

# People’s Multiparty Democracy and Democratization of the Left Movement

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## ABSTRACT

*People’s Multiparty Democracy (PMPD), propounded by People’s Leader Madan Bhandari, has had a profound influence on Nepal’s political trajectory since its conceptual articulation in the late 1980s and its formal adoption by the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) at its Fifth General Convention in 1993. As a distinct ideological innovation, this doctrine has revitalized the communist movement in Nepal providing a democratic framework capable of accommodating democratic aspirations. This study critically examines PMPD as a unique, Nepali version of Marxism. Employing a mixed methodology that combines qualitative analysis, historical inquiry, and autobiographical reflection, the research draws on both primary and secondary sources, as well as the author’s lived experience as a participant-ideologue in the development of PMPD under Bhandari’s leadership. The findings underscore PMPD not merely as a Nepali version of Marxism but as a democratically grounded and ideologically inclusive framework. Moreover, PMPD is presented as an outmatched alternative to both one-party communist authoritarianism and neoliberal capitalist imperialism—offering a model in which state power remains subject to periodic democratic validation, protection of human rights, and the pursuit of socio-economic justice. As PMPD continues to evolve as a progressive ideological paradigm, it holds significant potential to reinvigorate the global communist movement through its synthesis of Marxist-Leninist principles, democratic pluralism, and key elements of New Democracy.*

## Introduction

Since the formulation and adoption of the political doctrine of People’s Multiparty Democracy (PMPD) in 1993 as the guiding principle of the Nepali revolution, Nepal’s political landscape—both directly and indirectly—has been profoundly shaped by this ideology. Its scientific foundation and logical coherence have gradually brought clarity to those who were once uncertain, persuaded early skeptics, and rendered opposition

increasingly irrelevant. PMPD has not only guided Nepal’s national political development but also resonates with the experiences of international communist, leftist, and socialist movements in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, reaffirming its vision of social transformation and socialism. For its architects, proponents, and adherents, this continued relevance is a source of deep validation and pride. As a scientific doctrine, PMPD is dynamic—evolving with the times while

maintaining its foundational principles (Bhandari, 1993b).

Initially introduced as *Nepālī krāntiko kāryakram* (“the program of the Nepali revolution”) (Bhandari, 1993b), PMPD has adapted to the nation’s changing needs without losing its core ideological commitments. Defending and upholding this doctrine against both rightist and ultra-leftist attacks is the responsibility of every committed follower. More importantly, it must be implemented concretely, within Nepal’s specific context. Practical application is what refines any doctrine, allowing it to respond effectively to evolving social realities and the new challenges they bring.

The relevance of any doctrine lies in its continued defense, application, and development. A doctrine that cannot withstand internal and external threats will not endure. One that fails to guide practice becomes obsolete, and one that is not refined through lived experience becomes stagnant. To prevent such degeneration, its core principles must be actively defended; to avoid abstraction, it must be grounded in practical application; and to prevent rigidity or dogmatism, it must be continually developed through critical engagement.

Drawing on global Marxist experiences, diverse social experiments across time and place, and the lived history of Nepal’s communist and democratic struggles, PMPD took shape under the leadership of People’s Leader Madan Bhandari in the early 1990s. However, its roots trace back to the mid-1980s, when the Communist Party of Nepal (Marxist-Leninist) operated underground in resistance to the partyless Panchayat regime. The party undertook a “concrete analysis of concrete situation” to chart a revolutionary path forward (Lenin, 2012, p. 166). Observing the collapse of the Soviet model in Eastern Europe and the growing unpopularity of the Panchayat regime at home, the party began to define the distinctive features of PMPD.

By the time of its formal adoption at the party’s Fifth General Convention in 1993, its ideological foundation—first envisioned during the Fourth General Convention in 1988—had already begun to take practical shape, particularly during the 1990 People’s Movement and in the party’s continued political engagement. The 27-point dissent to the 1990 Constitution of Nepal and subsequent mass mobilizations were rooted in principles later codified in PMPD. The 2005–06 People’s Movement was likewise deeply influenced by PMPD’s democratic and leftist ethos, catalyzing significant political transformation.

Since then, Nepal has witnessed dramatic shifts: the abolition of the monarchy, the end of a violent Maoist insurgency that claimed nearly 17,000 lives (Norris, 2004), the pursuit of peace and justice, the dismantling and restructuring of outdated state institutions, and the struggle to institutionalize democracy, equity, and national identity—all unfolding amid a global economic crisis that has exposed the structural limitations of capitalism and reaffirmed the continuing relevance of socialism.

Marxism remains not merely a theory but a method for analyzing and transforming society. It should not be expected to provide ready-made answers to today’s complex questions. Rather, Marxism offers scientific tools—methods of inquiry, procedures of analysis, and perspectives on social contradictions—that empower us to develop meaningful solutions. In this light, PMPD provides a lens through which we can understand our contemporary revolutionary tasks and the ongoing construction of socialism.

