

Peru: Fujimori and other right-wing politicians detained for links to Odebrecht scandal

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While Peru has yet to be rocked by the double digits interest rates, inflation and currency devaluations as seen in Venezuela, Argentina and Brazil, the world capitalist crisis is manifesting itself in the Latin American country through a continuous escalation of the internecine warfare within the political establishment.

Longtime leader of the right-wing opposition party Fuerza Popular (FP) Keiko Fujimori was arrested last Wednesday October 10, along with 19 other FP members, under the order of Judge Richard Concepción Carhuanchu. They are being held under a 10-day “preventive detention”, i.e., to preclude the risk of their fleeing the country to escape charges related to their alleged participation in the massive fraud scandal involving the Brazilian construction giant Odebrecht.

All of the detained are accused of being part of a “criminal organization”—with Fujimori identified as its leader—that laundered money provided by Odebrecht for the FP’s campaign in the 2011 elections. This was part of Odebrecht’s buying of the whole Peruvian political establishment so that it could reap immense profits through the overpricing of its massive construction projects in Peru.

Following the arrest, FP followers went to the streets in protest. They were joined by several FP congressmen and former senior leaders such as Martha Chavez, Miguel Torres, Hector Becerril and Luis Galarreta. Many of them are also accused of being involved in corruption scandals. According to charges leveled by the prosecution, Fujimori’s alleged criminal organization included at least 114 people.

According to the judges and prosecuting attorneys, the FP’s modus operandi in laundering the money (according to Concepción, US\$649,573.64) was presenting it as money obtained through parties and lotteries—organized to raise campaign funding—as well from the personal contributions of individual FP members. The fact that most of the individual contributions—which were recorded as totaling US\$731,388.80—supposedly came from people in Tarapoto, a poor neglected city in the Peruvian jungle, led to the investigation and the subsequent detentions.

Fujimori’s detention is significant because until now, with

the FP’s extensive tentacles in the judiciary and its connections with powerful business interests, she had been seen as an “untouchable”.

Following her arrest, *El Comercio* reported that: 75 percent of Peruvians consider her guilty of money laundering as well as leading the criminal group; 71 percent approve of the detentions; and 38 percent declare that they had voted for her in the 2016 in the first and second rounds of the presidential elections, a significant fact that indicates Keiko’s loss of popularity.

For more than 12 years, Odebrecht through its main representative in Peru, Jorge Barata, won contracts and projects between 2001 and 2016, allegedly by paying off Peruvian officials and businessmen. In January, Barata became an “effective collaborator” with the prosecution, along with 77 other former directors in Brazil.

Since then, virtually all former Peruvian presidents over the course of the last two decades have been named by Barata and other Odebrecht officers as accomplices in their corrupt bribery and kickback schemes.

The same Judge Concepción ordered the “preventive detention” of former presidents Alejandro Toledo (2001-2006)—who fled to the US and lives under apparent protection by US authorities—and Ollanta Humala (2011-2016), along with his wife and accomplice, Nadine Heredia. The same FP members and congressmen who are denouncing the arrests of Fujimori and co. as “political persecution” had applauded Concepción when he sent Humala to prison for months while he was being investigated.

Keiko Fujimori’s detention came just one week after the Supreme Court issued a ruling annulling the pardon granted to her father, former president Alberto Fujimori, last December. Fujimori father was serving a 25-year prison sentence after an historic trial sentenced him in 2009 for human rights abuses—including death squad massacres—and corruption committed under his authoritarian government (1990-2000). He was pardoned by then-President Pedro Pablo Kuczynski in a filthy quid pro quo in which Kuczynski exchanged Fujimori’s freedom for the votes of a dissenting *fujimorista* congressional

faction—led by Keiko’s brother Kenji—in order to avoid impeachment over his own corrupt involvement with Odebrecht when he served under former president Toledo.

