Peru’s President Kuczynski pardons Fujimori after surviving impeachment

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A dramatic chain of political events has unfolded in Peru over the last three weeks, culminating in President Pedro Pablo Kuczynski’s (PKK) December 24 pardon of former president Alberto Fujimori, who was sentenced in 2009 to 25 years in jail for human rights violations, among other crimes perpetrated by his government.

Despite the assurances of the Kuczynki government that the pardon was not “negotiated”, the main Peruvian newspapers are confirming what the pardon really represents in political terms:

In mid-November, as part of the investigation into the ramifications in Peru of Brazil’s ever-widening Lava Jato corruption scandal, Brazilian construction magnate Marcelo Odebrecht revealed to Peruvian attorneys that he had hired Kuczynski as an “advisor” after his term as prime minister under the government of President Alejandro Toledo (2001-2006). Earlier, Odebrecht had confirmed he had paid bribes to Toledo for the right to lucrative infrastructure projects, prompting the former president to flee Peru and seek refuge in California.

Kuczynski denied any involvement in corrupt deals with Odebrecht, but on December 13, Rosa Bartra, the chairwoman of Congressional “Lava Jato Committee”—and member of the Fujimorista Fuerza Popular party (FP)—presented at a press conference details of payments by Odebrecht to two companies that had been established by Kuczynski and his Chilean associate, millionaire businessman Gerardo Sepulveda, in the United States while PKK had served as a minister under Toledo. These two companies served as “consultants” to Odebrecht and were awarded more than half a million US dollars.

Kuczynski admitted his co-ownership of these companies but still denied any wrongdoing, claiming everything was directed by Sepúlveda. Then, he also admitted that he had worked in another company established by Sepúlveda through which he directly received “some money” working as a private consultant to Odebrecht.

This triggered the call for the president’s impeachment. On December 15, a vote to initiate impeachment proceedings was passed with 93 votes in the 130-seat Congress. The main charge leveled against the president was “moral inability”—a grounds established in the country’s constitution—for having lied to the people about his real links to Odebrecht corruption.

The *fujimorista* FP, the main proponent of the impeachment, has, of course, other reasons to implement a restructuring of the government. Its leader Keiko Fujimori—daughter of the jailed former president—is herself implicated in the Odebrecht scandal, but definite proofs have yet to appear. Lawyers from the Justice System and the attorney general’s office who have been investigating Fujimori’s daughter over supposed payments by Odebrecht and a drug-related scandal have been harassed and threatened by FP members and congressmen.

As an expert on Latin America told the *New York Times*: “As in Brazil [with Dilma Rousseff’s impeachment], they’re not pursuing corruption charges to clean Peru of corruption, they’re using the charges to remove their enemies from power”.

However, as every caucus in Congress—except for the one comprised of Kuczynski’s party—voted for the impeachment debate, it seemed that there was a general consensus to bring a premature end to Kuczynski’s government. His approval rating—27 percent—is alarming for a president who just have ended his first year in office, and now the Odebrecht revelations have further discredited his administration.

A day before the impeachment vote, Kuczynski appeared with his two vice presidents, Martín Vizcarra and Mercedes Araóz, in a televised message and once again claimed no wrongdoings in relation to his work with Odebrecht and called the move toward impeachment a “constitutional coup”. He added that neither Vizcarra nor Araóz wanted to take part in a government “that is born out of an unfair and undemocratic maneuver”.

The pre-recorded message served as a warning that if the impeachment went through, no vice-president would take the presidency, and the post would then fall to the president of the Congress, Luis Galarreta, a staunch *fujimorista* .

The warning seems to have had an effect on the pseudo left caucus of Nuevo Peru. Days before the impeachment vote they began to campaign against it. They argued that the impeachment procedures were too “fast” and pointed out that Dilma Rousseff in Brazil had far more time to prepare her defense before the vote. Their battle cry against the impeachment vote was the hashtag #NiGolpismoNiLobismo (“Neither Putschism nor Lobbysim”), with “Lobbyism” intended to indicate the president’s supposed corruption.

In fact, the pseudo-left congressional caucuses of Nuevo Perú and Frente Amplio have been defenders of the stability of the bourgeois order even since before Kuczynski took power. The leaders of both caucuses (Veronika Mendoza and Marco Arana, respectively) called for a vote for Kuczynski—a multimillionaire former Wall Street banker—in last year’s general election in order

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to stop Keiko Fujimori from coming to power. Since then, in Congress, they promised not to be an “obstructionist” opposition and defended Kuczynski from the FP’s political attacks on his government.

