

## RESEARCH NOTE

# ROLE OF THE EXTRA-PARLIAMENTARY POLITICAL PARTY IN MULTI-PARTY DEMOCRACY: A STUDY OF THE CPN-UNITY CENTRE

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### Introduction

Some ultra-radical factions of the Communist Party of Nepal (CPN), who are against the multiparty Constitution of Nepal 2047(1991)<sup>1</sup> decided to abstain from the general elections in 1991 and agreed to be unite among themselves. Accordingly, they established the CPN-Unity Centre with three runaway factions of: (1) CPN-Mashal (Prachanda); (2) CPN-Fourth Convention (Nirmal Lama); and, (3) CPN-Peasant's Organization (headed by Rupal Biswakarma, who had split from CPN "Rohit" faction) on November 23, 1990. A thirteen member central committee was formed with 6 members from Fourth Convention, 4 members from Mashal, and 3 members from Peasant's Organization. Narabahadur Karmacharya became spokesman of the militant left group. Later, Dr. Baburam Bhattarai joined in the party. Similarly, CPN-People Oriented (Bidari) faction had also joined into the group. The main objective of this communist group is to establish a republican state.

Since the formation of the Unity Centre, the discussion on the issue of elections were held within the party until the formation of United People's Front, Nepal (UPFN). However, there was some confusion in the beginning because it could not decide whether or not to participate in elections. But, later by evaluating the pre-election national scene, the Unity Centre decided "to use elections to expose the multiparty system", but not for the positive participation. In this regard, Nara Bahadur Karmacharya, central spokesman of the Unity Centre declared that the party will not participate in elections in its own name and decided to support the candidates of UPFN.<sup>2</sup>

### **Unity Centre and UPFN**

The UPFN was formed on January 21, 1991 under the convenorship of Dr. Baburam Bhattarai. The main initiative was taken by the Unity Centre and Marxist-Leninist-Maoist faction (MLM).<sup>3</sup> In this regard, some members of the new grouping later held that the UPFN as such was not a real party, but a front for the Unity Centre established to fulfill the formal procedure for the registration of a political party to participate in the elections. They expressed that their main party is Unity Centre which is not registered as it has not reconciled to the constitution and it maintains revolution as its basic purpose, whereas UPFN is political front of the Unity Centre. Thus, the UPFN depends on programmes and policies of the Unity Centre. Therefore, they feel that UPFN may dissolve but Unity Centre will not. Thus, UPFN is the "showing teeth" of the Unity Centre. This was proven by Unity Centre by removing MLM from the reorganization of UPFN, because MLM was not involved with the Unity Centre. And, they feel that Unity Centre is still in underground stage and UPFN is in semi-underground stage.

### **Objectives of the Unity Centre**

The main objective of the party is to establish republican state through people's revolution. Its first national convention in 1991 approved a revolutionary programme for the party, called for a revolutionary joint front and agreed to establish a *people's army* under its leadership in order to its objectives.<sup>4</sup> The national convention also declared that its guiding principle was to be based on Marxism-Leninism-Maosim, and which involved the adoption of a policy of encircling urban areas from villages and organizing a movement against the present reactionary regime, which they contend is based on an alliance between the King and the Nepali Congress.<sup>5</sup>

### **Splitting Nature of the Leadership of the Unity Centre**

After the third national convention called by Pushpalal in May 1968 in Gorakhpur, India, split and conflict among the various leaders within the CPN had taken a crucial turn.

In December 1971, after release from jail, Man Mohan Adhikari, Sambhuram Shrestha, Mohan Bikram Singh, Nirmal Lama and Ganga Lal Shrestha had emphasized to unite all the splinter groups of CPN and for the purpose they had formed "Central nucleus" committee.<sup>6</sup> Among them, Man Mohan Adhikari, Sambhuram Shrestha and Mohan Bikram Singh were given to handle the office of central nucleus committee. And, Sambhuram Shrestha and Man Mohan Adhikari were sent to unity-talks among the communists with Pushpalal. Pushpa Lal welcomed the dialogue, but, it became unsuccessful, because Sambhuram Shrestha had made proposal to dissolve

the party before unification. On the other hand, because of internal conflict between the issue of Mao China, and the Constitution Assembly, the central nucleus committee became defunct. Later, this was paralyzed by Mohan Bikram Singh by holding the fourth national convention in 1974 in India, as a runaway faction of the CPN.<sup>7</sup> This faction duly emerged as the most powerful ground at that time.

