

Discourse on Splits in Nepal's Communist Movement: An Ontological Perspective

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Abstract

This study explores the discourse of factionalism within Nepal's communist movement through an ontological perspective. Communism in Nepal, rooted in Marxist-Leninist philosophy, has historically emphasised proletarian and peasant struggles but has experienced persistent splits due to divergent ideological, organisational, and strategic orientations. Ontology is applied to identify what each party regards as "real"-whether class struggle, parliamentary democracy, or state power-and how these perceptions shape their minimum programs, maximum goals, and political strategies. The analysis shows that parties such as NCP (Mashal), NCP (ML), and RCP Nepal prioritise proletarian leadership and view armed struggle as a long-term necessity, while UML, Maoist Centre, and Unified Socialist emphasize constitutional processes and peaceful competition. The Nepal Workers and Peasants Party (NWPP) maintains a focus on proletarian struggle and the socialization of production. Despite differences, all affirm socialism and communism as ultimate goals. Factionalism thus emerges not as incidental but as a dialectical outcome of ontological contradictions-class, ideology, and organizational practice-within the broader trajectory of Nepal's communist movement.

Keywords: Ontology, Factionalism, Class Struggle, Revolution, Socialism–Communism

Introduction

The study of factionalism within Nepal's communist movement requires an ontological lens to uncover the essence of communism and the philosophical foundations of communist identity. Ontology, a branch of philosophy, addresses the fundamental questions of "what exists" and "how it exists" (Audi, 2015). When applied to political movements, it helps examine the essential nature, existence, and orientation of ideologies and organizations. Thus, an ontological perspective provides a deeper understanding of why factionalism persists in the Nepali communist movement by exploring how different groups interpret the very being of communism.

The concept of communism first appeared in the writings of French philosopher Victor d'Hupay (1777), who envisioned a communal way of life based on cooperation, equality, and collective ownership. Later, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (1848/1998), in *The Communist Manifesto*, defined communists as organisers of the working class who sought to overthrow capitalist domination and establish proletarian political power. Importantly, they argued that communists should not be seen as a separate faction but as representatives of the universal interests of the proletariat.

In Nepal, communism emerged during the democratic awakening of 1951 (2007 B.S.), which challenged feudal rule and entrenched inequalities. The formal establishment of the Communist Party of Nepal (CPN) on September 15, 1949, institutionalised communist ideology in the country. The party's founding manifesto described communists as the "uncompromising supporters of the struggles of laboring people" (Communist Party of Nepal, 1949/2010, p. 12). This positioned communists ontologically as a political force grounded in class struggle and committed to social transformation.

The ontological foundations of communism rest on dialectical and historical materialism as philosophical bases, and on class struggle and revolutionary transformation as political foundations (Lenin, 1917/1964; Marx & Engels, 1848/1998). In Nepal, these principles initially guided the movement, but over time, diverse interpretations of Marxism–Leninism, competing political strategies, and contextual adaptations led to internal contradictions. For instance, the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist–Leninist)'s adoption of People's Multiparty Democracy represented a significant shift from the revolutionary orientation outlined in both *The Communist Manifesto* (1848) and the CPN's original manifesto (1949) (Ghimire, 2019).

These divergences suggest that the ontological foundations of communism in Nepal, though rooted in dialectical materialism and class struggle, have been repeatedly reinterpreted and contested. Consequently, factionalism within Nepal's communist movement should not be seen merely as a struggle for political power but as an ontological issue concerning the existence, essence, and philosophical orientation of communism in the Nepali socio-political context. This study applies a dialectical and qualitative approach, using comparative content analysis of party documents and ideological positions, to examine these contradictions and their implications.

Methodology and materials

This study adopts a qualitative research design informed by an ontological and dialectical approach to examine factionalism and ideological orientations within Nepal's communist movement. Drawing on Marxist dialectical and historical materialism, the

analysis explores the essential being of each party by identifying the social realities they recognise as fundamental, such as the proletariat, multiparty democracy, constitutionalism, or armed struggle, and examining how these assumptions influence their political programs and strategies.

A comparative content analysis was carried out using primary party documents, including manifestos, political reports, and policy statements. The analysis was structured around three dimensions: (1) ontological foundations or existential basis, (2) articulation of minimum and maximum programs, and (3) strategic and organisational line of action. This framework enabled a systematic assessment of how different parties conceptualise their role and objectives.

The study also employs a dialectical–materialist perspective to trace contradictions within the movement, such as unity versus division, armed struggle versus peaceful competition, and proletarian versus middle-class orientations. Through document-based interpretation and synthesis of historical and contemporary materials, the research provides a rigorous qualitative evaluation of ideological divergences, organisational strategies, and the ontological premises underpinning Nepal’s major communist parties.

Results and Discussion

Class Struggle and the Ontology of Nepal’s Communist Movement

To understand the ontology of Nepal’s communist movement, it is important to look at the country’s social structure and the class contradictions within it. From a Marxist point of view, society is divided into two opposing groups: those who exploit and those who are exploited. This struggle between classes is seen as the driving force of history.

