Jeanine Áñez arrested over coup in Bolivia

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In the early hours of last Saturday, the ex-president of Bolivia's coup regime, Jeanine Áñez, was arrested. She is charged with "sedition, terrorism and conspiracy." Her government's ministers and military commanders, who played central roles in the US-backed coup that toppled elected President Evo Morales of the Movement Towards Socialism (MAS) in 2019, have been similarly charged.

After spending the weekend in a police station, Áñez was transferred on Monday to a women's prison in La Paz where she will await trial for the next four months. Two other former ministers, Álvaro Coimbra (Ministry of Justice) and Rodrigo Guzmán (Ministry of Energy), have already been arrested. The former ministers Arturo Murillo (Government Ministry), Yerko Núñez (Presidency Ministry), and Luis Fernando López (Defense Ministry), whose arrests have also been ordered by the Public Ministry, are at large.

The same arrest order targets former chief commander of the Armed Forces Williams Kalimán, who on November 10, 2019 made a televised statement "suggesting" that "the president resign his presidential mandate," thereby consummating the coup. Also charged are the military chiefs who accompanied Kalimán in the broadcast: Palmiro Gonzalo Jarjury Rada (former Navy commander), Jorge Gonzalo Terceros Lara (former commander of the Bolivian Air Force - FAB), Jorge Mendieta Ferrufino (former Army commander), Elmer Fernández Toranzo (FAB general), and former police commander Yuri Calderón.

The "Coup d'Etat" case, through which the investigations are taking place, stems from a criminal complaint filed with the Public Ministry of La Paz by former MAS deputy Lidia Patty in late November, after the election of Bolivia's current President Luis Arce of the MAS.

In her complaint, Patty also accused political leaders such as the ultra-rightist Luis Fernando Camacho, newly elected governor of Santa Cruz, who led the so-called "civic stoppages," for Morales' downfall. Justice Minister Iván Lima said, however, that Camacho should be given "differentiated treatment" and that the case "cannot be the reason for a conflagration in the country."

Other individuals are being prosecuted for the violent actions they committed during and after the coup. The leader of the fascist "shock group" Cochala Youth Resistance (RJC), Yassir Molina, was arrested over the weekend, but released afterwards by a court in Sucre. The government has stated that it will charge the judge who released him.

In addition to the charges under the "Coup d'État" case, Áñez and her ministers have had five other charges brought against them by the government over the week. On Monday, charges were filed for the "irregular and onerous loan" taken by Áñez's government from the International Monetary Fund (IMF); the "illegal extension of concession to Fundempresa [a commercial activities regulator];" the "violation of human rights of Bolivians living in Chile [who were prevented for weeks from entering their country];" and for a decree of "restrictions during the pandemic" that allegedly undermined "freedom of expression."

On Tuesday, the government issued its fifth indictment of Áñez for the Sacaba and Senkata massacres, in which 36 people were killed and more than 500 wounded by regime forces in protests following the coup. Minister Lima told *La Razón* that this latter case is "the most important for us" because of demands for justice by victims and survivors.

Lima told Bolivian state television that "what we are seeking is not a four-month detention, but a 30-year sentence," paraphrasing the declaration of Arturo Murillo when the coup regime brought charges against Evo Morales: "This is terrorism and this is sedition… We have asked for the maximum penalty of 30 years in prison."

The arrest of Áñez and her collaborators was repudiated by the imperialist-aligned forces that supported the 2019 coup. The Organization of American States (OAS), responsible for fabricating findings of an electoral fraud, the pretext for the overthrow of Morales, is now attacking Bolivia's right to prosecute the coup plotters.

In a statement issued Monday, the OAS expressed its "concern about the abuse of judicial mechanisms that have once again become repressive instruments of the governing party." The imperialist organization demands that no trials be held in Bolivian courts, that all accused be immediately released, and that the entire judicial system be "reformed" under international supervision!

Along the same lines, Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro—who represents the largest and most influential country in the region, and openly defends Washington's geopolitical interests—has also spoken out in defense of his fascistic Bolivian ally. In an extraordinary meeting of PROSUL, an alliance of right-wing

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South American regimes, Bolsonaro described Áñez's arrest for a "coup d'état" as "nonsensical" and demanded that the "rule of law" be maintained in Bolivia.