In May 1980, Rishi Devkota had resigned from the central committee of Fourth Convention charging that the leadership had guided the party in "revisionism" and did not protest Soviet social imperialism and tried to make workers its blind supporters. After the resignation of Rishi Devkota, internal conflicts in the party heightened. Groupism in the party developed basically in three groups and each group charged each other which made honesty and morality worst within the party. In this regard, party had taken disciplinary action against Mohan Bikram Singh. Then Nirmal Lama became general secretary of the party. After two years, Nirmal Lama had to resign after the inclusion of Mohan Bikram Singh in the central committee. Then Bhakta Bahadur Shrestha (Shersingh) became general secretary. Party had taken disciplinary action against once again Mohan Bikram Singh. Consequently Nirmal Lama was expelled from the party.<sup>8</sup>

In the meantime, general secretary, Bhakta Bahadur Shrestha was arrested in 1983. Two members of the central committee had also resigned from the central committee. This created legitimacy problem in the party. Consequently, in November 1983, news of split of the Fourth Convention was flashed suggesting that Jayagovinda Shah, Nirmal Lama, Suryanath Yadav, Dil Bahadur Shrestha, Narabahadur Karmacharya, Niranjana Chapagain, Shyam Shrestha and Kailasa (Debendra Lal Shrestha) were in one side, and Mohan Bikram Singh, Chitra Bahadur K.C., Mohan Vaidya, Khampa Singh, Bachaspati Devkota, Chandra Prasad Gajurel, Bhairab Regmi and R. Shrestha were in other side.<sup>9</sup> This led to another split.

As a consequence, in 1983, Mohan Bikram Singh formed CPN-Masal. In November 1984, he was suspended for six months by the convention of 1984 in Gorakhpur charging all the leftists were in rightist way. When he was included in the central committee of the party after six months again conflict was started. Then, he wrote an article charging the "role of C.I.D. and agent of enemy in the party", "majority had suppressed to the minority in the party" and "need of rebellion from the party". Similarly, Masal had also criticized the activities of Mohan Bikram Singh. Then again in November 1985 he was expelled from the party "charging involvement in anti-party activities." In the same month he formed central committee of 5 members. Through this new group, he called the first national convention in March

1986.<sup>10</sup> On the strength of this convention once again he became general secretary.

Again in 1991, a group of leaders and workers from Masal - Dr. Baburam Bhattarai, Sittal Kumar, Sindhunath Pyakurel, and others rebelled against the Masal party under the control of Mohan Bikram Singh. The central spokesman of Masal, Sindhunath Pyakurel declared that the meeting of March 15-16 had appointed Sittal Kumar as general secretary and himself as central spokesman,<sup>11</sup> thus supposedly easing out Mohan Bikram Singh from the party framework.

Similarly, Rupal Biswakarma had also split from the Nepal Workers and Peasant's Party of "Rohit". And, Ram Narayan Bidari had also split from the People Oriented Party of NCP-Rupchandra Bista. Hence the mushrooming growth of the roller-coaster communist parties in Nepal rose.

Even after the formation of UPFN, Rohit had withdrawn his position from the UPFN after the failure of talk with CPN-Unity Centre in regards to general elections. Meanwhile, after the restructure of UPFN in August 17, 1991, the MLM had also withdrawn its position from UPFN charging the Front became a rubber stamp of the Unity Centre.

