

Peru's Castillo wins confidence vote after ordering army into the streets

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President Pedro Castillo's government survived a confidence vote in the Peruvian Congress Thursday after carrying out wholesale changes to his cabinet and making ever-more direct appeals to Peru's ruling elite and its right-wing representatives.

The ascension of Castillo, a former rural teachers union leader, to the presidency in July was hailed by the pseudo-left as a major victory for the Peruvian masses and even a revival of the so-called "Pink Tide"—the coming to power of left-nationalist and populist bourgeois governments in a number of South American countries during the commodities boom of the early 2000s.

Since taking office amid a torrent of populist demagoguery, Castillo's government has lurched convulsively to the right.

Just two days before the Congressional vote of confidence, Castillo issued an executive order deploying Peruvian Army troops on the streets of the capital, Lima, and in the neighboring port city of Callao, which together have 11 million inhabitants, a third of Peru's population.

While carried out under the pretext of assisting the Peruvian police in combatting rising crime, the military deployment came in the context of a rising tide of social protest and class struggle, which has been driven by deepening poverty and social inequality under conditions of the uncontrolled spread of COVID-19. With over 200,000 recorded COVID deaths, Peru has the highest per capita fatality rate in the world.

There have also been a number of strikes by impoverished peasant communities against the seizure of land and destruction of the environment by major transnational mining companies. After a road blockade forced the closure of the country's largest copper mine Antamina—co-owned by Glencore and BHP Billiton—and rattled financial markets, the government sent a group of ministers to negotiate a truce based on promises of "dialogue."

At another mining protest in Ayacucho, the Peruvian National Police was dispatched, using rubber bullets, tear gas and clubs to disperse community members. Meanwhile bus, truck and other transport drivers have threatened a

strike on November 8 against rising fuel prices.

In another bow to the Peruvian right, Castillo sacked yet another of his cabinet members on the very eve of the confidence vote. Interior Minister Luis Barranzuela, whose removal was demanded by a number of right-wing legislators as a condition for a vote in the government's favor, was relieved of his post on the grounds of charges that he hosted a Halloween party on October 31, after the government issued a directive telling the population not to hold such gatherings. Barranzuela claimed, implausibly, that he had convened an official meeting.

Barranzuela was identified with Perú Libre, which nominated Castillo for president, even though he had joined it only in 2020. He had served as the attorney for Vladimir Cerrón, the leader of Perú Libre and a former regional governor of Junín, who was sentenced to prison on corruption charges.

Cerrón and Perú Libre combine populist demagoguery and pseudo-Marxist rhetoric with regionalist politics and appeals to resentments toward the domination of Lima. Its corruption is of a piece with all of the bourgeois parties in Peru, which has seen four of its living ex-presidents sentenced to prison and a fifth commit suicide rather than surrender to the police.

On the morning of the congressional vote, Castillo swore in Barranzuela's replacement, Avelino Guillén, a senior prosecutor with a 40-year career in the Peruvian government. He carried out the investigation and indictment of former Peruvian dictator Alberto Fujimori for his role in the Barrios Altos and La Cantuta massacres carried out by the Colina military death squad in 1991 and 1992. Fujimori is now serving a 25-year sentence in connection with these crimes.

While Guillén's appointment was positively received by the bulk of the Congress, it won no support from the extreme right-wing Fuerza Popular, which is led by Fujimori's daughter Keiko Fujimori, who narrowly lost the presidential election to Castillo.

This was only the latest in a long series of cabinet changes.

They began less than a month into Castillo's presidency when his foreign minister, Hector Bejar, 85, was hounded from office by the right-wing media, which dredged up an incontrovertible statement he had made earlier that the military had carried out acts of terror against the civilian population under Fujimori. The Peruvian Navy denounced the statement as an "affront," and Castillo's then-prime minister Guido Bellido, issued a statement praising the armed forces for "the efforts they made in the fight against terrorism and for national pacification."

Bellido was himself relieved of his position after making demagogic threats to nationalize the Camisea gas company, which is jointly owned by Hunt Oil in the US and Argentina's Pluspetrol. Castillo himself indulged in similar rhetoric.

However, his finance minister, Pedro Francke quickly "clarified" these statements, declaring that they meant ensuring that the company operated in "the service of Peruvians" and, "in no way does it mean taking state control over a private activity."

This echoed pledges made by Castillo and Francke during their trip to the United States in September, when they assured private investors, the US government, the IMF and the World Bank of their commitment to defending the profit interests of transnational investors and Peruvian capital.

Taking Bellido's place was Mirtha Vasquez, a so-called moderate leftist and attorney who had proved herself as a safe pair of hands, taking the position of interim president of Congress in the 2020 crisis sparked by the parliamentary coup that toppled President Martín Vizcarra.

Other ministers sacked to appease the Peruvian right included Labor Minister Iber Maraví, who was charged by the right-wing press with association with the Maoist guerrilla movement Sendero Luminoso, a charge he denied and for which there exists no evidence.

Among others removed was the minister of mining Iván Merino, who despite working to assure the mining corporations that they were in no danger of nationalizations was replaced by Eduardo González, a former general manager of a technology company.

One position where there was no change is that of chairman of the Central Reserve Bank of Peru. Castillo has kept in place the right-wing economist Julio Velarde, who has held the position since 2006. A champion of transnational and Peruvian capitalist interests, upon being sworn in for a new term on Tuesday, Velarde warned that Peru's mining protests were "affecting the perception of the country in terms of future investments," and echoed calls by the mining companies for the government to "re-establish order."

The right-wing trajectory of the Castillo government has

split Perú Libre. In the confidence vote, the government won 68 votes, four more than the necessary majority of 64, against 56 against. The congressional delegation of Perú Libre split down the middle, with 19 voting in favor of the government and 16 voting against.

Among those voting against was ex-chief minister Guido Bellido, who stated that Castillo was not a socialist or on the left, but just a "basic trade unionist."

The pseudo-left, including *Jacobin* magazine, which is affiliated with the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), have assiduously promoted illusions in Castillo and the prospect of a bourgeois government headed by a union leader carrying out a socialist transformation of Peru. This reactionary perspective serves to subordinate the Peruvian working class to the capitalist state and pave the way to bloody defeats.

Castillo's calling the army into the streets of Lima follows only by weeks the invocation of a "state of exception" and the deployment of the military across Ecuador, also in the name of fighting crime. That the supposedly "left" union leader and the right-wing banker and ex-Coca Cola executive, Ecuadorian President Guillermo Lasso, arrive at the same decision to call out the troops is a measure of the disintegration of any basis for democratic forms of rule in a Latin America riven by intense class divisions and social inequality that have been sharply intensified by the COVID-19 pandemic.

In Peru, as throughout Latin America, the burning question is the independent political mobilization of the working class in opposition to every section of the bourgeoisie and all its political parties and the corporatist trade unions. This can be achieved only on the basis of a socialist and internationalist program directed at the overthrow of the dictatorship of corporate and finance capital and the reorganization of socioeconomic life on socialist foundations. This requires, above all, the building of a revolutionary party of the working class—a Peruvian section of the International Committee of the Fourth International.



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