Maoist uprising against the Nepal monarchy for more than ten years before entering electoral politics in 2006. Today his prime ministership is dependent on the UML-led alliance that includes the right-wing monarchist RPP.

Nepal's last period of monarchical rule was marked by corruption, widespread poverty and unemployment, inflation, long hours of power cuts and grossly inadequate social services and infrastructure.

That the royalist RPP, 14 years after the monarchy was abolished, was able to win more than half a million votes in last November's election underscores the political bankruptcy of the Maoist and Stalinist parties and the intensity of the social crisis now gripping Nepal.

Rising geopolitical tensions in the South Asian region between US and India on one side and China on the other side, are heavily impacting on Nepal.

When Dahal was sworn in as leader of the Nepali government, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi immediately offered his congratulations. New Delhi, he said, was looking forward to working with him to strengthen the friendship between the two countries.

Notwithstanding this proforma statement, the Modi government, which regards Nepal as its backyard, is concerned about Beijing's influence on the new administration and in particular the UML leader Oli, who is close to China.

The *Indian Express* reported on December 27 that Nepal Congress leader Deuba “boasted that he enjoys the ‘support of both Washington and Delhi’ and after the [election] results were out, the US and Indian ambassadors met Deuba and Prachanda frequently, in the hope that their alliance would remain intact.”

To New Delhi's dismay, the Congress-Maoist electoral alliance fell apart and led to a new government formed with the pro-China UML.

While New Delhi remains Kathmandu's largest trading partner, Beijing is investing heavily in Nepal in greater infrastructure connectivity between the two countries, including rail and road links. The Himalayas form a natural wall separating Nepal and China, so the easiest access to the outside world for Kathmandu is through India. This is exploited by New Delhi to enforce its economic and political interests.

Beijing, however, is seeking to overcome the Himalayan barrier with Nepal. Under its proposed Belt and Road Initiative it plans to establish a rail link between Kerung city in southern Tibet, to Kathmandu.

India's ongoing efforts to keep Nepal within its own economic and military sphere of influence is also related to its role as Washington's major strategic partner in the South Asian region.

In opposition to protests from China, New Delhi held its annual Yudh Abhyas joint US-Indian military exercise from November 16 to December 3. The provocative operation was held in Auli, Uttarakhand, near Arunachal Pradesh and just 100 km from the Sino-Indian border.

While the US is leading the NATO war against Russia in Ukraine, it considers China as its most significant strategic competitor and is stepping up its military preparations accordingly.

Even as Nepal is being increasingly being drawn into the sharpening geopolitical conflicts between US-India and China, the ruling elites in Nepal whether Stalinist-Maoist, Royalist or Nepali Congress, are incapable of addressing any of the basic social and democratic issues confronting the working class and rural poor.

Only an independent political movement of the Nepali working class, rallying the rural toilers, to overthrow bourgeois rule and establish a government of workers and peasants committed to socialist policies, can resolve those burning social problems confronting the masses. This is an inseparable part of the broader struggle for socialism in South Asia and internationally, and the building of a Nepali section of the International Committee of the Fourth International.



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