Peru’s President Castillo is impeached and arrested after attempting to dissolve Congress

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Peru’s elected President Pedro Castillo was locked up in prison Thursday following a series of extraordinary events over the previous day in which he desperately sought to preempt the threats by the judicial and legislative branches to oust him by ordering the shutdown of Congress and declaring an authoritarian state of exception.

Castillo’s bid to remain in power collapsed after the combined commands of the armed forces and police issued a statement describing his actions as unconstitutional and warning that they would not support them.

Congress defied his order to dissolve and instead voted by an overwhelming majority to impeach him. Several of his ministers immediately resigned and condemned his actions as an attempted “coup,” and within hours Congress had sworn in his vice-president, Dina Boluarte, as Castillo’s successor.

The ignominious fall of Castillo, a former rural teacher and union leader, has thoroughly exposed not only the bankruptcy of his own rule, but that of the politics of broad layers of the pseudo-left who celebrated his election as a victory for “socialism.” Faced with the intransigent opposition of the military and the political right, he proved unable and unwilling to even attempt the mobilization of any popular support in his defense.

Aside from his personal fate, the events in Peru portend a sharper turn by the ruling classes across Latin America toward dictatorship, as they seek to place the entire burden of the deepening economic crisis on the shoulders of the workers and rural masses.

Peru’s ongoing crisis of bourgeois rule, which has seen six presidents in just over four years, as well as the arrest and imprisonment of every surviving head of state on corruption charges, has reached a new level of intensity.

A political nobody before joining Castillo’s ticket in 2021, Boluarte has no popular support or party. While she had previously stated she would resign if Castillo were impeached, she quickly changed her tune once it had happened. Expedited congratulations by the US State Department and the European Union, along with efforts by the corporate media to promote her as the country’s first female president, already ring hollow amid right-wing maneuvers to oust her as well and force early elections.

Acknowledging her precarious position, Boluarte appealed in her inaugural speech for a “political truce to install a national unity government” and for “a broad dialogue between all political forces represented or not in Congress.” In other words, she is offering her services as a figurehead in a government dominated by the right.

The far-right opposition in Congress, however, is unlikely to accept the offer. It had already attempted to oust her almost as viciously as it did Castillo, with the aim of installing the president of the Congress, José Williams, who is next in line of succession. Williams is a fascistic former military official who continuously rails against “Marxist ideology” and has been accused of ties to drug cartels and of trying to cover up the 1985 Accomarca massacre of 69 peasants.

At dawn on Thursday, the Prosecutor’s Office raided the presidential and ministerial offices to gather evidence against Castillo, and potentially also Boluarte.

Since taking office in July 2021, Castillo had named five different cabinets and 80 ministers, faced two failed impeachments by the unicameral Congress and left his party Free Peru. He lurched consistently to the right, including through his appointments, which only emboldened the far right and its allegations of corruption and nepotism.

The fact is that the entire political establishment, including the police and military, have been thoroughly discredited. The charges against Castillo were penny-ante compared to the vast web of corruption that envelops every state institution.

A Datum poll published hours before the impeachment debate found that Castillo’s ridiculous approval rating of 24 percent was greater than the 11 percent for Congress.

Castillo’s preemptive bid to forestall his impeachment collapsed as soon as the police and military commands, along with their handlers in Washington, refused to enforce it. US Ambassador Lisa Kenna quickly condemned Castillo’s announcement on Wednesday and called on him to “take back his attempt to shut down Congress.” Nervously, she added, “We encourage the Peruvian public to keep calm during these uncertain times.”

Castillo’s reaction was to take flight. Having secured an offer of asylum from Mexican President Andrés Manuel López, he

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and his entire family rode in a limousine toward the Mexican Embassy in Lima before the head of national security ordered Castillo's escort to bring him to the Lima police headquarters instead. There he was arrested for "rebellion" and "breaking the constitutional order" and sent to prison under a preventive detention order.

The Congress was then able to move forward its impeachment debate and quickly vote by a majority of 101 of the 130 members for deposing him due to "permanent moral incapacity."

Before Castillo's coup attempt to dissolve Congress, however, every report suggested that the far-right parties were still far behind the 87 votes needed to depose him, having only garnered 55 votes in the latest attempt in March.

At the same time, parties of the official center like Alliance for Progress, Popular Action and the Morado Party had gradually joined the impeachment drive, even as the far right resorted to strikingly reactionary allegations of "betrayal of the fatherland" against Castillo for even considering aiding land-locked Bolivia in gaining an outlet to the sea.

Far from being defenders of democracy as the media now claims, the police and military comprise the same repressive state apparatus that has a long record of brutally repressing peaceful protests and massacring peasants and workers. Only two years ago, the police killed Inti Sotelo and Brian Pintado during a demonstration against Manuel Merino, whose presidency lasted only six days.

The Biden administration has continued to train and arm these forces in preparation for a larger crackdown. In August, the Castillo administration and Congress approved the entry of US troops for joint exercises with the Peruvian military and police involving special combat operations, intelligence support and psy-ops.

Castillo directed his appeals against the far-right not to the working class, but to US imperialism, by sending a letter last month to the Organization of American States (OAS), an agency complicit in numerous CIA-backed coups. He begged this US-dominated body to defend him against a "new type of coup d'état."

Early on in his mandate, Castillo—like the pseudo-left presidents Petro in Colombia and Boric in Chile—sought accommodation with Washington by denouncing the Nicolas Maduro government in Venezuela as undemocratic. This year, after an October meeting in Lima with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, the Castillo administration issued a joint condemnation of the Russian military operation in Ukraine.

On December 1, from Washington, the envoys of the OAS recommended a "political truce" after warning that the actions by both ruling factions, including the corruption investigations against Castillo and his threats to dissolve Congress, "risk the democratic institutionalism of Peru." This was widely interpreted as a refusal to back Castillo and a green light to the right wing to move ahead with his ouster.

Castillo combined a right-wing program of mass deportations of migrants, constantly depicting them as criminals, and lifting virtually all mitigation measures against COVID-19—even though Peru has suffered the highest death rate per capita in the world—with demagogic slogans like "No more poor people in a rich country." But the only income redistribution he implemented was upwards, through handouts and other incentives for businesses, ostensibly to abate unemployment.

This year, he boasted that his policies had greatly reduced poverty. However, even the unsafe re-openings only slightly reduced the numbers living in poverty from 9.93 million to 8.61 million during his first year, compared to 6.6 million before the pandemic.

The whole region has been gravely affected by the ongoing global supply chain issues due to the pandemic, the increase in interest rates by the major central banks, and the NATO war against Russia in Ukraine. Peru's public debt, which it holds mainly in euros and dollars, rapidly jumped from less than 20 percent of its GDP in 2013 to over 36 percent. Moreover, the country's agriculture is highly dependent on grain and fertilizer imports largely produced in Russia and Ukraine.

During the harvest this year, the Castillo administration failed three times to carry out an international purchase of fertilizers, which was exploited by those pushing for impeachment.

These pressures added to the continuous devaluation of the Peruvian sol against the dollar since 2014, when the commodity boom ended. Copper sales to China, whose demand remains anemic and whose prices have failed to keep up with inflation, represent, by far, Peru's main export, followed by gold and gas.

As the economies of Peru and across Latin America slow down dramatically, the political crisis in Lima signals, above all, that the ruling elites will be unable to continue suppressing the class struggle by promoting empty illusions in an entirely bleached "Pink Tide."

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