Similarly, seeking detailed answers to today’s dilemmas in Bhandari’s pre-1990s writings would be misguided. His legacy lies not in predicting future events, but in offering a flexible, context-sensitive framework for building a distinctly Nepali form of Marxism. PMPD today stands as the modern, scientific, and socially grounded expression of that vision. It synthesizes the strengths of global ideological traditions while decisively rejecting their regressive or authoritarian elements.

The rapid economic rise of neighboring China and India—both of which exert substantial influence on Nepal—has introduced new dynamics of opportunity and challenge. Their complex interplay of competition and cooperation presents fresh questions for Nepal’s political movement. PMPD addresses these emerging realities by engaging a wide range of issues, including nationalism, democracy, livelihoods, science, geography, environmental sustainability, human rights, technological innovation, and more.

PMPD remains the ideological backbone of the Nepali revolution—an evolving doctrine rooted in practice and committed to transformation. As a scientific method for understanding and advancing Nepali society, PMPD continues to guide our search for objective answers to emerging challenges. This paper, therefore, explores the contemporary relevance of PMPD in light of Nepal’s ongoing socio-political transformation, the challenges confronting the leftist movement, and the urgent need for its democratization and renewal.

## **Methodology**

This paper employs a mixed methodology that combines qualitative analysis, historical inquiry, and autobiographical reflection. It draws on both primary and secondary sources, as well as the lived experience of the author as a participant-ideologue in the formation of PMPD under Bhandari’s leadership. This approach facilitates an examination of the contemporary relevance of PMPD within both national and international contexts. The analysis reviews the core principles of PMPD in comparison with other leftist and rightist political ideologies currently prevailing in Nepal. By evaluating PMPD’s role as a highly influential political doctrine, the article highlights its historical impact on subsequent political developments, including the rise of rightist movements in the first decade of the twenty-first century.

Drawing on a diverse range of sources—including library archives, online repositories, personal

collections, and the author’s direct involvement from the conceptual stages of PMPD alongside Madan Bhandari to the present, as well as experiences in applying its core principles across various aspects of Nepal’s development—this paper analyzes the perspectives of Nepal’s leftist parties. It is grounded in an extensive review of literature on the communist movement, multiparty democracy, and both political and rightist uprisings. The research emphasizes the democratization of political parties as a defining feature of Nepal’s political evolution over the past two decades.

Furthermore, the study explores the historical context and assesses the impact of multiparty democracy on Nepal’s broader political landscape. It incorporates insights from deliberations among political leaders, activists, and theorists regarding the issues, agendas, and ideological orientations of both democratic and leftist fronts. Finally, it traces the emergence of a federal democratic state as a direct outcome of PMPD’s evolution, offering critical insights into the development of Nepal’s communist movement.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **The theoretical foundations of PMPD**

PMPD is the result of the creative application of Marxism to Nepal’s specific social and political context—effectively, a distinctly Nepali version of Marxism. It possesses both theoretical depth and strategic clarity, functioning not only as a revolutionary program but also as the guiding principle that shapes and leads the broader movement. As a universal science, Marxism provides revolutionary forces worldwide with the tools to understand, analyze, and transform society. However, due to historically rooted structural differences, uneven development, and varying stages of revolutionary struggle, Marxism must be applied contextually in each country. Dialectical materialism teaches that the universal is always manifested through the particular, and every particular contains a moment of the universal. This

dialectical relationship holds in Marxist praxis: universal principles must take concrete national forms. Failure to adapt Marxism to local conditions results in strategic errors; conversely, ignoring its universal essence leads to ideological deviation.

### ***The unique characteristics of the Nepali communist movement***

Nepal's communist movement has evolved with unique features. Unlike many Third World countries where communist movements began primarily as anti-imperialist and patriotic struggles, Nepal's communist movement emerged in opposition to domestic autocracy and was deeply intertwined with the democratic struggle from its inception. With slogans like "Down with the Rana regime! Long live democracy!" the movement initially challenged the Rana oligarchy and later expanded its opposition to the monarchy. Though it initially played a supporting role in Nepal's democratic movement, by the 1990s the communist movement had emerged as its leading force. It has consistently refused to compromise with authoritarianism, and this unwavering democratic commitment is embedded in the ideological structure of PMPD.

Nepali society is strikingly diverse—home to major racial groups such as Aryans, Mongoloids, Austro-Asiatics, and Dravidians, with over 142 castes and ethnic communities and more than 124 spoken languages (NSO, 2023). Despite a legacy of discriminatory state policies, Nepali society has largely upheld a culture of coexistence, tolerance, and mutual respect. The idea of an "open, pluralistic society," which PMPD champions, is grounded in this lived social reality. Historically, however, the Nepali state was autocratic—suppressing diversity, enforcing centralized rule, and frequently silencing dissent (Bhandari, 1993, p. 312). The 2015 Constitution of Nepal attempts to redress these historical injustices by guaranteeing the rights of all communities, thus reflecting the democratic values envisioned by PMPD.