Nirmal Lama had participated in United Left Front in 1990, also represented in the Constitution Drafting Commission from the ULF in 1990. During the period of drafting constitution, he had tried to gain popularity by leaking some of the critical issue in the constitutional debates. This behaviour earned him endearment but also made him an ineffective member of the constitutional drafting committee.

A further split and conflict between two leaders, Prachanda (Pushpa Kamal Dahal) and Nirmal Lama, was observed in first national convention on November 25, 1991, held in Chitwan district of the country. Both leaders of the Unity Centre blamed each other as becoming "revisionist it and centrist",<sup>12</sup> but none was responsible to the split, because the split has its own momentum. This momentum was created by their personal greed and ambition to remain the top.

Therefore, the conflicting behaviour as well as splitting nature of leadership made a question mark on the continuity and stability of the Unity Centre to achieve its objectives.

### **Role of Unity Centre on Different Issues**

Unity Centre had supported the civil servants' agitation which was started only three months after the elected government took office on July 1, 1991 and blamed the government for discrimination. To support the civil servants' agitation the leaders of Unity Centre in the legislature who are the MPs from UPFN, boycotted the Parliament on August 9, 1991 with other opposition

Mps. They marched in a black flag procession to the Bhadrakali temple, where some employees were on fasting.<sup>13</sup> On August 24, 1991, agitation was suspended and hunger strike was called-off without solving the problems.

Similarly, MPs from UPFN in Parliament had boycotted the Parliament meetings with other opposition MPs, staged demonstrations at the gate of *Singha Durbar* (Secretariat), and organized joint procession with UML, Unity Centre and independent communist leaders from Basantapur to open air theatre at Tundikhel to protest against the understanding reached with India on water resources. The mass meeting was called by leader of UML - C.P. Mainali, leader of Unity Centre - Nirmal Lama, Convenor of UPFN - Dr. Baburam Bhattarai and leader of UPFN - Lilamani Pokharel.

On April 3, 1993 MPs of UPFN voiced against the bill, when the bill was proposed in the Lower House to ammend the treaty law which was originated from the Upper House.

### **Call for a Joint Movement by Unity Centre**

Nirmala Lama, one of the leader of the Unity Centre formed Central Action Committee on his own convenorship to launch a joint movement to protest against the government. He also declared that the committee was holding negotiations with other parties to achieve the objectives. This committee had forwarded 8 demands such as to control the price increase in essential goods, problems of employees and squatters, Congressization, etc. Later, this committee was renamed into Joint People's Action Committee. On March 5, a delegation of the Joint People's Action Committee, led by Nirmal Lama handed over a memorandum containing 14 demands (see, Annexure - I) to the Prime Minister, Girija Prasad Koirala.<sup>14</sup> The Joint People's Action Committee set the different programmes for March 27, 1992.

In this regard, it had carried out nationwide demonstrations on March 20, 1992 in support of 14 demands. In Kathmandu, a public meeting was held at Basantapur, and in the public meeting, MP of the United People's Front Lilamani Pokharel spoke against the monarchy and Nepali Congress, Dinnath Sharma (Masal) charged Nepali Congress as an agent of "Indian expansionism", while Krishna Bhakta Shrestha (Communist League) called resignation of Prime Minister, "because he signed traitorous treaties with India and paid no attention to the problems of the people".<sup>15</sup> Later, some groups from the Joint People's Action Committee, MLM, Masal, and Communist League had disagreed when the proposal of "Nepal Bandh" on April 6, 1992 was made by Unity Centre to observe as historic day as "people's movement day" the day when people's movement won a victory in 1990, with nationwide strikes and demonstrations, and public meeting at

