

Peru cabinet shakeup exposes crisis of rule

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On September 17, Peruvian President Pedro Pablo Kuczynski swore in new cabinet ministers for his right-wing pro-business government. The former Wall Street banker and World Bank officer—with dual American-Peruvian citizenship—leads a crisis-ridden government isolated and obstructed by other right-wing political forces, most notably the *fujimorista* Fuerza Popular (FP), the right-wing party that controls the legislature with 71 congressmen.

The decision to remove and replace some ministries came in the aftermath of a powerful 71-day teachers' strike. The strike was ignited by Kuczynski's broken promise of raising teachers' wages in his first year in office, but it soon became a nationwide mobilization against the abysmal state of public education and in opposition to "education reform" that in the name of "meritocracy" would lead to the firing of teachers for failing performance tests.

The government showed utter indifference toward the demands of the striking teachers, slandering them as "terrorists" and "extremists" and repressing their protests when teachers streamed into the capital from all over the country. Exposing its own complete integration into the establishment, the SUTEP teachers' union bureaucracy joined in the government slander of their own ranks, prompting teachers to rebel against them and denounce them as traitors.

In the end, SUTEP, along with its rival organizations inside the teachers' movement, suspended the strike without achieving any gains. However, the government's image was badly damaged by its own incompetence in dealing with the strike. Most of Kuczynski's government is made up of operators from the corporate world with no experience in politics.

FP then sought to reap political gains from the strike's chaotic aftermath. During the strike, FP had, in an opportunistic fashion, presented itself as a mediator between the government and the strikers and cynically

feigned support for their struggle. It announced that it would mount a congressional investigation of Minister of Education Marilú Martens over her incompetent role dealing with the strike. Eventually, it announced that it would present a motion to censure Martens, who was widely despised by teachers for her arrogant posture during negotiations.

The *fujimoristas*, of course, don't care about the wellbeing of teachers, or of any other section of the working class for that matter. The attempt to censure Martens aims to help and prop the government by getting rid of an unsustainable, despised figure while doing nothing to change its policies regarding education. Furthermore, FP's founder and former President Alberto Fujimori—jailed for the last nine years for human rights violations and corruption—imposed the free-market measures that set into motion wholesale privatizations and the pauperization of the education sector.

The pseudo-left coalition Frente Amplio (FA) and its recent split-off, Nuevo Perú (NP), also voted for Martens's censure. "Minister Martens has provoked a very angry response from teachers. ... It is evident that this conflict has reached to a level that cannot be allowed and we ask for her removal," declared NP spokeswoman and congresswoman Marisa Glave.

The move to censure Martens sent the government into a crisis. During its first year, Kuczynski's cabinet lost two of its ministers due to the machinations and censure motions of the FP. Losing a third minister by another motion to censure by the *fujimoristas* would lead to the total loss of the government's credibility. According to the weekly journal *Hildebrandt en sus trece*, anonymous state sources warned that if FP brought down yet another minister, then "[FP leader] Keiko Fujimori would become the *de facto* leader of the country, and the government's image would never recover."

Kuczynski on September 13 ordered Prime Minister Fernando Zavala to submit to Congress a confidence motion on behalf of the government to “stand up against the *fujimoristas*.” The following day, after a heated eight-hour debate in which congressmen traded insults and screams, the Peruvian Congress enacted a no-confidence vote. The *fujimoristas* and the Frente Amplio caucuses voted against the confidence measure along with other, smaller parties. Nuevo Perú, proving its conciliatory and “non-obstructionist” character, abstained from the vote, even though the party’s leader and former presidential candidate Veronika Mendoza—who has disappeared from the political scene without any explanation—tweeted: “Mr. Kuczynski, the ‘confidence’ that you must gain comes from the people. Changes are necessary in your cabinet.”

Over the following days, the government met with the opposition *fujimorista* and *aprista* delegations in order to implement cabinet changes more to their political liking. While the *fujimoristas* control Congress with their disproportionate number of congressmen, the APRA party, despite being a minuscule force in Congress, has strong support from the corporate class and international investors.

Despite the demands from FP for a complete cabinet shakeup, only changes were made, along with Zavala’s withdrawal from his post as prime minister. Martens’s successor as minister of education is Idel Vexler, who was deputy minister in APRA party President Alan Garcia’s second government (2006-2011), which had an even more confrontational relationship with the teachers and helped to enact an early version of the law teachers are currently fighting. He had voiced some opposition to the performance tests but eventually retracted and declared there is no halt to the “education reform.”

Minister of Health Patricia García, who faced a parallel month-long strike by doctors and nurses, was replaced by former navy admiral Fernando D’Alessio. The doctors’ union criticized the choice, since D’Alessio is not a health professional and has never worked in the civilian state sector, adding that he was only selected for his closeness to APRA. The minister of economy, a post that had also been held by Prime Minister Zavala—leading to criticisms that he had too much power with the two cabinet seats—went to Deputy Minister Claudia Cooper, a longtime executive in

Peruvian banking and finance.

The minister of justice was replaced by Enrique Mendoza, former president of the Supreme Court, who, according to some reports, had helped to terminate judicial investigations into some of the state crimes committed during the first government of Alan Garcia (1985-1990). Mendoza also gave affirmative comments regarding a possible presidential pardon for Alberto Fujimori, but these were later repudiated by the new prime minister, Mercedez Araoz.

Araoz is yet another figure close to APRA. In Alan Garcia’s second government, she was minister of commerce and tourism, leading the final negotiations to establish the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with the US. During her tenure, the government ordered security forces to fire on protesters who were occupying the road in the town of Bagua, Amazonas, in protest over the concession of their lands to multinational corporations.

Araoz later claimed that the protesters’ actions were jeopardizing the FTA. The contemptuous attitude toward the rights of native and indigenous groups to their lands remains intact, with Energy and Mining Minister Cayetana Aljovín declaring that there won’t be any “prior consultation” with native associations before turning over their lands to the multinationals for mineral extraction.

The Peruvian working class is currently ruled by direct representatives of big business and extreme reactionaries whose main mission is to continue their exploitation and looting of the country’s vast mineral resources. Whatever skirmishes and infighting occur in the corridors of power, it will always lead to an accord for sustaining bourgeois rule and the adoption of an even more right-wing capitalist program.



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