The 80-year-old Alberto Fujimori refused to turn himself in to the authorities and instead went immediately to a private clinic, arguing that the news that he would be sent back to prison had dealt a terrible blow to his health. “If I return to prison my heart won’t take it. It’s too weak to pass through this again. Please don’t condemn me to die,” declared the former president in an impromptu video filmed as he lay in bed, in apparent agony. He appealed to the President and the Supreme Court for “mercy”. He has remained in the clinic since, protected by his followers and private doctors.

While the news that he would return to prison may have shocked Fujimori, he has feigned health problems before to evade punishment. The judge who ordered the pardon annulled declared that the main reason for his decision was the dubiousness of the initial report about Fujimori’s supposedly extremely ill health, which was elaborated by a medical team that included Fujimori’s own physician (in Peru, pardons are allowed under the law for health reasons).

For his part, Kuczynski—who renounced his presidency last March amidst another scandal over vote-buying to avoid a second impeachment—cannot leave the country because he’s still being investigated. He has declared that he does not regret granting the pardon to Fujimori.

These developments have dealt a major blow to the *fujimorista* movement in Peru. They take place amidst sharply declining popular support for FP: Keiko Fujimori’s approval rating has plummeted to 15 percent, while her disapproval rating has shot up to 80 percent.

She is considered guilty by 89 percent in sector A (the highest income bracket), 81 percent in B, 78 percent in C, and 70 and 75 percent in sectors D and E (those with the lowest income). During the last presidential election, Keiko enjoyed a much higher approval rating across all five income sectors.

The likelihood that Keiko could stand as a credible contender for the presidency in the next general elections in 2021 has all but vanished thanks to her detention.

The main reason for the sudden rejection of the once popular politician has been the performance of the FP caucus in Congress. Ever since the beginning of the Kuczynski government, the FP, which enjoys an absolute majority in Congress, became a staunch rival of the president and the executive power and obstructed and isolated it to the point that the ability of the former Wall Street banker’s government to rule was called into question.

Millions of Peruvians, including many *fujimoristas*, became disgusted with not only the obstructionist attitude by Congress—seemingly fueled by Keiko’s own revanchist attitude for losing the elections to Kuczynski by a small margin—but also the endless stream of corruption scandals involving FP congress members, many of them former officers and

beneficiaries of the corrupt Fujimori government of the 1990s.

In response to the rescinding of Fujimori’s pardon, the FP caucus in Congress—with the help of the other right-wing APRA and APP caucuses—approved in record time legislation providing for freedom under electronic surveillance for imprisoned men above the age of 60. The bill was widely criticized as being tailored specifically for Alberto Fujimori so that he can spend the rest of his sentence in his comfortable home in Lima. This is exactly the kind of brazen political actions that have cost FP its popularity with most of its followers and Peruvian society in general.

Political analysts have pointed out that, with FP disappearing from the political map in Peru, there is now a political vacuum to be filled among the social layers that provided a base of support for the FP, particularly among the poorest sections of Peruvian society, where the FP’s populist message and tough-on-crime stance gained a hearing. They argue that these layers could turn once again to “left-wing” politicians such as Veronika Mendoza or Marco Arana.

For Mendoza, leader of the bourgeois left Nuevo Peru party, the arrest of Keiko represents an advance for democracy. She has issued what amounts to a second endorsement of the current capitalist government of President Martin Vizcarra, whom she had supported for calling for a popular referendum aimed at preventing the collapse of the Peruvian bourgeois state:

“In Peru there were always powerful untouchables who never were held accountable for their crimes. Is it that justice finally begins to measure everyone with the same yardstick, regardless of the charge, the size of their wallet or their last name? Hopefully,” she told *America Noticias*.

Mendoza, who currently ranks second in the polls for the 2021 presidential elections, with Keiko Fujimori in third place, sees the FP leader as her main rival.

This week marked the deadline to register political parties for the next presidential elections. Nuevo Peru gathered only 10 percent of the required signatures (close to 750,000), which means that it will have to seek alliances with other established political organizations if Mendoza is to launch a bid for the presidency in 2021. Such pacts will undoubtedly entail her further lurch to the right.



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