### ***Waves of revisionism in the international context***

Globally, Marxism has undergone multiple waves of revisionism, often in response to evolving socio-political realities. In contrast to rigid dogmatism, Bhandari's PMPD represents a creative and contextual application of Marxism. The 1990s marked the collapse of the Soviet Union—the world's first socialist state—which dealt a major blow to the global communist movement (Ahmed, 1993, p. 369). This collapse sparked widespread reflection on the future of socialism, the relevance of Marxism, and the future of leftist politics.

The first wave of revisionism began in Marx's own lifetime, notably with Eduard Bernstein, who questioned Marx's prediction of capitalism's inevitable collapse. Observing capitalism's adaptability through legal reforms, labor rights, and democratic structures, Bernstein argued for gradual democratization and reform rather than revolution. He famously stated, "The movement means everything to me; the final aim of socialism is nothing" (Bernstein, 2012, p. 6). Lenin harshly criticized Bernstein, labeling this position "opportunism" and emphasizing the necessity of class struggle and the dictatorship of the proletariat (Lenin, 1946).

The second wave, spanning the 1920s to 1970s, featured Western Marxists such as Antonio Gramsci, Georg Lukács, Theodor Adorno, and Herbert Marcuse. These thinkers shifted emphasis from economics to culture and ideology. Gramsci's notion of cultural hegemony suggested that ruling classes maintain dominance through consent rather than force (Gramsci, 1971, p. 244). Frankfurt School theorists, like Marcuse, critiqued both capitalism and Soviet socialism, arguing that modern rationality and mass culture had become tools of domination (Marcuse, 2013, p. 19). While orthodox Marxists accused them of diluting class struggle, these thinkers enriched Marxist theory with insights from psychoanalysis, aesthetics, and sociology.

The third wave, structural Marxism, emerged in the 1960s and 1970s with Louis Althusser. He rejected humanist and teleological interpretations of Marx, offering instead a scientific, structural approach. Althusser's focus on ideological state apparatuses, superstructural autonomy, and epistemological breaks influenced later fields such as Marxist feminism, postcolonial studies, and cultural theory, despite criticisms of abstraction and neglect of agency (Althusser, 2023).

The fourth wave, beginning in the 1980s, encompasses post-Marxist and poststructuralist theories, especially those of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. Rejecting economic determinism, they proposed a theory of radical democracy based on discursive struggle (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985). Though criticized by traditional Marxists for sidelining class, their approach brought Marxism into dialogue with intersectionality, identity politics, and discourse analysis.

### ***PMPD as creative Marxism***

Bhandari's (1993b) conception of Marxism stands in direct opposition to Western revisionism and significantly diverges from Soviet socialism, Maoism, and Indian Naxalism, while remaining faithful to the fundamental principles of Marxist dialectics. He criticized the Soviet model under Khrushchev and Brezhnev as an erroneous implementation of Marxism. The system's increasing unpopularity stemmed from bureaucratic control, centralization of power, disconnection from the people, suppression of dissent, weak economic performance, and technological stagnation (Bhandari, 1993c, p. 355).

Likewise, Bhandari rejected one-party rule as endorsed by Maoists and proponents of New Democracy. He argued that equating such monopolism with Maoism or New Democracy reflects a misreading of Marxist theory. Whether a nation adopts a one-party, two-party, or multiparty system should be determined by concrete national conditions during and after anti-feudal and anti-

imperialist revolutions—not by ideological orthodoxy but by strategic necessity (Bhandari, 1991, p. 168).

Bhandari held that revolutions must align with objective conditions and should not blindly imitate foreign models. He was particularly critical of the Jhapa Movement, which he viewed as an uncritical replication of the Indian Naxalite strategy, lacking consideration for Nepal's unique socio-political context. Even among those supporting armed struggle, certain tactics became dominant—such as Charu Majumdar's method of eliminating class enemies, armed insurgency, and the rural encirclement of urban centers. Bhandari saw rigid distinctions between peaceful and armed revolution as distortions of Marxism. Instead, he emphasized using any strategy appropriate to the prevailing objective, class, and international conditions (Bhandari, 1993a, p. 262).

