

Thousands of demonstrators from across Peru march “to take Lima”

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Protests in Peru have escalated continuously in tandem with the murderous repression unleashed by the US-backed Dina Boluarte regime. Demonstrations, strikes and roadblocks have led to calls and preparations for a “march to take Lima,” the country’s capital.

Demonstrations rapidly expanded in the southern Puno region in the Andes, whose population is predominantly Quechua and Aymara-speaking. Puno is also one of the poorest regions in the country, with nearly half of the population living under the official poverty line.

On January 9, in response to the blocking of all roads to Juliaca, the region’s main commercial center, the police used live ammunition against demonstrators, killing at least 18.

The ashes of a policeman and his vehicle were found the following morning in the city, bringing the total number of confirmed deaths in the protests to 49. At least 41 demonstrators have been killed and about 600 have been wounded by gunfire.

The Juliaca massacre has unleashed an escalation of the protests, which erupted one month ago in response to the December 7 coup against President Pedro Castillo. Protesters have demanded the resignation of Boluarte and the Congress, immediate general elections and a constituent assembly.

Last week, roadblocks gradually spread from the southernmost Puno region to the rest of the country, including important economic chokepoints at the Bolivian border in Puno and the Chilean border in Tacna, as well as the northern Amazonian region.

Despite violent efforts by security forces to reopen the roads, gas and food shortages have already been reported in the southeast, while inter-provincial and local public transportation has shut down in Arequipa, Puno and other parts of southern Peru.

Flowing from the logic of the struggle, protesters are increasingly targeting the economic and political centers of the country, and an “indefinite strike” has been called, arising out of the impromptu discussions in plazas, community halls and the roadblocks themselves. Local mayors, other political officials and leaders of trade unions have been compelled to go along for now, while attempting to raise the prospect for dialogue with the regime.

The national leadership of the General Confederation of Peruvian Workers (CGTP) was further discredited for acknowledging Boluarte after the coup and holding talks with her. The bureaucracy, which is nothing but an appendage of the

corporations, has since sought to distance itself from Boluarte.

In an interview with Reuters, José Luis Chapa, secretary of the Arequipa Workers Federation, suggested that the government needs to convoke elections this year “if it wants dialogue.”

While demanding his liberation from prison, nowhere are demonstrators even raising the restoring of Castillo to the presidency. His record as another bourgeois politician subordinated to the oligarchy and the mining corporations, including his deployment of troops against demonstrators, is undebatable. Nonetheless, local leaders of so-called Defense Fronts and the pseudo-left in Peru and internationally have sought to exploit the anger and political confusion to again promote illusions in Castillo.

Most recently, demonstrators in the towns and the indigenous Aymara and Quechua communities in the south have called for a march to “take Lima” and forcibly oust Boluarte and Congress. Since Sunday, thousands have joined caravans from across the country and are heading to the capital, as the police and military seek to intercept them with checkpoints.

Demonstrators north and south of Lima have also established roadblocks along the Pan-American highway, but have not so far tried to systematically surround the city.

Local indigenous leaders have called the caravans the “March of the Four Corners,” which was the name of mass demonstrations in Lima in the year 2000 against the authoritarian regime of Alberto Fujimori. While triggered by electoral fraud that year, social anger had accumulated against Fujimori over the privatization of the mines and other public enterprises, social cuts and his use of massacres to suppress social opposition.

The present eruption in Peru is driven by rampant social inequality and hostility to the ruling oligarchy and the mining corporations. Alongside a growing number of dollar billionaires and some of the largest mineral deposits in the world, 51 percent of the population suffers from food insecurity, according to the UN.

“They want to sell us to the transnational corporations. We will not allow this. We are fighting for our children and grandchildren,” a caravan participant in Arequipa told Telesur.

Production in the key mining region around Arequipa, an epicenter of the protests, has already seen disruptions. Last week, the road to Cerro Verde, the largest copper mine in the country, owned by US-based Freeport, was blocked at intervals.

On Thursday, Swiss-based Glencore said that it had evacuated its

Antapaccay copper mine, the fifth largest in the country, after demonstrators invaded it and set fire to two vehicles. Communities near the Las Bambas mine, the third largest, have threatened to disrupt its activities.

Fearing an offensive against the mines, most of which are located in some of the poorest regions of the country, like Cajamarca, Apurímac, Piura, Cusco, Junín and La Libertad, the companies are calling for a harsher crackdown.

