

# Peruvian pseudo-left bitterly divided over launching of new party

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Verónica Mendoza, the former presidential candidate for the coalition of Peruvian pseudo-left movements known as the Broad Front of the Left (Frente Amplio de Izquierda, FA), has officially undertaken, along with her allies, the formation of a new political party. Public speeches on the new party's proposed political agenda, the record of the policies backed by its promoters and the bitter infighting inside FA have exposed its bluntly pro-capitalist and fraudulent "left" character.

Mendoza, a 36-year-old French-based psychologist, began her career in politics during the last decade as a functionary within the Peruvian Nationalist Party (PNP), a political vehicle for the aspirations of Ollanta Humala, a former military officer who espoused bourgeois nationalist views similar to those of the late Hugo Chávez.

Humala won the presidency in 2011—in large part because of his nationalist posturing and phony promises of undoing the worst aspects of the neoliberal system sustained since the 1990s—and Mendoza was elected as a congressional representative for the region of Cuzco, where she was born.

In 2012, after Humala exposed the real class character of his government by imposing martial law and killing scores of protesters demonstrating against environmental damage inflicted by giant mining multinationals in the region of Cajamarca and the province of Espinar in Cuzco, Mendoza resigned from the PNP. She made an alliance with a right-wing party to form a congressional caucus with other former PNP members, becoming the most visible face of the "opposition" to Humala from the "left".

FA was established in 2013 through an opportunistic alliance of assorted pseudo-left, Stalinist and ecological parties and movements designed to fill the political void left by the Humala government steady turn to the right. The party's manifesto consisted of a list of bourgeois reformist and state interventionist measures that are wholly impossible to achieve outside of a working class mobilization.

Two years later, Mendoza was picked as the FA's presidential candidate for the 2016 elections through an internal election process marked by accusations of voter fraud by FA officials aimed at blocking a victory by Marco Arana. Leader of the ecological party Land and Liberty (Tierra y Libertad, TyL), and an ecological activist, Arana had gained a national

reputation for his role as one of the leaders of the mobilization in Cajamarca against a US-backed mining project.

In an expression of national dissatisfaction with the political establishment, the 2016 vote saw decades-old parties eliminated in the first round. Mendoza—with Arana as her running mate—ended up in third place behind right-wingers Keiko Fujimori (Fuerza Popular) and Pedro Pablo Kuczynski (Peruanos Por el Kambio).

In a signal to Peru's ruling class that the FA was a reliable partner and had no intention of providing the working class any alternative to bourgeois politics, Mendoza publicly endorsed Kuczynski (simply known as PPK) for the run-off, declaring that, while both candidates were "equally neoliberal", the return of *fujimorismo* would bring an "authoritarian narco-estate". Tens of thousands of workers and young people who despised Fujimori, the daughter of president Alberto Fujimori (1990-2000) who is now jailed for extrajudicial killings and corruption, were lured to vote for PPK on the basis of the bankrupt claim that he represented the "lesser evil". In the end, the FA's support for PPK proved crucial, as the former Wall Street banker surpassed Fujimori by just 41,438 votes.

The FA also managed to win 20 congressional seats—the second largest legislative bloc after Fuerza Popular—with Arana becoming the spokesman for the FA caucus. They pledged to act as a "democratic and non-obstructionist" opposition that would support the new government's "good policies". Arana also declared that he would abandon his critical and confrontational stand against the transnational mining companies if they "respect the rights of the people."

With Mendoza and her closest allies inside FA feeling emboldened after achieving the best electoral results for the Peruvian "left" in three decades, and Mendoza, in particular, having become a well-known figure, they have resolved to leave the FA coalition behind and launch a new party that would serve better their purposes.

The formation of "New Peru" (NP) was announced on November 17 at a public conference by Mendoza and her allies from the FA in Cuzco. The main proposals advanced at the conference were a new constitution and the building of their new party as an alternative to traditional politics. They are to begin collecting signatures for their inscription as an official

electoral party at the end of the month.

