

Thousands of Peruvian workers join protests against Garcia's policies

Our correspondent in Lima
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On July 8, thousands of workers, including *mototaxists* (drivers of three-wheel motorcycle powered taxis), construction workers, textile workers and teachers marched through the capital of Lima as part of three days of nationwide action in repudiation of the free-market economic policies being pursued by the APRA party government of Peruvian President Alan Garcia.

The protest, organized principally by the country's main trade union federation, the CGTP, was also joined by students and members of left opposition parties.

The day after, the Peruvian press tried to minimize the size of the march, portraying it as flop. One paper, *El Comercio*, accompanied such an article with a blaring headline about a supposed "intelligence report" confirming "chavista infiltration" from Venezuela.

The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke to several of the participants in the demonstration in Lima.

Juan Rivas, the leader of a group of *mototaxistas* who had joined the march, told the WSWS that he and his co-workers were angered over the government's abusive issuance of traffic tickets and the drastic increase in the cost of fuel.

"There is the rise in costs and for repairs, but above all it is the tickets, which are excessive and high," he said. "They treat the small vehicles as if they were large vehicles, but we are earning less than other drivers. It is an abuse."

"This government is practically like a dictatorship, and it is not favorable for the population," Rivas continued. "We have to reclaim our rights, but peacefully, and we have always done it like that. But we hope that they will respect us, we who are trying to raise our voices."

Felix Ponce, another *mototaxista*, told the WSWS, "We are *mototaxistas*, but we are also heads of

families. The tickets they are giving us are at an excessive level and they are doing it at the caprice of Garcia. We could tolerate tickets of 35 or 50 soles (approximately US\$12-17), but the new measure raises them to 450 and 800 soles.

"We are prepared to have a dialog, but if they refuse us this, the union is calling for an indefinite strike. If we would have a general strike, it would be for all of Peru, for the poor. I think that the money that we give for tickets goes to the snobby people, the people who have the money. But for the poor people, those of us earning minimum wage, we get rubbish."

A member of the union of striking textile workers at the Topy Top factory told the WSWS, "We are participating in the demonstration basically because of the effects of the Law 2242 for non-traditional export contracts, which allows the firms to cut their workforces and fire personnel whenever they find it convenient and not when their contracts end. These nontraditional export contracts can last for 20 days, a month, two months, depending on what the owner and the company want. And they abuse these contracts, getting rid of people who have worked for 15 or 20 years.

"The government supports this law, which has been around for 30 years and is used against the workers. They use it to get rid of workers who try to unionize or who demand something.

"There are some 200,000 workers affected by this law, 60 percent of whom are unionized. We have been on various occasions in strikes and in struggles that have not brought us anything. We have asked for dialog, but unfortunately, the central government ignores our petitions. Eventually we will have to take more radical measures to get rid of this law, which affects all textile, agricultural and mining workers.

“If there is no solution, we will simply have to take stronger action which could soon lead to a strike on a nationwide level in which we would take whatever measures necessary to get rid of this cabinet.”

Emerson Cabezas a teacher and member of the SUTEP union, said that teachers were angered over the decree of the so-called “New Public Career,” which creates an oppressive new labor regime for Peru’s teachers.

“This is a neo-liberal measure,” he said. “The public is already tired of putting up with this and in this way it is demonstrating, with struggles in the streets in an attempt to change this policy.

“This is a new stage in the crisis. In my home, we have never passed through anything like it. The economic situation is serious. Things have gone up and the cost of living is high.

“I think that the only way forward is to protest and struggle in the streets in an organized way. Maybe that’s what has been missing here. A lack of organization. People want to fight, want to come out into the streets, but there is no organization. That is what is lacking in this country.

“Talking with regular people, we come to the conclusion that sometimes the marches and strikes are not strong enough, not effective. So the majority of the people want something strong, like an indefinite general strike that could be more revolutionary.

“People have to become conscious of this situation, that the only way they will be able to make things better is struggling in the streets, in masses, spreading ideas, mass organizing ... I think that everything can change.”



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