

Former President Garcia's suicide exposes desperate crisis of Peruvian bourgeoisie

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27 April 2019

Former Peruvian president Alan Garcia shot himself in the early morning of April 17 when a state attorney and policemen arrived at his home to place him under “preliminary detention” following a judge’s order.

Over the previous weeks, there had been speculation that Garcia would be detained following the naming of several of his close collaborators as recipients of bribe money from the Brazilian construction giant Odebrecht.

After failed attempts to revive him at the local Casimiro Ulloa hospital, Garcia was pronounced dead at 11AM.

Garcia, who ruled the country twice—first from 1985 to 1990 and later from 2006 to 2011—was, along with four other former presidents, under judicial scrutiny for more than two years after top Odebrecht officials revealed to Peruvian state attorneys that they had been bribing presidents, ministers and potential presidential candidates for nearly two decades in order to be awarded overpriced, lucrative construction contracts.

The money Odebrecht managed to siphon from the Peruvian state through these corrupt arrangements could reach a billion Peruvian soles (over US\$ 300 million)—a sum similar to what they stole in Brazil itself.

Though Odebrecht has admitted to having bribed state officials in nearly a dozen other countries, it is in Peru where an investigation into their practices has seen the powerful political figures fall from grace and land in “preventive detention”—imprisonment for those accused of a serious crime, whose liberty might threaten an ongoing legal investigation against them.

In April 2017 a judge ordered the “preventive detention” for 18 months of former president Alejandro Toledo (2001-2006) for having received over US\$ 25 million in bribes from Odebrecht. Today he is holed up in California, seemingly under the protection of US officials.

Months later in the same year, another judge ordered former president Ollanta Humala (2011-2016) and his wife Nadine Heredia subjected to the same form of detention. They both spent nine months in prison until one of their appeals was approved by the Supreme Court and they both were released, though the investigation into their alleged crimes continues.

In March 2018, then president and former Wall Street banker Pedro Pablo Kuczynski had to resign amidst revelations that he

had also favored and received money from Brazil’s Odebrecht while he was minister of Economy and Finance under President Ajelandro Toledo. The 80-year old former president is currently serving a 36-month preventive jail sentence for influence trafficking and having two companies, Westfield Capital and First Capital, that collected invoices from Odebrecht for US\$ 4.8 million in financial services.

Then in 2018, ex-presidential candidate and daughter of former president Alberto Fujimori (1990-2000), Keiko Fujimori, was ordered by a judge to remain under “preventive detention” for three years, while state attorneys investigate whether she and her party—Fuerza Popular—laundered money received from Odebrecht for her 2016 election campaign.

Fujimori’s detention shocked a significant segment of the ruling class, which had grown accustomed to a compliant justice system always working in its favor. Fujimori, with her vast influence over the judiciary and the favor of the corporate elite, had always been seen as an “untouchable.” The implications of the Lava Jato scandal—the bribery and kickback schemes involving Odebrecht and other Brazilian companies—meant that no one was really “sacred” anymore in the widely corrupt Peruvian establishment.

All of these corrupt ex-presidents and likely future convicts have issued messages of condolence for Garcia and his circle and denounced the “persecution” against him as the reason for his suicide.

Garcia had voiced opposition to Fujimori’s arrest. In a series of tweets he labeled Fujimori’s arrest a “coup” engineered by a “law-breaking” current President Martín Vizcarra, because Fujimori and her party were the main right-wing opposition to his government.

As more damning revelations surfaced about the flow of money from Odebrecht’s specific bribery accounts to Garcia’s close collaborators and members of his APRA party (the oldest in Peruvian history), his statements became ever more unhinged, including personal attacks on journalists and attorneys investigating the charges.

A turning point occurred when an appeal by a state attorney, Jose Domingo Perez, for a court order barring Garcia from leaving the country for 18 months was approved by a judge. Garcia at first feigned compliance, affirming it would be an

honor “to remain in Peru”, but on November 18, in a move nobody expected, he secretly entered the Uruguayan ambassador’s residence asking for “political asylum” and a safe exit to Uruguay.

Garcia’s plea for a diplomatic means of escaping Peru was based on the claim that he was a victim of a “political persecution” by a justice system manipulated by a “dictatorial” Vizcarra, who was hunting down all his political enemies. His APRA subordinates and friends in the media repeated this claim over the following days, urging Uruguay’s President Tabare Vasquez to grant Garcia safe conduct to Montevideo.