Bhandari advocated a creative application of Marxism rooted in dialectical reasoning. Marx and Engels's three laws of dialectics—(1) the negation of the negation, (2) the unity (or interpenetration) of opposites, and (3) the transformation of quantity into quality (Sison, 2020, pp. 20–21). The first law states that development transforms things into their opposites—capitalism, for instance, began as free competition against mercantilism but evolved into monopoly capitalism. The second law holds that everything contains opposing forces: one dominant, shaping its nature, and one subordinate, striving to replace it. In capitalism, the bourgeoisie and proletariat are mutually dependent yet inherently antagonistic—their coexistence is relative, but their conflict is absolute. The third law asserts that gradual quantitative changes can lead to qualitative shifts, such as revolutions, often preceded by reforms. Together, these three laws form the dialectical law of contradiction, or the unity of opposites. (Sison, 2020, pp. 21–22). PMPD applies this dialectical logic not only to conduct “concrete analysis of concrete conditions” in the Leninist sense but also to understand Nepal's social plurality. Politics reflects class interests and



viewpoints, and the state serves as an instrument of class domination. However, Bhandari argued that this domination must be strategic, not crude or overt. So long as classes exist, class politics will persist. Even within a single class, internal contradictions and diverse perspectives remain (Bhandari, 1993a, pp. 286–287). Thus, Marxist dialectics remains central to understanding society and applying Marxism creatively and contextually. Bhandari interpreted the Soviet collapse not as Marxism's failure but as a consequence of dogmatic rigidity. He viewed global multipolarity and capitalism's internal contradictions as evidence of Marxism's ongoing relevance. Pointing to China's post-1979 reforms, he argued for a flexible but principled Marxism that can adapt to changing realities.

In Nepal's context, Bhandari reaffirmed Marxism's significance, particularly in the face of widening inequality and ecological crises exacerbated by global capitalism. PMPD emerged as a response—embracing multiparty democracy, the rule of law, and a mixed economy driven by a strong state but supported by a regulated private sector. Its goal is to develop productive forces while mitigating exploitation and social division. Bhandari also warned against U.S. imperialism's efforts to expand capitalism through economic coercion and political interference in countries like Cuba and North Korea.

PMPD rejects dogmatic literalism and instead encourages ideological innovation. It confronts key historical questions: How did a socialist regime capable of defeating fascism lose its connection to the people? Why was it overthrown without armed resistance? And why has capitalism—despite its repeated crises—continued to survive and adapt? PMPD addresses these challenges by promoting people's sovereignty, democratic competition, and political legitimacy through electoral victories. It asserts that socialism can demonstrate its superiority through a balanced relationship between market competition and regulation. Thus, PMPD stands as a modern, context-sensitive articulation of Marxism—an evolving and dynamic ideology that

integrates global insights with national realities. Rather than abandoning Marxism, it reaffirms and revitalizes it for the twenty-first century through critical reflection and creative application.

### ***Basic contradiction between capitalism and socialism***

Comparing socialism and capitalism based on the duration of their existence is irrelevant. Capitalism has existed for nearly six centuries, whereas the socialist movement is barely 150 years old. Engels (1893) wrote, “The first capitalist nation was Italy. The close of the feudal Middle Ages and the opening of the modern capitalist era are marked by a colossal figure: an Italian, Dante, both the last poet of the Middle Ages and the first poet of modern times” (p. 29). Therefore, it is misguided to lose faith in socialism simply because it has not yet triumphed universally or has experienced setbacks in certain regions due to flawed implementation.

Indeed, Lenin's early 20<sup>th</sup>-century prediction—that capitalism was moribund and that the century would witness global socialist revolutions—now appears premature (Lenin, 1964). In reality, capitalism has remained dynamic and adaptive, managing its internal contradictions and crises. Thus, expecting the imminent collapse of the global capitalist system is unrealistic. However, capitalism carries deep structural flaws, and recurring global economic crises have demonstrated that such instability is intrinsic to its nature. These persistent crises reaffirm the necessity—and the historical inevitability—of socialism.

What we must understand is that socialism will only triumph through a long, complex, and nonlinear process of anti-capitalist struggle. This requires a careful and nuanced analysis of the evolving nature of the global capitalist system: its new forms of exploitation, the challenges and opportunities posed by globalization, emerging class relations, shifting economic structures, and the possibilities and risks generated by scientific and technological advancements. Based on this analysis, we must develop updated, context-sensitive strategies of struggle.

Globalization, while opening up new avenues, has also introduced new challenges. Capitalism now extends into nearly every corner of the globe and, under the pretexts of combating terrorism, maintaining peace, or defending human rights, has acquired the ability to intervene anywhere. In practice, however, globalization has also produced more terrorism, violence, and human rights violations—despite certain positive effects. Paradoxically, it has also facilitated the globalization of labor struggles, human rights movements, and socialist initiatives. PMPD encourages maintaining unwavering faith in the superiority and inevitability of socialism while promoting a creative response to changing conditions.

In today's global order, the fundamental contradictions between socialism and capitalism, between labor and capital, between capitalist states, and among imperialist powers in the post-Cold War era persist (Fletcher & Harris, 2023). However, with the failure of U.S. efforts to establish a unipolar world order, the international landscape is shifting toward multipolarity. Alongside traditional capitalist powers such as the United States, Europe, Japan, and Russia, emerging powers like China, India, Brazil, and South Africa are significantly reshaping global power dynamics. Tensions continue among these nations, especially in areas such as trade and geopolitics.

