

# Amid corruption charges and cabinet resignations, President Pedro Castillo's government on the brink in Peru

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One year after Pedro Castillo assumed the presidency of Peru, amid cheers from the pseudo-left, his government is mired in a sea of accusations involving criminal activity by himself, family members and officials of his government.

The accusations are part of a campaign by a virulent right-wing opposition—centered in Congress—which aims to force his resignation, or impeachment. This campaign began immediately after the former rural teacher and union leader was unexpectedly elected last July.

While there is no doubt substance to the corruption charges, their scale pales in relation to the massive Odebrecht scandal in which virtually every bourgeois party and institution was implicated. Meanwhile, six of Peru's ex-presidents have been sentenced, indicted, or investigated for corruption or money laundering.

The unending effort by the right-wing parties in Congress—spearheaded by Keiko Fujimori's Fuerza Popular, who Castillo defeated in the elections—to bring the president down has created a crisis of governability, due to the sackings and removals of key figures as his administration moves ever rightward.

This has led to a record 67 ministers appointed by Castillo so far, prompting Bloomberg to observe last month that “A New Minister Is Appointed Every Six Days in Castillo's Peru”.

The latest to fall this month is the foreign minister, Miguel Angel Rodríguez Mackay, after just over a month in office. Rodríguez's appointment led to the resignations of Peru's ambassadors to both the United Nations and the Organization of American States after he voiced his support of the Congress's refusal to ratify the Escazú Accord, a continental wide agreement meant

to protect the environment and, specifically, environmental, and human rights defenders in the Amazon region. The rejection of the accord was in line with the demands of big mining and other extractive industries.

Parallel to this crisis, and feeding it, has been the devastation caused by COVID-19, and now the war in Ukraine. This one-two punch, triggering an economic slowdown, high unemployment, and a drastic increase in prices of food, fertilizers, and urban transportation, is plunging the working class into poverty.

Castillo's ascendance represented, in a distorted way, a rejection of the free-market policies by the bulk of the most economically marginalized population, which has not seen any improvement in living standards since the implementation of those policies three decades ago.

His rise to the presidency is part of a wider wave of populist politicians in the South American continent brought in to replace right-wing governments that fell amidst the biggest economic crisis engulfing the region since the Great Depression in the 1930s. They include Gabriel Boric in Chile, Gustavo Petro in Colombia, Luis Arce in Bolivia, Alberto Fernandez in Argentina, and in Brazil, the potential return of Luiz Ignacio 'Lula' da Silva of the Workers Party, who leads the polls for the presidential elections to be held on October 2.

Despite Castillo's policies in many cases being indistinguishable from those of the extreme right, and his frequent assurances that he will respect private property, and even give foreign investors more incentives to exploit Peru's natural resources, he has not succeeded in winning the confidence of big business.

The Spanish newspaper El País recently wrote that it

fears that “Peru's institutional crisis, in which the political class has been submerged for years, is heading towards a point of no return.” Defending the substantial interests of Spanish companies in Peru, *El País* warns that the scandals of the Peruvian government are dangerously undermining “national stability.”

On August 13, the governments of Argentina, Bolivia, Ecuador, and Mexico issued a communiqué expressing their fear about the viability of democracy in Peru, which they said could collapse due to the “social and political tension in that country, where its president, Pedro Castillo, is undergoing his sixth judicial investigation”.

According to a survey of the Institute of Peruvian Studies (IEP), 85 percent of Peruvians disapprove of Castillo's administration, a substantial increase over the 60 percent rejection recorded in August of last year, one month after Castillo took office.

However, his right-wing opponents in Congress are not faring any better. Mired in their own corruption scandals, and detested by the population for their oppressive policies, their antics and their disruption of the government, IEP reports that Congress has a 90 percent rejection rate, something unheard of in the country's recent history. Just 1 percent of those interviewed said that Congress is doing a “good” job.

Castillo survived his first year as president because his left-populist guise as a rural teacher and union leader, and the lining-up of all pseudo-left forces behind him, was of use to the ruling class in containing an emerging movement of the working class.

It would be wrong, however, to assess the crisis of Castillo's government as that of just another regime collapsing under the weight of its own corruption. Castillo's former supporters have turned against him for not fulfilling in the slightest his fanciful promise of 'no more poor in a rich country.' This expresses a breaking point in the attempt to contain the working class and the masses through the “left” and nationalist pretensions of a bourgeois regime.

With the political elite thoroughly discredited, and the absence of any force like the unions or other “left” figures that could control a social explosion, more astute sections of the Peruvian bourgeoisie know that forcing Castillo's removal could be playing with fire.

With Castillo's own image in tatters, and his downfall a matter of time, the July 20 release from prison of

Antauro Humala—the brother of former President Ollanta Humala—has been of considerable concern to the ruling class.

Antauro is the founder of “ethnocacerismo,” a political movement that exalts the indigenous race and promotes ultranationalism and xenophobia. He led an armed uprising in the Andean city of Andahuaylas in 2005.

The right-wing corporate media has seized on Antauro's release to launch another virulent anti-communist tirade, with dubious claims that Castillo had pardoned Antauro in furtherance of an alliance aimed at keeping his government in power.

Today Castillo does not even dare to show his face. Not only does he maintain a police cordon that prevents citizens from approaching the government house, an unprecedented act, he held the traditional military parade for the national holidays in late July inside the Ministry of Defense, the Pentagonito.

While hundreds of angry citizens demonstrated outside the fortress-like premises, Castillo's image, flanked by generals saluting the flag, was broadcast nationwide by all national TV stations.

Although during the election campaign last year, a small group of retired generals advocated a military coup to stop Castillo's “communism,” the higher echelons of the Armed Forces are not as harshly opposed to Castillo as are the corporate elite and their political representatives. This, allegedly, is due in part to his covering up corruption in their ranks.

However, there is little doubt that the Joint Command of the Armed Forces is carefully following the intensifying governmental crisis and will take the decision that it thinks best protects its own interests, as well as those of the national bourgeoisie and foreign capital.



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