Behind the scenes, anonymous sources inside APRA told the press that Garcia was “terrified” of landing in jail “even for a short period” and that he had unofficially sought asylum first in Colombia (where he had fled into exile in 1992 after Fujimori’s father carried out his “self-coup”, shutting down the congress, suspending the constitution and purging the judiciary).

After two weeks of staying at the Uruguayan ambassador’s residence amid protests outside of it—mostly by young people demanding that Garcia not to be allowed to escape—on December 3 the Vasquez government accepted Vizcarra’s petition not to grant Garcia diplomatic protection—since it would allow other individuals under investigation to claim “political persecution”—and Garcia was forced to leave.

Vasquez’ decision came a few days after the US ambassador to Peru, Krishna Urs, and his EU counterpart, Diego Mellado, insisted that there wasn’t any “political persecution” in Peru and that its “democratic institutions” were safe—essentially taking Vizcarra’s side in the dispute.

A few weeks after Garcia left the ambassador’s residence, Odebrecht executives revealed that one of his closest allies, former presidential secretary Luis Nava, had been on the receiving end of multi-million-dollar bribes through the subcontracting of one of Nava’s trucking companies.

During Garcia’s funeral at the APRA headquarters in downtown Lima, his daughter Luciana Garcia read what amounted to a suicide note, in which Garcia implied that his decision to end his life had been taken some time earlier.

In his typical egomaniacal fashion, he boasted of having led “APRA to power on two occasions” and expressed great resentment against politicians who tried to “criminalize” him. To the end, he maintained his innocence and concluded saying: “I have seen others paraded in handcuffs, guarding their miserable existence, but Alan García does not have to suffer those injustices and circuses.”

Garcia’s rise and fall cannot be explained outside of an assessment of the politics and roots of the APRA movement, which dominated much of Peruvian history during the 20th century. At least two of the many military coups that have plagued the country were launched specifically to crush APRA’s appeals for political mobilization of the working class.

APRA was a mass bourgeois party that had a significant

following in the 1930s and 1940s. A series of unprincipled alliances, and the party’s failure to contest US imperialist domination of the country, led to a declining membership and splits to the left.

A turning point came with the end of World War II when the bourgeoisie’s fear of the emerging Peruvian working class led APRA to take a more openly anticommunist stand. In the 1960s, its trade union affiliate, the Confederacion de Trabajadores del Peru (CTP), was the rival of the Confederacion General de Trabajadores del Peru (CGTP). Originally founded by Jose Carlos Mariátegui in 1929, the CGTP over the following decades was persecuted by the Peruvian state and was dispersed until being refounded under the leadership of the Stalinist Communist Party in June 1968. Then APRA suffered the desertion of many of its members in the working class to the Stalinist-led CGTP.

After the death of APRA’s founder, Victor Raul Haya de la Torre—at 84 years old—in August 1979, it was up to Garcia to lead the party into the presidential elections of 1985. He faced the mayor of Lima, Alfonso Barrantes, representing a largely discredited Izquierda Unida (United Left), a conglomerate of left organizations going back to the 1960s. He easily beat Barrantes in the first round.

Garcia’s first term in office was marked by his defiance of the demands of US imperialism and Wall Street, limiting Peru’s foreign debt payments to 10 percent of GDP. Hyperinflation reached 1722.3 percent in 1988 and 2775 percent in 1989. At the time, the Maoist guerrilla movement Sendero Luminoso controlled most of the southern Peruvian Andes. Garcia was responsible for ordering the massacre of 300 Senderistas after they had been disarmed and were lying helpless on the floors of three jails in Lima.

During his second term, he followed the neoliberal policies of his predecessor Alejandro Toledo favoring multibillion-dollar foreign investments. That term was marked by the “Baguazo,” a massacre that ended with 23 policemen and 10 indigenous inhabitants of the Amazon basin dead. The protest was ignited by the government’s failure to consult with the indigenous population over a plan to hand over its jungle territory to transnational corporations for raw material exploration. Garcia arrogantly responded that as president he did not have to consult with anyone. The measure was later revoked.

The death of Garcia only underscores the desperate crisis of rule of the Peruvian bourgeoisie, in which every single major political figure and party—including APRA, the country’s oldest—has been implicated in massive corruption.



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