Moreover, developing nations—particularly those integrated into the World Trade Organization (WTO)—are engaged in struggles to assert sovereignty over resources, demand climate justice through compensation and adaptation measures, and secure a dignified place in the global community (Xinyan, 2025). The anti-imperialist struggle today is thus increasingly expressed through platforms such as the WTO, climate initiatives, human rights campaigns, and United Nations forums advocating for socio-economic and cultural rights. In other words, it is now articulated through broad socio-economic and cultural discourses.

At the same time, working-class movements in capitalist countries are evolving in their own

ways. Recent events in France, for instance, are representative of this trend (Bérout, 2023). PMPD offers a framework for linking socialist and communist movements with these broader social struggles, helping to lead and expand the anti-imperialist struggle in new directions.

Violence has never been a central tenet of Marxist theory. Nor has it ever been a matter of preference for communists or an inevitable path to revolution. It is not a universal or eternal truth. Yet, within segments of the communist movement, there has been a longstanding tendency to view violence as an essential tool or a matter of principle. Even in contexts where democratic rights exist and peaceful political engagement is possible, the pursuit of violence on impulse has sometimes caused significant damage to the movement.

PMPD liberates the revolutionary movement from this misconception. It makes a decisive statement: violence can never be the essential instrument or guiding principle of revolution. In the context of the late 20th and early 21st centuries, we now have ample grounds and opportunities to achieve socialist transformation through peaceful, democratic means. PMPD emphasizes a revolutionary strategy grounded in the broad mobilization of the people through nonviolent means—organizing mass movements for social transformation based on the conscious, active, and voluntary participation of the people, and achieving democratic transformation through inclusive and participatory processes.

Certainly, the state remains a class-based institution, and one of its inherent characteristics is the exercise of control. The nature, objectives, and functions of the state are defined by its constitution, and the state enforces its authority against those who attempt to subvert or violate it. However, control is only one dimension of the state—it is not the whole. Another critical aspect is the state's responsibility to work for the welfare of the people, win public support, address citizens' demands, and earn their trust. Without this, no state can endure for long.

In recent times, new conditions have emerged in which transformative forces can ascend to state power through democratic mandates. Human rights, democracy, the rule of law, and periodic elections have become globally accepted norms. It is no longer feasible for any regime to sustain itself without at least formally adhering to these principles. This transformed context has created new possibilities: leadership of the state can now be achieved through popular support, and governments can be compelled to act in the public interest.

If state power can be attained through democratic means, and if strong, sustained popular pressure can be organized from below, a new foundation for the peaceful transformation of state power can be established. PMPD recognizes and upholds this principle as a vital component of its theoretical foundation.

***PMPD: A doctrine for the democratization of the movement***

The democratic or socialist state system established after a revolution is not classless—it remains a multi-class system. In such systems, multiple classes and ideologies coexist; that is, non-working classes continue to exist alongside the working class. The working class advances through a dialectical relationship of coexistence, cooperation, and transformation with these other classes (Bhandari, 1991, p. 173). Given the existence of multiple classes in society, the presence of diverse ideologies is natural. It is equally natural for various political parties to emerge and operate based on these ideological differences. Therefore, the existence of multiple parties under socialism is both natural and necessary.

One of the major errors of past communist movements was the failure to recognize this reality—the coexistence of multiple classes, ideologies, and political parties even within democratic or socialist states. This oversight led to an inability to accommodate political competition. When the state's character failed to reflect the

multi-class nature of society, contradictions between its form and essence emerged, significantly contributing to the collapse of several socialist states. Learning from this history, PMPD embraces the legitimacy of ideological diversity and dissent within democratic or socialist systems. It formally articulates the necessity of multiparty competition, the obligation of communist parties to earn public support through democratic means, and the people's right to criticize, oppose, or even replace a communist-led government.

However, society is not composed solely of classes and their representative political parties. Multiparty competition represents only the political dimension of a pluralistic society. Many individuals and groups are unaffiliated with any party, and beyond the realm of political competition, there exist numerous social and cultural organizations and civil society actors. The concept of “multiparty competition” does not adequately capture their rights or existence. If we speak only of multiparty competition, we risk addressing only collective political freedoms while ignoring individual liberties, the autonomy of social groups, and the broader pluralistic vibrancy of society. For this reason, PMPD incorporates the values of an open and pluralistic society as essential to its theoretical foundation—going beyond mere multiparty competition—and thereby places itself at the forefront of democratic transformation.

Broadly speaking, PMPD is a doctrine aimed at the democratization of the communist movement. Its core principles include revolutionary transformation through the conscious and active participation of the people; social change through peaceful and democratic means; the operation of socialist or people's democratic power based on democratic competition and popular legitimacy; and the democratization of the Communist Party itself to ensure internal democracy and member ownership.

Certainly, all these democratic processes are oriented toward revolutionary transformation. Democratization is a means to achieve revolutionary



goals. If democratization is pursued in isolation from these goals, it risks becoming a process of bourgeoisification. Conversely, neglecting democratization can lead to the militarization or bureaucratization of the Communist Party. PMPD advocates for a balance between revolutionary aims and democratic means.

