

Peru's political crisis deepens with second motion to impeach President Vizcarra

Cesar Uco**27 October 2020**

A reactionary and disparate alliance of political parties in the Peruvian Congress has filed a second motion to oust President Martin Vizcarra, accusing him of moral incapacity in connection with alleged bribes. The charges are based on the testimony of an as-yet unidentified cooperating witness working with the attorney general's office.

Vizcarra is accused of taking close to \$300,000 from Obrainsa, a company seeking a construction contract, when he was governor of the department of Moquegua, a mining region in the south of Peru. Obrainsa was part of the "Club de la construcción" a consortium of 31 firms that included Brazilian giant Odebrecht—implicated in kickback and bribery scandals throughout the hemisphere—which received billions of dollars in public infrastructure contracts.

Vizcarra went on to succeed Pedro Pablo Kuczynski as president when the latter was forced to resign amid Odebrecht corruption charges in March 2018. Nearly every living Peruvian ex-president has been implicated in corruption probes, while one, Alan García, shot himself to death in April of last year rather than surrender to the police.

This is the second attempt to impeach (or seek a presidential vacancy against) Vizcarra in little more than a month. In the last vote, 32 legislators voted in favor of ousting the president, 78 against and 15 abstained. The opposition-dominated Congress required 87 votes for the motion to succeed out of a total of 130 legislators.

Given the track record of Peru's presidents and other bourgeois politicians, the charges against Vizcarra are at least plausible. Those bringing them, however, are pursuing interests that have nothing to do with a crusade against corruption.

The latest motion has been presented by members of

the Union for Perú (UPP) with the support of Podemos Perú, Frente Amplio, two Acción Popular congressmen and one independent.

Behind the new impeachment attempt lie a scheme by the president of Congress, Manuel Merino from the center-right Acción Popular party (AP), to take over the presidency, and a bid by Antauro Humala to gain his freedom. Antauro, an ex-army major and the brother of former president Ollanta Humala, who is also under investigation for illegal deals with Odebrecht, is serving a 19-year sentence in connection with an abortive nationalist coup in 2005.

It is known that Antauro Humala also has presidential ambitions if he gets out of prison. (Parties have begun to announce pre-candidates for the presidency in the run-up to April 2021 elections).

UPP, the main party promoting the impeachment, was founded by the late ex-secretary of the United Nations Javier Pérez de Cuellar, who unsuccessfully challenged then-president Alberto Fujimori, who is now imprisoned for crimes against humanity, in the 1995 presidential elections.

Currently, UPP is led by one of its co-founders, José Vega, an ex-union leader and delegate of the Stalinist-dominated General Confederation of Peruvian Workers (CGTP). In 2006, Vega entered an alliance with the nascent Peruvian Nationalist Party (PNP) of Ollanta Humala, who lost the presidential election that year, but became president after winning the 2011 election.

Vega is reportedly in talks with Antauro Humala's ultra-nationalist supporters on changing his party's name and running Antauro as its presidential candidate.

Frente Amplio, which represented the bourgeois "left" in the last elections, running former *Humalista* Veronika Mendoza as its presidential candidate, has demonstrated its reactionary character by joining with

these right-wing parties in backing the impeachment.

Vizcarra criticized the Congress for considering a second impeachment motion in barely one month and with little more than five months to go until presidential elections.

"I do not know if it will be once a month, having so much to do, so much work, generating this type of distraction and confrontation when we are so close to the elections," he said.

The new political conflict reflects the crisis of the entire Peruvian ruling class as it confronts the country's worst recession in decades. In addition, the death toll from COVID-19 remains alarming. While the number of infections and deaths have decreased, a new wave of infections is expected following the resurgence of the virus in Europe and the US.

To date, the Ministry of Health (Minsa) has officially recorded more than 34,000 COVID-19 deaths, but the real toll is far higher. The National Information System on Deaths (SINADEF) puts the figure at 65,000. A Minsa worker who spoke to the WSWS put the estimate at 80,000, saying, "We know that Minsa is hiding the true figures. In my office we receive news that every day three to five Minsa employees die. It is a desperate situation."

Peru has the highest per-capita mortality rate in the world, and is sixth in the number of infections, with more than 890,000.

Under conditions of the deepening economic crisis and the still uncontrolled pandemic, Vizcarra and a large sector of the bourgeoisie fear that an impeachment trial could further fuel the growing militancy of the working class.

Over the last two months, doctors have joined two 48-hour strikes and are threatening a broader indefinite strike. They have the support of the entire health sector and most of the population for their heroic sacrifice in fighting the coronavirus pandemic.

With 199 deaths from the virus and more than 4,000 infected, doctors have been the most affected by COVID-19 and express the growing anger of the Peruvian working class over the response of the ruling class to the pandemic.

In addition, there is the Las Bambas mining conflict where protests have prevented the Chinese transnational mining company MMG Limited from transporting copper to the port of Matarani (Arequipa).

Members of the Peruvian congress have charged that the government will make use of the armed forces to prevent Vizcarra's impeachment. Prime Minister Walter Martos said, "We will never use the Armed Forces in political acts." That he is compelled to issue such a denial is telling. It is well known that Vizcarra and the armed forces chief of staff have been collaborating closely since the president dissolved the old congress in late September of last year.

The direct intervention of the armed forces is an increasing threat as the COVID-19, economic and impeachment crises coalesce.



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