

Peruvian pseudo-lefts select former ruling party member as presidential candidate

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Early last month in Peru, the Broad Front of the Left (Frente Amplio de Izquierda, FA), an electoral coalition formed by the country's main pseudo-left parties, ran a primary election to choose its presidential candidate for next year's general election.

Held nationwide and open to anyone who wanted to cast a ballot, the primary attracted over 30,000 voters, which was viewed as a success given the lack of coverage in the media and the dismal performance of the pseudo-left parties in recent elections.

These parties represent not the interests of the Peruvian working class, but those of better off sections of the middle class. They seek not the overthrow of capitalism, but rather the creation of more comfortable conditions for these layers. They base themselves not on the class struggle, but rather their connections to bourgeois parties and institutions and various internationally financed NGOs.

The most revealing thing about this "left" primary is that the counting and processing of the votes was entrusted to the National Democratic Institute, a branch of the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), a US agency formed in the 1980s to handle political operations previously assigned to Central Intelligence Agency. Nothing could more definitively expose the subservience of these so-called lefts to imperialism.

Before a winner could be announced in the primary, reports surfaced of alleged ballot fraud in the Pomalca district of the northern province of Chiclayo. Almost 3,000 votes that, reportedly, went to the candidate Marco Arana were annulled by the electoral committee, leading to the victory of incumbent congresswoman Verónica Mendoza.

Supporters of Arana in Pomalca denied the fraud allegations and claimed the electoral committee had deliberately annulled their votes to block Arana's candidacy.

Arana is a former Catholic priest involved for more than 20 years in environmental and ecological activism in Peru. His role in the intensifying struggles against the depredations of the mining corporations, however, has consistently been directed at keeping popular opposition to the environmental damage caused by the extractive activities of the multinationals under control and helping to stifle it.

Because of this, *Time* magazine proclaimed him an "environmental hero" whose "willingness to compromise has won grudging respect from the Peruvian government, which has called upon Arana to help defuse violent mining disputes in the country."

Despite Arana's repeated attempts to make clear he is not opposed to mining activities, but only to its "excesses" and "lack of regulation"—because this is what, naturally, leads to social upheaval—Peru's corporate media has not hesitated in demonizing him and his party Land and Liberty (Tierra y Libertad, TyL) as "anti-mining terrorists."

While a government under Arana—or any other "environmental hero" of his ilk—is unacceptable to the ruling class, congresswoman Mendoza possesses a political record that suits the plans of a section of the Peruvian bourgeoisie.

A Sorbonne-educated psychologist with dual Peruvian-French citizenship, she was elected as congresswoman in 2011 on the ticket of the Nationalist Party (Partido Nacionalista, PN) of Ollanta Humala, a former army officer who won the presidency that year based on a demagogic campaign of feigned opposition to the neoliberal politics that have dominated the country since the beginning of the nineties.

Humala, who was supported by the majority of the Peruvian pseudo-lefts, rapidly swung to the right, packing his cabinet with pro-business figures, suppressing social struggles and tailoring his policies to the demands of the

mining multinationals and Wall Street.

After the Humala government violently repressed the mobilization of the indigenous population in the Andean city of Espinar in Cuzco against the contamination produced by the mining transnational Xstrata, Mendoza and other congress members resigned from the Nationalist Party. They did so to preserve their own political viability amidst the rapid fall in Humala's approval rating and the confirmation for millions of Peruvians that his promises of change and "social inclusion" had all been lies.

Mendoza declared that her quitting of the PN did not mean breaking with "The Great Transformation," the pompous title given to Humala's initial government plan, which would supposedly include vague nationalistic reforms. When Humala publicly abandoned it, he was praised by the financial-corporate sector.

She and the rest of congress members who left PN formed a legislative caucus with the right-wing party Acción Popular, whose two periods in power were amongst the most right-wing governments in the republic's history. Since then, Mendoza has been one of the most well-known figures inside the "left" opposition, gaining media attention and occasionally appearing in protests against the government's policies.

She has promoted legislative bills centered on "environmental supervision" of transnational companies that have reaped billions in profits extracting natural resources from the country, enjoying full immunity from the government when they produce natural disasters in the process. She has also promoted so-called "previous consultation" with indigenous peoples over the use of their lands for the extractive activities. Mendoza and others also propose the creation of a "special" police force to deal with "social conflicts."

In October of 2012, Mendoza voted to allow American troops into Peru. Neither she, nor any other congress members for that matter, made any statement on this vote because the media obediently buried the news.

In the days following last month's primary, there were protests in Pomalca demanding that the FA's electoral commission restore the annulled ballots. Demonstrators carried placards reading "Verónica Mendoza, respect our votes" and "Marco Arana, respect our will."

For its part, the commission, acting under the oversight of the US National Democratic Institute, presented unproven reports of voting irregularities, lack of oversight by officials and the transcription of an audiotape involving an FA official supposedly planning to stuff the ballot boxes with additional votes for Arana.

The online journal Barranca.pe published a report analyzing the tape that concluded not only that it was altered, but also that only the national intelligence service, DINI (Dirección Nacional de Inteligencia), had the technology to produce it. The report suggested that the state had a direct hand in blocking Arana's candidacy.

As for Arana himself, he immediately accepted the claims of vote fraud in Pomalca, asking via Twitter for the cancellation of the 3,000 ballots cast for him and "conceding" defeat. He quickly appeared at rallies in support of Mendoza.

Next April's national election will be held under conditions in which Peru's economy has been hit by the downturn in demand from China, the country's second largest trading partner and, for the last decade, the market for most of its mining exports (Peru is the world's fourth biggest exporter of minerals). It is understood that whoever wins the presidency next year will have to impose—by dictatorial means, if necessary—the will of the transnationals and foreign investors, going well beyond the repressive methods employed by Humala.

While Mendoza and the FA currently are receiving just 2 percent support in the polls, a section of the national bourgeoisie is promoting her candidacy with an eye toward having a figure that could placate the population in case of a sharp rise in social discontent.

As ruling classes all over the world seek to implement their hated programs of war, repression and austerity, they are preparing themselves for the inevitable class conflicts, and not only by military means. The promotion by sections of the bourgeoisie of pseudo-left figures like Mendoza serves to demobilize the working class politically while propping up discredited capitalist rule.



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