open air theatre at Tundikhel to protest against the dearness of essential commodities, insecurity, Congressization, handover of water resources to India etc.<sup>16</sup> Then, the bandh programme was declared by the Unity Centre and UPFN in the name of Central Action Committee. Two days after the declaration of the movement, the conflicts and disturbances occurred in different places of the kingdom such as incidences of clashes between the students of Nepal Vidyarthi Sangh and Akhil Nepal Vidyarthi Sangh in Ratna Rajya Laxmi Campus on March 30, 1992 and on March 31, 1992 in Law Campus. Similarly, in relation to "Nepal Bandh" on April 6, 1992, blackout was observed throughout the city on April 5 and destroyed some public property by the demonstrators during the blackout. On April 6, "Nepal Bandh" was observed completely throughout the country. Consequently, demonstrators encountered with police in different places and turned violent. The violence damaged a lot of public property in one side and in the other so many people were killed [The killed persons were 16 according to UPFN, 15 according to *Suruchi* weekly paper (April 12-18, 1992) and 14 according to the *Report of Human Rights Organization*] and injured.<sup>17</sup> To control the situation curfew was imposed in Kathmandu and Lalitpur municipalities till April 10, 1992. Then, convenor of Central Action Committee, Nirmal Lama had dissolved the Joint People's Action Committee to form new Action Committee by inviting all the left forces.

Later, the understandings were reached between Nepali Congress and UML, and signed on 6 points agreement<sup>18</sup> (See Annexure - II). One interesting point is that the movement was called by Unity Centre. At the first stage of the movement UML had shown only moral support. Later, it was directly involved in the movement. But, at the end of the movement, UML went one step ahead and signed an agreement with the ruling party which not only concluded the movement but also disappointed to other leftist parties.

### **Concluding Observations**

In the history of Nepalese politics, split of communist party started since 1968. Then factions of Nepal Communist Parties were fragmented in different units. In spite of their effort on unification of the party, this objective remains elusive due to various group interest, rival personal interest, personality clashes among its ambitious leadership. Though they could not reach any understanding on certain principles, they had however, forged a "functional Unity" when, for instance in 1990, the seven left forces had formed United Left Front in order to support the people's movement spearheaded by Nepali Congress. On the other hand, those radical left forces who were against the ULF had also formed United National People's Movement to support the movement separately.

In regards to the "functional Unity", all the left forces had supported each other directly or indirectly. For instance, when CPN-UML had supported civil servants' agitation, most of the left parties in Parliament had also supported the cause. Similarly, when *Nepal Bandh* on April 6, 1991 was called by Unity Centre, most of the left parties had supported and observed the cause. In Parliament, most of the MPs from left forces have uniformly maintained their unity on national issues, be it, on water resources, treaty laws, etc. But, without a "unity on principle" their "functional unity" could not prove much effective in all cases.

The "functional unity" of the Unity Centre lacks main principles, strategy and future perspective. And, the ever splitting nature as well as most ambitious character of leadership are the barriers against "unity on principles". Therefore, without "unity on principles", the significance of "functional unity" has been largely symbolic since the image of the Unity Centre has been reduced to one of a destabilizing force in the country. Will it eventually be able to forge the much needed "unity on principles?" This point depends mostly on the idiosyncrosies of the group itself.

Next, the Unity Centre had adopted two distinct lines - one is revolution against the constitutional monarchy, and other is to use Parliament to expose the parliamentary system through UPFN. Are both of these objectives of the party under constitutional framework and multiparty political system?

Lastly, with factionalism constantly followed by personality classes among its leaders, the main question is whether the Unity Centre continue to survive in the future.