The announcement led dozens of members from small movements inside the FA coalition to leave and join NP, including more than 40 individuals from TyL. This was deemed a “betrayal” by many TyL members, since Arana’s party served as the coalition’s “backbone” as it was the only one that was officially registered.

TyL congressman Jorge Castro sharply criticized Mendoza and her clique for using the FA coalition as a platform for their own personal interests. “NP wants to destroy the FA coalition and over its corpse build their own party. We are not going to allow it,” he said.

He added that members of the FA caucus who sympathize with NP have started to act and vote in Congress under the name of “New Peru”, exposing the fact that the FA caucus has broken into two factions: one still aligned to the FA, and specially to Arana, and the other to Mendoza and her new project.

In the sharpening of this factional conflict, Arana summoned a meeting of the FA’s ruling committee—without telling Mendoza allies—in order to create a new leadership and expel those aligned with Mendoza. NP and Mendoza supporters rushed to the meeting and a fistfight reportedly ensued between the rival camps. In a barely disguised response to the launching of the NP, Arana’s followers issued a statement declaring that the FA coalition is not “collecting signatures to become a new party”.

The factional infighting reached congress in May of this year when FA withdrew its congressman Richard Arce from the Congressional Ethics Commission. The move came after Arce abstained on a proposal to subject Arana to an investigation as an alleged “terrorism apologist” for questioning an act of Congress honoring the military squad that stormed the Japanese Embassy in 1997, summarily executing members of the MRTA guerrilla group that had taken hostages there.

The NP faction denounced Arce’s expulsion as an act ordered by Arana without a majority vote.

It would be wrong to see the source of the increasingly bitter conflicts within the FA as merely a power struggle over who will either control the coalition or break it apart.

Arana is a longtime ecological activist whose real aim during the periods of conflicts and unrest in the Andean region of Cajamarca (the region hit most severely by the extractive operations of the transnational mining corporations) was to contain and defuse the tide of working class mobilization and divert it through the FA towards the dead end of bourgeois politics.

The continuous lurch to the right by Mendoza and her clique through the formation of the NP cuts across Arana’s efforts to posture before the working class and youth as a radical leader to whom they can turn to in times of upheaval. Their deals and alliances with the right threaten to discredit his reputation and jeopardize his effectiveness as a buffer for bourgeois rule in

Peru.

In an indication of the extent to which Mendoza and her allies are prepared to move to the right—and a symptom as well of their failure to receive popular support for their venture—they are reportedly in talks with former prime minister Yehude Simon and his Partido Humanista. That Simon served as Alan Garcia’s PM during his second right-wing and corrupt government (2006-2011) and had a key role in the so-called Baguazo massacre of dozens of indigenous people protesting the granting of their lands without consultation to foreign companies, appears to be no obstacle for Mendoza and her supporters.

Peru’s ruling establishment has made its attitude toward the shakeup within the FA clear. While not officially endorsing Mendoza, the bourgeois media has weighed in with continuous denunciations of Arana as a dangerous extremist.

Summarizing the whole fraudulent character of the FA coalition, its member Lenin Valencia wrote in a recent article about the coalition’s ongoing crisis: “I remember how many inside the FA felt relieved after we didn’t get elected in the run-off, *because we lacked the capacity to mobilize the politicized citizenry* (emphasis added) and the right wing would mop the floor with us the moment we took office.”

In fact, there is no shortage of workers and youth in Peru willing to fight against the grinding oppression and exploitation of Peruvian and international capital. Rather the supposed “incapacity” to mobilize this force is rooted in the class orientation of the so-called “lefts,” which is not to the working class and oppressed, but rather to privileged layers of the middle class. They base themselves not on the class struggle, but on their connections with the parties and institutions of the Peruvian bourgeoisie and various international non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

In the end, the rival factions of the FA are in conflict over the best political means to block the revolutionary mobilization of the working class and provide a “left” prop to the discredited capitalist setup in Peru.



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