The National Association of Mining, Oil and Energy (SNMPE) released a statement last Friday ranting about “blackmail and anarchy” and an “escalation of vandalism and terror that has forced Peru to mourn.” The employer group demanded a return of the “rule of law, the principle of authority and rules, in an environment of social peace,” as well as an end to the “impunity under which the violent groups operate.”

Behind these hysterical calls for repression lies the high demand for metals and minerals, intensified by supply chain disruptions caused by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the US-NATO war in Ukraine against Russia, and labor shortages. Peru is the second-largest producer of copper, and a major producer of key minerals like silver, gold, zinc, lead and tin.

Responding to these demands, the Boluarte regime extended the state of emergency for another month in the departments of Lima, Cusco, Callao and Puno, suspending democratic rights and authorizing military repression.

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The corporate media and the ultra-right Fujimoristas in Congress and the state apparatus, who are dictating the policies of the regime, have ramped up their denunciations of demonstrators as “terrorists,” “communists,” and minions of Bolivian ex-president Evo Morales, whose entry into the country was denied. Without presenting any evidence, Boluarte and the far right have claimed that Morales is helping funnel weapons to demonstrators and fomenting “separatism.”

Hundreds of arrests of alleged leaders of the protests and raids of local organizations have taken place on the basis of these fraudulent accusations. Books of Marx, Lenin and Mao have been cited as “proof” of ties to terrorism.

In reality, the protests remain largely uncoordinated and leaderless. As reported recently by *La Jornada*, Boluarte’s former intelligence chief, General Wilson Barrantes Mendoza, said that “the intelligence agencies never identified any party or Senderista [Maoist guerrilla] movement or any central organization that was coordinating the demonstrations.” There are also no indications that demonstrators anywhere have been armed.

The bloodthirsty frenzy of the ruling elite is a sign of weakness and desperation under conditions in which all of its political parties and institutions, including the trade union bureaucracy, are totally discredited, and Peruvian capitalism offers nothing to the impoverished urban and rural masses but hunger, disease and militarized repression.

The Boluarte regime has offered not even a hint of democratic or social reforms. Instead, the Peruvian ruling class and US imperialism are following a similar script to that of the 2019 coup against Evo Morales in Bolivia.

Concluding that Morales and his Movement Toward Socialism (MAS) party had become discredited and were increasingly unable to contain social opposition, Washington set out to overthrow them. The Organization of American States (OAS), an appendage of the State Department, claimed that Morales had perpetrated electoral fraud, which led to demands by the right-wing parties, the military and even the pro-MAS Bolivian Workers Central (COB) for his resignation.

The ouster of Morales, who escaped to Mexico, set the stage for brutal massacres with the use of live ammunition, and mass arrests against demonstrators under the US-backed coup regime of Jeanine Áñez. Eleven months later, in the face of mass demands for new elections, the MAS was restored to power under Luis Arce in October 2020. Little more than two years later, he now faces renewed coup threats from the far right, while popular support for his government has recently fallen from 47 to 40 percent, according to a poll that cites inflation and “instability” as the main reasons.

In Peru, days before the December 7 coup, the OAS explicitly rejected giving any support to Castillo against a trumped-up impeachment drive. The US Embassy then took the initiative, denouncing Castillo’s preemptive attempt to dissolve Congress, while signaling to the military and police to oppose Castillo. The Peruvian Congress, Washington and the European Union then swiftly acknowledged Boluarte as the new president.

The experience with Castillo in Peru, just as with the MAS in Bolivia, Gabriel Boric in Chile and their counterparts elsewhere, demonstrates that the second “Pink Tide” in Latin America is nothing but a card being played by the capitalist ruling elites to buy time and prepare for dictatorship as they continue to impose the deepening crisis of global capitalism onto the backs of workers.

Capitalism can provide no progressive way out of the present crisis. Despite Peru’s enormous mineral and agricultural wealth, the COVID-19 pandemic, inflation and the crisis of grains and fertilizers due to the war in Ukraine have demonstrated the country’s dependence on the global economy.

A progressive outcome to the current political impasse in Peru and the rest of the region can only emerge insofar as workers mobilize internationally and politically in a conscious fashion to overthrow global capitalism and reorganize society to meet all human needs. This requires the building of a new, socialist and internationalist leadership in the working class—as sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International in Peru and throughout Latin America.



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