In the past, some countries attempted hasty transitions to socialism, leading to severe socio-economic problems. Ultimately, the collapse of many socialist states was due in part to the gap between popular expectations and the regime's capacity to deliver. Socialism can only be built on a strong national economy, high and stable industrial development, and an awakened and engaged citizenry. Even after the end of feudalism, socialism cannot be sustained without first establishing a robust economic base. For this reason, PMPD proposes a phased, planned approach to building socialism after the success of a people's democratic revolution. This includes: (1) eliminating the remnants of feudalism; (2) consolidating and strengthening a people's multiparty democratic system; and (3) transitioning toward socialism (Bhandari, 1993b). This framework is crucial for guiding the transformation from democracy to socialism.

### ***Changing context of Nepali society and the world***

Since the formulation of PMPD in 1993, Nepal and the world have witnessed significant changes. These developments have introduced new questions, challenges, and opportunities for the movement. Without seeking new answers to these emerging issues, we cannot confront new challenges or seize new possibilities. In addressing these new realities, PMPD has continued to evolve—becoming more refined, developed, and relevant—and capable of offering scientific guidance in tackling contemporary problems.

Effective social transformation requires an accurate understanding of the society in question. Just as a patient cannot be treated without a proper diagnosis, the path to social change cannot be determined

without comprehending the socio-economic and political-cultural structure of society. Since the founding of the Communist Party of Nepal in 1949, Nepali society has been characterized as “semi-feudal and semi-colonial.” However, over the decades, society has undergone significant transformation. The weakening of feudalism—particularly in political and economic structures—and the growing dominance of capitalist forces have reshaped the social landscape.

Yet, the key question remains: has this transformation merely been quantitative, or has it produced a qualitative shift in the fundamental character of Nepali society? This remains a matter of serious debate. If we examine feudalism solely in terms of labor relations, we may arrive at a misleading conclusion. Feudalism is a complex system encompassing economics, politics, culture, social norms, and psychology. Declaring the end of feudalism—and with it, the irrelevance of the people's democratic revolution—would be premature and potentially dangerous.

How should we evaluate the historic People's Movement of 2005–06? What socio-political transformations has it brought? And what responsibilities does it impose on the Communist Party? These are critical questions. The movement sought to abolish the monarchy as the symbol of feudalism, end the cycle of Maoist violence and state counter-violence, and restructure the discriminatory state. While the monarchy was successfully abolished, violence has persisted. Nonetheless, the movement was undoubtedly epoch-making. Most notably, the peaceful nature of the protests rendered both the king's guns and the Maoist guns ineffective. In this sense, it was a significant political revolution from a leftist perspective.

This movement gave rise to a transitional democracy. Representing the working class, the CPN (UML) not only participated but led the movement. Given its role in shaping the movement's direction and demands, the resulting

democracy is more progressive than a standard bourgeois democracy. However, it still does not fully align with the democratic vision of PMPD. To institutionalize the movement's gains and move toward PMPD, democratic competition must be grounded in inclusive principles. Moreover, the complete eradication of feudalism remains an unfinished task.

Today, the Maoists assert that they led the movement and played a decisive role. However, their involvement was reluctant and secondary. After 11 years of violent conflict failed to secure military victory—and with the party in crisis—the Maoists abandoned their slogans of “People’s Republic,” gave up on maxims such as “political power grows from the barrel of a gun,” and reluctantly joined the peaceful democratic movement. They were compelled to accept multiparty democracy and abandon one-party dictatorship and the notion that a communist party must always maintain its own army.

Ironically, the Maoist insurgency reversed many of the achievements of the 1990 movement and gave the monarchy the excuse to reimpose naked autocracy. Their participation in the democratic movement ultimately marked the defeat of their version of Maoism. The historic People’s Movement proved that peaceful social transformation is possible. What years of violence and the deaths of nearly 17,000 people (Norris, 2004) failed to achieve was realized through peaceful protest—through the empty hands and bare feet of ordinary citizens determined to bring change. Even before this, the joint movement of the United Left Front and the Nepali Congress in 1990 had demonstrated the power of peaceful protest—unlike the failed armed revolts of 2018 B.S. (1962), 2028 B.S. (1971), and 2031 B.S. (1974).

Democracy is sustained by unity, consensus, and cooperation. Only the unity of democratic forces can isolate Maoist extremism, separate it from violence, and facilitate its transformation. However, the differences between the Maoists

and the CPN (UML) are not merely tactical—they are fundamental. In today’s context, the CPN (UML) and the CPN (Maoist) represent opposing tendencies: the UML stands for peaceful, democratic, class-based, and ideological politics, while the Maoists continue to reflect violent, authoritarian, and ethnocentric tendencies.