While Arana’s Frente Amplio initially was one of the main proponents of the impeachment, Nuevo Perú declared the impeachment to be a plot to carry out a hostile takeover of the government by the *fujimoristas*. They dubbed it the *Fujigolpe* (“fujicoup”).

On December 21, the impeachment vote took place, and during the speeches by members of Congress preceding it, the media reported that someone had leaked a medical report on Alberto Fujimori’s health which proposed a pardon.

When the vote came, 10 congress members from the FP abstained, while all 10 members of the Nuevo Perú caucus stood up and walked out of the hall in order to exclude themselves from the vote. TV cameras showed that as they walked away, members from other caucuses began to applaud them.

In the end, the impeachment was defeated as it only got 79 of the needed 87 votes.

The 10 *fujimorista* “rebels”, who didn’t follow the party line and abstained, were led by Kenji Fujimori, brother of Keiko and Alberto’s son who, according to many reports, has been trying for years to topple his sister and become the new party leader and the next presidential candidate for the *fujimoristas* .

Kenji has also been advocating for his father’s pardon more than his sister. It is reported that Alberto Fujimori favors him, and that both father and son are more supportive of the Kuczynski’s government.

Kenji’s involvement led to speculation that Kuczynski’s government had negotiated a pardon for Alberto Fujimori, but this was denied by government spokesmen.

Two days after the failed impeachment, *El Comercio*, the right-wing corporative voice of the Peruvian ruling class, published an op-ed criticizing both Kuczynski and the opposition FP.

The op-ed argued that Kuczynski had no reasons to celebrate, since his position is now more precarious than before due to the Odebrecht revelations. It lamented the fact that the president, who comes entirely from the business world, hasn’t managed to implement “economic reforms” (anti-working class policies) and that the still failing economy hasn’t improved, despite the rising price of minerals, Peru’s main export.

As for the FP, *El Comercio* declared that it is time for the party to abandon its aggressive stance towards the government, pointing to a poll showing that 61 percent of Peruvians favor the dissolution of Congress, the one institution under the FP’s thumb.

Then, the following day, as most Peruvians families were gathering to celebrate Christmas Eve, came the official announcement of Fujimori’s pardon.

As far back as 2011, Kuczynski had declared that if he came to power he would pardon Fujimori. He went so far as to support Keiko Fujimori in the 2011 elections when the Peruvian ruling class was concerned about the rise of the nationalist Ollanta Humala, now also jailed and awaiting trial for having received bribes from Odebrecht.

However, during the 2016 elections, as he was being supported by the pseudo-left against Keiko Fujimori, Kuczynski pledged not to pardon him. Once in power, he declared that he was revising this pledge due to concerns about Fujimori’s health, which have been proven a fabricated pretext. Fujimori until now had been living in a golden jail on the outskirts of Lima, and the only real health issues doctors could find were non-life-threatening hypertension and depression.

Fujimori received not only a pardon, but also a *derecho de gracia* (“prerogative of mercy”), the suspension of all existing legal proceedings against him.

In the aftermath of the pardon, the media—even amongst the government’s supporters— confirmed in reports that the pardon had been negotiated behind the scenes during the impeachment vote. Journalists showed how certain moments during the impeachment debate gave away what was happening, such as when Kenji Fujimori engaged in a heated debate with other high-ranking FP members, and when FP congressmen were called by cellphone by Alberto Fujimori himself who asked them to abstain from voting.

On Christmas, the president himself gave a thoroughly pathetic TV message supporting his decision to pardon Fujimori citing the false ill-health claims of the former president and claiming that despite the “excesses” and “mistakes” of his government he also did “good things”. Finally he told young people to leave the “hate” behind and “turn the page”.

Fujimori’s pardon has unleashed a wave of protests, mostly by young people, in the capital and other main cities. The relatives of the victims of those killed and disappeared during Fujimori’s government have asked international human rights organizations to condemn Kuczynski’s actions, and even the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and the UN have voiced “concern” over the pardon.

On top of this, Kuczynki’s government has been shaken by the resignation of congressmen, ministers and even journalists and artists working in state television in the wake of the pardon.

It’s difficult to predict whether the pardon will finally cement an alliance between the government and the *fujimorista* right. If that is the case, then the ruling class will finally have a united government for its program of a frontal assault on the working class in order to prop up capitalism in Peru.

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