**Annexure - I**

**Fourteen Point Demands Made by the Unity Centre**

1. Control prices of fertilizer, electricity, water, telephone and daily necessary goods. Stop black-marketing, smuggling and corruption.
2. Stop Congressization on administration, education, communication and in other fields.
3. Stop government terror, killing, firing, suppression and hooliganism.
4. Abrogate of unequal treaty, agreement and understanding including 1950 Treaty. And, cancel the understanding covering the handover of rivers to India.
5. Provide settlement for the squatters and stop their displacement without providing alternate areas of settlement.
6. Stop the expell and suspension of employees. Reappoint the employees who were expelled during the last strike.
7. Fix the wages of industrial and agricultural labourers. Make arrangements to provide the work and food for the unemployees.
8. Stop injustice and exploitation of farmers. Fix reasonable market price for agricultural products.
9. Stop commercialization of the education sector and make education fee and materials available at a reasonable price.
10. Stop differentiation of the depressed people and the untouchable. Provide equal opportunity in communication media, including Radio and T.V. for all languages.
11. Stop all kinds of partiality towards women including selling them on the market. End partiality on distribution of citizenship certificate. Determine the right of property of daughter as equal to those of the sons.
12. Stop differentiation of people living in terai and remote areas. End partiality on distribution of citizenship certificate.
13. Take action against the corrupt people of Panchayat period.
14. Stop conspiracy between the King and the reactionary forces with the help of Congress government in reviving the game made by the people in the *Jana Andolan*.



**Annexure - II**  
**Six Points Agreement between the NC and the CPN-UML  
to settle the April 6 incidence**

**Following are the agreed six points:**

1. Both sides will make honest efforts to ensure that the local election are held in a peaceful manner;
2. They will form Peace and Understanding Committee at Central levels for resolving problems and disputes in an amicable manner, and also ensure full compliance with the code of conduct adopted recently by all parties in the presence of the Election Commission;
3. HMG will form a commission to inquire into the April 6-7 incidents in Kathmandu and elsewhere;
4. Adequate compensation will be paid to the victims of the April 6 firings, and arrangements will be made for the treatment of the injured;
5. both sides will take steps to ensure that such violence and terror, which harm the nation and democracy are not repeated, and
6. A consumer's Commission will be formed to study to what extent electricity charges and prices of essential commodities can be controlled or reduced.

Source: Sridhar K. Khatri, *Political Parties and Parliamentary Process in Nepal: A Study of the Transitional Phase* (POLSAN: Kathmandu, 1993), p. 27. See also, *Gorkhapatra*, May 1, 1992.

**Notes**

1. The four cardinal principles of the 1991 Constitution includes the concept of: constitutional monarchy, sovereignty of people, multiparty system and basic human rights.
2. *Press Digest*, January 21, 1991 and April 22, 1991, p. 153. Also in *Pristhabhumi*, January 17, 1991.
3. Recent Political Situation and Party Responsibilities, Proposal passed by the Central Ad hoc Committee by the meeting of September 21-23, 1991, Communist Party of Nepal-MLM, November 2, 1991, P. 16. Also in *Press Digest*, February 3, 1992. *Naya Nepal Post*, March 8, 1992.
4. *Press Digest*, December 23, 1991, p. 472. See, Political Resolutions, passed by National Convention of Unity Centre in December 1991.
5. *Ibid.*
6. Members of the Central Nuclus Committee were Man Mohan Adhikari, Sambharam Shrestha, Mohan Bikram Singh, Nirmal Lama, Bharat

- Mohan Adhikari, Ram Bahadur Hyamo, Jayagovinda Shah, Kamal Koirala, Siddi Lal Singh etc.
7. Bhim Rawl, *Communist Movement in Nepali Origin and Development*, Pairabi Publisher (Kathmandu: 1991), pp. 73-75.
  8. *Ibid.*, pp. 76-77.
  9. *Ibid.*
  10. *Ibid.*, p. 79
  11. *Press Digest*, March 25, 1991, p. 177. also in *Gorkhapatra*, March 21, 1991.
  12. *Nepal Patra*, December 6, 1991. Also in *Bishwabhumii*, December 8, 1991.
  13. *Ibid.*, p. 310.
  14. *Press Digest*, March 9, 1992, pp. 89-90.
  15. *Ibid.*, March 30, 1992, p. 117.
  16. *Dristi*, April 1, 1992.
  17. Report, Civit Fact Finding Commission on April 6, 1992 Violence, pp. 25-26.
  18. Sridhar K. Khatri, *Political Parties and Parliamentary Process in Nepal: A Study of the Transitional Phase* (POLSAN: Kathmandu, 1993), p. 27. See also, *Gorkhapatra*, May 1, 1992.