If transformed, the Maoist movement could indeed play a constructive role. But in its current form, it discredits the left movement, obstructs progress, and accelerates degeneration. Therefore, failing to distinguish between genuine leftism and ultra-leftism—and imagining the future of the communist movement through collaboration with the Maoists alone—is not only a betrayal of PMPD, but also a dangerous illusion.

### *Major currents of the democratic movement in Nepal*

From the outset, Nepal’s democratic movement has consisted of two main currents: reformist and revolutionary. The NC, representing the bourgeoisie, has embodied the reformist trend, while the CPN (UML), representing the working class, has led the revolutionary democratic current. However, Nepal’s bourgeois class did not emerge through a decisive struggle against feudalism but rather through compromise and cohabitation. As a result, it has been characterized not by militancy or entrepreneurial vigor, but by compromise, dependency, corruption, and servility. A similar observation applies, to some extent, to Nepal’s working class. This class is not the fully industrial proletariat envisioned by Marx—those with “nothing to lose but their chains”—but rather a semi-proletariat composed of small landholders who migrated from rural areas to urban centers. Consequently, we often see petty-bourgeois deviations within this class as well. Still, these two currents have remained the representative forces of Nepal’s democratic movement. Whenever they have united, autocracy has been forced to retreat; whenever they have been divided, autocracy has resurged. The revolutions of 1951 and 1959, the People’s Movement of 1990, and the 2005–06

movement all attest to this truth. Therefore, if our ongoing democratization process is to be understood as a bourgeois republic, any attempt to sideline liberal democratic forces—no matter how revolutionary it may appear on the surface—is, in essence, a destructive mindset. At a minimum, unity between these two forces is essential to institutionalize the capitalist republic.

We should take pride in the fact that contemporary Nepali politics has been guided not by any other ideology, but by PMPD. At one time, the Maoists denounced this ideology as “rightist” and “revisionist,” choosing instead to pursue a violent path. Today, however, they are reluctantly following the very path they once rejected—just as Bhandari predicted in the early 1990s. In their proposal of “Twenty-First Century Democracy,” we can see the shadow of PMPD. Yet, by continuing to uphold “Maoism” and the so-called “Prachanda Path” as their guiding ideologies, maintaining a fundamental connection to violence, and failing to break free from authoritarian tendencies, the Maoists remain stuck at a crossroads. In the ideological contest with PMPD, Maoist ultra-leftism has consistently found itself on the defensive—duller and weaker.

Similarly, the fact that the Nepali Congress—once a party that gave near-doctrinal legitimacy to constitutional monarchy, refused to look beyond limited political rights, and defined itself in opposition to communists—has now embraced republicanism, accepted social justice and the economic, social, and cultural rights of the people, and formally recognized cooperation with the left represents the theoretical and moral victory of PMPD. Not only in Nepal but across Asia, Latin America, Africa, and other parts of the world, we continue to witness the repeated defeats of ultra-left movements claiming to be communist and the steady rise of democratic leftist forces—further validating the relevance and vitality of PMPD.

### **Democratization of the party and PMPD**

A party that lacks internal democracy—or does not function democratically—cannot lead a democratic movement in society. Democracy is not a facade or

an ornament to embellish a party; it is a scientific, just, and social method of state governance. It is a system that holds ruling parties accountable to the people and a way of life for individuals. Democracy is an entire social system—its structure, processes, methods, and behaviors. Therefore, the current debate on democratization should not be confined to a narrow framework of organizational structures or party statutes. It must be understood in the broader context of democratizing society as a whole and empowering the people.

When we speak of PMPD, we are also referring to it as a democratizing current within the Communist Party. It is not founded on violence, the laying down of arms, or the heroism of a few revolutionaries, but rather on the conscious, informed, and active participation of the masses. The essence of PMPD lies in the belief that state power—whether democratic or socialist—should not be established through violence, the power of the gun, or the actions of a few heroic individuals. Instead, it must be achieved through democratic competition, the people’s mandate, and the collective will of an engaged citizenry. Naturally, to inspire and mobilize people in this way—and to transform society through their participation—an organization of similar character is required. Such an organization must function continuously with the people’s support and win superiority through democratic competition. Thus, the question of party democratization is inseparable from the revolutionary path we intend to pursue and the socialism we aim to establish. It is a necessary precondition for both the revolution and the governance system we envision.

The democratization of the party, the state, and society at large is an urgent necessity today. Ironically, however, we are witnessing a contradictory trend: the militarization of parties and the authoritarianization of the state and society. What is truly needed now is the demilitarization of armed parties, the democratization of even unarmed parties, the spread of democratic practices across all spheres of society, and the

modernization and strengthening of state security forces, including the Nepali Army. On the question of army modernization, two contrasting views exist: one supports modernization, constitutional supremacy, civilian oversight, transparency, and equipping the army with adequate resources and training; the other opposes these principles.