Communist ideology, based on historical and dialectical materialism, views society as dynamic and full of contradictions. Its main goal is to establish a just and classless society. In Nepal, this idea placed the working class and the peasantry at the centre of political and social change. Their struggles, demands, and aspirations shaped the strategies and practices of the communist movement, influencing its growth and direction.

Class Struggle and the Social Base of Nepal’s Communist Movement

Nepal’s early communist movement developed in an agrarian setting, where the peasantry formed its main social base. The creation of peasant associations and their integration into party structures became a key feature of the movement’s identity. Although the country had only a small industrial working class due to limited capitalist development, communist groups still tried to organise labour unions and raise class-based

demands (Dahal, 1981; Rawal, 1990). In this way, the social foundation of the movement was deeply rooted in its ties with peasants and workers.

Over time, however, this foundation weakened. The original goal of raising class consciousness and defending the interests of peasants and workers was increasingly replaced by middle-class ambitions for state power. The growing influence of urban middle-class forces shifted the movement toward a power-oriented approach, which encouraged internal rifts and factional divisions (Bhattarai, 2003; Lawoti, 2005). The contradiction between staying true to the working class and pursuing political power led to fragmentation within the movement (Rawal, 1996). From an ontological perspective, the existence of Nepal's communist movement reflects an ongoing tension between class contradictions, social relations, and the pursuit of power, which explains its repeated disputes and splits.

Class Struggle as the Basis of Social Existence

Marx and Engels (1848/1976), in *The Communist Manifesto*, argued that the history of human civilization is essentially the history of class struggle. Social classes are formed on the basis of ownership and control over the means of production. Those who own resources enjoy wealth, power, and privilege, while those without property are left in a position of dependence and exploitation (Lenin, 1917/1975; Bhattarai, 2003). This unequal relationship inevitably produces conflict between exploiters and the exploited.

From a historical-materialist perspective, class struggle continues as long as unequal ownership and control over resources persist. These inequalities maintain differences in economic power, social status, and political influence, ensuring that conflict remains a permanent feature of society (Dahal, 1981; Rawal, 1990).

Ontology of Organisation in the Communist Movement

Organisation is central to communist movements. It gives shape to their ideas, structure, and strategies, and provides a system for working together. Without organisation, a movement becomes scattered, lacks discipline, and loses direction. An organisation brings unity through its rules, leadership, decision-making, and collective discipline.

In the communist movement, the party organisation acts as a living social and political body. It puts ideology into practice, connects members, and ensures coordination at all levels. Thus, the organisation itself is key to the movement's strength and survival.

Ontology of Factional Splits

Factionalism should not be seen as merely accidental or random. It is a deeper reality tied to philosophy and the nature of social life. Splits within organisations are not just due to personal conflicts but stem from material conditions, class interests, ideological differences, and strategic disagreements. They are closely connected to ongoing class struggles, ideological debates, organisational control, and the distribution of power. Although splits show the negative side of organisational life, they are closely linked to the organisation itself in a dialectical way. While an organisation represents unity and continuity, factionalism reflects the inherent contradictions that exist within it.

Ontology of the Relationship between Organisation and Factionalism

The link between organization and factionalism is dialectical. An organisation represents unity, stability, and structure, while factionalism highlights contradictions, conflicts, and divisions. Factionalism is not an external problem but an internal possibility within any organization. Therefore, organization and splits are not separate; they are interconnected parts of the same historical and social process. An organization builds unity and collective strength, whereas factionalism reveals imbalance and internal conflict.

Context of the Nepali Communist Movement

The communist movement in Nepal began with the formation of the Communist Party of Nepal by its four founders in 1949. Over time, the party expanded and laid the foundation for a wider communist movement in the country. However, instead of remaining unified, the movement split into multiple factions. In Nepal, organization represents unity, structure, and continuity, while factionalism expresses conflicts and divisions. Both are interrelated: without organization, splits cannot occur, and without splits, the limits of organizational unity cannot be fully seen. The party's structures grew from historical, socio-economic, and ideological contexts, yet factionalism keeps emerging due to ideological disputes, strategy differences, power struggles, and external interventions. Organization reflects the movement's continuity, while factionalism reflects its contradictions.

Ideological, Programmatic, and Organizational Splits in Nepal's Communist Movement

In Nepal today, revolutionary communist groups follow a three-tier program: the general program is New Democracy, the basic program is scientific socialism, and the ultimate goal is communism. Achieving these goals requires strategies and tactics that address current social and economic contradictions.