Over the week, under the slogan "It was a fraud, not a coup!," Bolivian far-right forces staged demonstrations against the arrests, defending the coup carried out against Morales and renewing their threats to overthrow the newly elected MAS government. The largest of these protests took place Monday night in Santa Cruz, the center of the country's right-wing opposition.

Santa Cruz Governor Luis Camacho told the crowd gathered at the foot of the city's Christ the Redeemer statue, "The next time we go to La Paz will be to defeat a tyrannical government." Rómulo Calvo, his successor in the leadership of the reactionary Santa Cruz Civic Committee, spoke at the same event stating that his supporters are willing to go to the streets as "we did in the 21 days [preceding the coup]," and that they already have the "recipe for removing a coward from office and hunting him down."

Camacho announced that Santa Cruz will be converted into a "center for the reception of politically persecuted people." According to one representative, the Santa Cruz Civic Committee is sheltering about 30 people wanted by the police who are supposedly "scared... about what happened to the Cochala Resistance [leader]," and that number will reach hundreds.

On Tuesday, the Cochabamba branch of the National Association of Non-Commissioned Officers, Sergeants, Corporals, Police Officers and Administrative Personnel issued a public statement to its national leadership declaring itself in a "state of emergency in support of all comrades who are being summoned by the relevant authorities."

The next day, representatives of the different Civic Committees in the country met in Santa Cruz to plan their actions. They threatened to carry out a "national strike" if the arrests do not cease and Áñez and her ministers are not released.

The decision of the Bolivian judiciary and the MAS government to proceed with the prosecution of the coup perpetrators undoubtedly took place under strong popular pressure.

The one-year interval between the overthrow of Morales and the election of Arce witnessed a series of rebellious protests by the Bolivian working class and peasants, demanding the immediate overthrow of the coup regime, justice for the massacres committed by the state, and for income for the population. This opposition movement was contained—with difficulty—by the MAS, the trade unions, and social movements, and channeled into a bankrupt bourgeois electoral outcome.

The "national unity" program advocated by Arce once elected did not reflect the aspirations of the Bolivian masses. This was expressed in the apathy registered in the ongoing Bolivian local elections, which will have their second round on April 11. The MAS performed significantly worse than in the November elections, being defeated in eight of Bolivia's ten main cities, including in traditional electoral strongholds of the party such as El Alto. The party was elected to head three of the nine state governments and is in the second round in four of them.

Since the arrests in the "Coup d'État" case, Arce's name has only appeared in the Bolivian press in the form of denunciations of his deathly silence about the recent events. Right-wing figures like Iván Arias, Áñez's former minister and now mayor of La Paz, sought to separate the president from a "radical wing" of the MAS that he accused of causing "confrontation in the country, with the objective of anticipating elections and heading for a recall." When asked which political forces in the MAS he was referring to, he pointed to Evo Morales.

Despite the apparent political contradiction within the MAS, which feigns to be swinging between the interests of the Bolivian working masses and the ruling elite, only the latter are beneficiaries of its double game. The MAS' greatest concern is that the unstoppable growth of social opposition in Bolivia not bring down the country's bourgeois regime. This was openly expressed by Justice Minister Iván Lima, who congratulated the "good decision" of Lidia Patty and the Public Ministry to "lower the intensity of criminal prosecution" during 2020, while an electoral solution to the Bolivian political crisis was being drawn up within the ruling class.

Meanwhile, former President Evo Morales, often portrayed in comparison to Arce as a "radical" figure, defined on Wednesday the urgent political tasks confronting the country as follows: "Instead of political confrontation, the post-pandemic agenda should have an economic character, through a national agreement between the state, social movements and businessmen to prioritize investment and generate sources of employment."

Bolivian workers face a critical moment. The dictatorial threats of the ruling class persist. They are, moreover, being fueled by the terrible growth of social inequality, with at least a million Bolivians thrown into poverty over the last year, and the protracted COVID-19 crisis, which has already left 12,000 dead in the country and will reach a catastrophic level, following its neighbor Brazil, if immediate measures are not taken.

The condition for confronting these risks is the establishment of the political independence of the working class from the MAS, the trade unions and all the political forces of the bourgeoisie.

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