Although we thoroughly debated the theoretical aspects of PMPD at the Fifth General Convention and reached certain conclusions, we did not sufficiently discuss its organizational dimensions. With the passing of Bhandari, creative debates and further theoretical development on many fronts came to a halt. At the Seventh General Convention of the CPN (UML), the discussion on the democratization of party life was formally initiated. However, due to the party's then-prevailing level of awareness, internal dynamics, and the limited time allocated for debate, the issue had to be postponed. It was only at the Eighth General Convention that this topic became a central agenda. Through wide-ranging discussion, we succeeded in establishing democratization as an integral aspect of party life.

The democratization of party life is not limited to the distribution of posts or elections held during conventions. Its core lies in establishing the sovereignty of ordinary members within the party, ensuring their ownership in policymaking and decision-making processes, forming leadership through the voluntary selection of capable cadres, and promoting collective leadership via fair and appropriate distribution of responsibilities. Equally vital are the vibrant presence of ideological and political debate within the party, the assurance of non-discrimination based on differing views, institutional accountability of upper committees and leadership through defined procedures, and setting term limits for key positions to enable the gradual transfer of leadership to younger generations. Democratization is the lifeblood of party life. If party leadership begins to treat the organization as an "institution" serving only its loyalists and factions, views dissent negatively, suppresses critical consciousness, and fosters blind

loyalty, such a mindset will inevitably degrade the party's health.

At the Eighth General Convention in 2009, the party undertook a significant democratic experiment and set a new precedent, affirming the CPN (UML) as a pioneer and leader in the practice of democratization. Its influence continues to be felt both nationally and internationally. This democratic practice has now begun to reach the local level as well. Serious past mistakes—both in undermining socialism globally and in splitting parties domestically—occurred during periods when communist parties were steeped in undemocratic practices. As noted earlier, democratization is not merely a clause, provision, or structural feature of the statute; it is a mindset and a way of life. If you rig elections, foster unhealthy environments, exclude dissenting voices, address ideological issues only technically, declare unelected individuals as representatives for favorable outcomes, or misuse party power for personal preservation and advancement—and then blame the principle of democratization for the party's problems—how can such reasoning be justified? Problems existed and were often worse when there was no democratic practice within the party.

The question of democratization—and democratizing party life more broadly—is directly related to the formation and functioning of various organizational bodies, from the party's general convention to its central and lower levels, as well as to the proper and balanced relationships among them. In particular, the nature of the relationship between central and subordinate bodies—whether it is democratic, rule-based, and focused on party and public interest—is a crucial concern. The party's relationship with various mass-based, professional, community, and affiliated organizations is also an important aspect of democratization. While such organizations should align with the party's policies, their organizational independence and autonomy must be respected. This is the central democratic principle in this area.

It is not democratic to disregard the party's policies while interfering in organizational matters or to impose favored leadership regardless of policy alignment. Preventing mass-based organizations from being autonomous and self-reliant, blocking advancement based on merit and performance, eliminating fair evaluation mechanisms, and promoting a culture of favoritism and sycophancy are all undemocratic practices. Such methods must be abandoned, and we must move toward democratic norms of recognition and conduct.

Certainly, experience has shown that this democratic practice needs further refinement. We must address issues surrounding internal party elections—how they can be conducted in a healthy and dignified manner, how to prevent distortions, and how to define the roles and responsibilities of comrades who are not elected in competitive elections. It is also time to reconsider how to manage ideological or issue-based groupings within the party, and how to distinguish these from factions formed solely based on personal interest or ambition. In today's changing context, it is necessary to hold fresh discussions on the management and development of party cadres. In this new context, the party cannot be limited to politically oriented work alone. It must also lead to driving economic and cultural transformation. To do so, the party must engage broadly, play an effective role, and assume leadership not only in political organizations but also in institutions and initiatives that support socio-economic transformation. This effort must be guided by the ideological clarity envisioned by PMPD.

## Conclusion

It has already been discussed how PMPD has proven its relevance in addressing today's political challenges and how it is shaping broader national politics. Based on this experience, we must continue to enrich and develop it through practical application. Our goal should be to establish PMPD not only as the ideological guiding principle of the CPN (UML) but also as a central guiding thought in national political discourse. PMPD remains the only viable point of consensus in Nepal's national

politics—especially in a context marked by the status quo orientation of center-right parties such as the Nepali Congress, and the authoritarian and violent tendencies reflected in the so-called “Prachanda Path” promoted by the Maoists for socio-economic transformation.

What is urgently needed is to align all our actions with the ideology of PMPD and to position the CPN (UML) not as a shadow, follower, or supporter of any external force, nor as a replica of others, but as a leading and autonomous force at the center of national politics. To achieve this, the party must firmly establish itself as a distinct power—democratic in character, unlike the ultra-left, and revolutionary in content, unlike the status quo forces. In other words, we must become a revolutionary democratic force for socio-economic transformation and meaningful change, as envisioned in the goal of “Prosperous Nepal, Happy Nepali.”

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