- The Revolutionary Communist Party of Nepal focuses on establishing a New Democratic state power led by the proletariat, aiming toward scientific socialism under the people's democratic dictatorship.
- The Nepal Communist Party (Marxist-Leninist) sees the revolution as a two-step process: completing the democratic revolution and transitioning to socialism.
- The Nepal Communist Party (Mashal) views New Democracy as both the minimum program and a necessary stage for socialism, stressing that socialism cannot advance without it.
- The Nepal Workers and Peasants Party emphasizes organizational strength, mass mobilization, and parliamentary engagement while promoting socialism through self-reliance and national sovereignty.
- The Nepal Communist Party (UML) supports a socialism-oriented people's democracy with multiparty competition, advocating class struggle through democratic means.
- The Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre) stresses the importance of the People's War (1996–2006) in ending monarchy and establishing a republic, combining revolutionary and parliamentary methods toward socialism.
- The Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Socialist), formed from a UML split in 2021, promotes democratic socialism, criticising both reformist and ultra-leftist tendencies, and positions itself as a progressive and republican socialist force.

A table format can help present these parties' ideological and strategic positions clearly.

Table 1. Ontology of Major Communist Parties in Nepal

Party	Ontology (Existential Basis)	Minimum/Maximum Program	Strategy / Line of Action
Nepal Communist Party (Mashal)	The proletariat and oppressed masses are the real revolutionary entity; armed struggle is indispensable.	Minimum: New Democratic Revolution; Maximum: Socialism–Communism.	Peaceful people's movements at present, long-term armed struggle.
Communist Party of Nepal (UML)	Power struggle is political; multiparty people's democracy and parliamentary system are real.	Minimum: Constitutional democratic reforms; Maximum: Socialism.	Parliamentary competition, multiparty democracy, and achieving socialism through democratic processes.
Communist	Peaceful path,	Minimum: New	Lawful competition,

Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre)	coexistence, and lawful competition are real; socialism adapted to 21st-century specificities.	Democratic Revolution as foundation; Maximum: Scientific Socialism.	peaceful people's movements, long-term socialism.
Nepal Communist Party (Unified Socialist)	Scientific socialism as goal; constitution, law, and human rights as reality.	Minimum: Superiority through peaceful competition; Maximum: Scientific Socialism.	Parliamentary competition, strategy rooted in constitution and democratic values.
Nepal Workers and Peasants Party (NWPP)	Proletarian struggle and socialization of means of production are real.	Minimum: Socialism; Maximum: Communism.	Expansion of people's organizations, socialization of means of production, long-term revolution.
Nepal Communist Party (Marxist-Leninist) [NCP (ML)]	Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought as guiding principle; people's revolution is real.	Minimum: New Democratic Revolution; Maximum: Socialism-Communism.	People's revolution under proletarian leadership, armed or peaceful struggle depending on conditions.
Revolutionary Communist Party, Nepal (RCP Nepal)	Current socio-economic contradictions and proletarian leadership as reality; New Democratic state power as objective.	Minimum: New Democratic Revolution; Maximum: Scientific Socialism.	Proletarian leadership, joint dictatorship, long-term people's war, and peaceful movements in the current phase.

Key Analysis

Armed vs. Peaceful Strategies: Nepal Communist Party (Mashal), Nepal Communist Party (ML), and Revolutionary Communist Party, Nepal combine immediate peaceful actions with the possibility of armed struggle in the long term. In contrast, UML, Maoist Centre, and Unified Socialist focus mainly on parliamentary, constitutional, and peaceful methods.

Reality and Goals: All parties see the leadership of the proletariat or the people and socio-economic structures as the true foundation. While their ultimate goal is socialism or communism, their minimum programs and methods vary according to their ideological stance.

Significance of Ontology: A party's understanding of social reality shapes its strategies, choice between revolutionary or parliamentary paths, and minimum/maximum programs. Ontology determines which social entity—proletariat, masses, constitution, or parliamentary system—a party considers central and guides its activities accordingly.

Overall Insight: Factionalism in Nepal's communist movement arises naturally from ontological contradictions, organizational dynamics, and class struggles. It is not merely political rivalry but reflects the movement's deeper philosophical and structural realities. Understanding each party's ontology helps explain why splits occur, why strategies differ, and why the movement continues to evolve dynamically.

Conclusion

Factionalism in Nepal's communist movement reflects deeper ontological and philosophical realities rather than mere political disagreements. Each party's understanding of social reality, whether focused on the proletariat, oppressed masses, constitutional frameworks, or armed struggle, shapes its strategies, minimum and maximum programs, and tactical choices. Differences in interpreting Marxism-Leninism, the balance between revolutionary and parliamentary approaches, and responses to historical and social contexts have produced ongoing ideological disputes, organisational splits, and strategic divergences. The relationship between organisation and factionalism is dialectical: organisation ensures unity and continuity, while factionalism reveals inherent contradictions. Viewed ontologically, factionalism is not an anomaly but a natural and intrinsic feature of the movement. This perspective shows that the Nepali communist movement is inherently dynamic, evolving, and contradictory. Understanding each party's ontological foundation provides a clear framework to explain ideological differences, strategic paths, and recurring splits, highlighting factionalism as an essential expression of the movement's organisational and ideological realities.

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