

Peru protests continue in face of police state repression

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Protests in Peru's capital continued into a fifth day on Monday as the demonstrators who traveled from across the country for the "takeover of Lima" have been brutally repressed through mass arrests, the use of tear gas, rubber bullets and beatings, and the deployment of armored vehicles.

As the US-backed regime of Dina Boluarte, which was installed in a coup in early December, met last Thursday afternoon with the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, the police and military carried out a renewed onslaught against the peaceful demonstrators in Lima and elsewhere in the country, resulting in at least one death that day in Arequipa.

Several more protesters have been killed since, as the police continue to use live ammunition. There have been 56 confirmed deaths of civilians and one of a policeman, and hundreds have been injured. Other reports have placed the number killed by the security forces at 62 or more.

The epicenter of the protests remains the impoverished south. The largest demonstrations and most persistent roadblocks are taking place in the cities of Arequipa—the second largest after Lima—Juliaca, Ayacucho, Cusco and Tacna. While sporadic roadblocks have been reported in La Libertad and Amazonas, as well as a fire in an oil pipeline close to the Ecuadorian border, the north of the country and the formal mining, energy and industrial workers have not participated en masse in the protests.

The General Confederation of Peruvian Workers (CGTP) veered from initially recognizing the Boluarte regime to feigning support for the demonstrations and calling a series of "national strikes." At the same time, however, the trade unions that belong to it have kept workers in all key sectors on the job, showing that they stand on the regime's side of the barricades in defending the profit interests of the transnational corporations and the oligarchy.

The heroism of the protesters notwithstanding, the limitations of seeking to disrupt economic activities and topple the regime through roadblocks, airport occupations and scattered marches are becoming clear. By their very nature, these tactics can be isolated and crushed by the armed forces. Similar tactics were followed—in some cases more massively than in Peru—in Nicaragua in 2018, Ecuador, Chile, Bolivia, and Honduras in 2019, Paraguay in 2021 and Colombia in 2021-2022, to the

same effect.

As a result, the leadership of the Boluarte regime, the military and intelligence apparatus and, undoubtedly, behind them the US Embassy, felt confident enough to carry out the highly provocative move of crashing through the gates of Lima's San Marcos National University with an armored vehicle and invading the campus with hundreds of heavily armed police on Saturday.

At the emblematic campus of the most important university in the country—and the oldest in the hemisphere—police arrested more than 200 students and demonstrators who had traveled from the interior and were being sheltered by the students. Those arrested at the university, including a mother and her eight-year-old child, were treated as "terrorists," forced to lie on the ground before screaming police in scenes reminiscent of the darkest days of the Peruvian dictatorship of Alberto Fujimori in the 1990s, or even Chile in 1973.

The continued defiance of this murderous police-military violence by demonstrators drawn from the most impoverished and heavily indigenous regions of Peru has won the attention and admiration of workers and youth all over the world. But bravery is not enough. Despite being the largest wave of demonstrations in Peru in recent memory, without a revolutionary program and leadership, it cannot achieve the fundamental political and social aspirations driving the mass popular anger that is gripping the country.

There are several fundamental aspects of the current mobilizations that workers in Peru and internationally need to assess. Firstly, the protests are part of a global resurgence of the class struggle triggered by the policies of ruling elites. Everywhere, their aim is to intensify the exploitation of the working class and plunder semi-colonial countries like Peru to sustain the record profits of the financial and corporate oligarchy in US and Europe, pay for the repeated financial bailouts of the rich, and feed the US-NATO war drive for hegemony against Russia and China.

The Boluarte regime does not merely represent the Peruvian oligarchy, but it primarily oversees the interests of US and European imperialism. Washington and the European Union are working, both openly and behind the scenes, to bolster the regime's ability to "pacify" the country to safeguard the

continued extraction of the strategic mineral wealth of Peru.

On January 9, as the police was carrying out a massacre of demonstrators in Juliaca, killing 19 demonstrators and injuring over 100 more, the US Embassy congratulated the Boluarte government for confiscating drugs, declaring that the State Department is “glad to collaborate with the National Police in Peru, providing advanced training in the fight against drugs and organized crime.”

In fact, the Biden administration has openly poured millions in aid into the Peruvian repressive apparatus during the crackdown and supported the “state of emergency,” which criminalizes the protests and involves the deployment of the military.

Last Thursday, the first day of the “takeover of Lima,” the US ambassador in Lima and CIA veteran Lisa Kenna met with Boluarte’s Energy and Mining Ministry in a “high-level dialogue between Peru and the United States on the subjects of mining development.”

The ministry officially “thanked the support of the American government in the subjects of mining and energy and reasserted the determination of the national government” to expand natural gas production and develop petrochemical production in the south of the country, the epicenter of the protests. Peru’s natural gas exports have almost doubled during the war in Ukraine and have gone primarily to Europe as an alternative to Russian energy.

Washington’s overriding concern over the Peruvian mass protests centers on their shutdown of massive mining operations, such as those of Glencore in Antapaccay and MMG’s Las Bambas facility, and the continuing blockade of key highways linking the mines to port facilities. While the US Embassy issued a carefully worded statement lamenting the mass killing of protesters, behind the scenes the Pentagon and CIA are collaborating in the bloody repression in the defense of profit interests.

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The leaderless character of the demonstrations makes them vulnerable to repression and also to their manipulation by sections of the regionalist and indigenous elites that belong to the venal bourgeoisie and have responded to the discrediting of the old traditional parties by advancing their own political platforms to negotiate corrupt deals with the mining companies and public contracts. The rise of President Pedro Castillo was the result of these processes.

Few Peruvians see the depiction by the regime and the media of the demonstrators as “terrorists” and pawns of the now defunct Sendero Luminoso Maoist guerrillas as anything but fascistic hogwash. However, support for guerrillism, along with the promotion of the indigenous nationalism of Mariátegui, bourgeois nationalism and syndicalism by the Stalinist Communist Party, the Maoist Communist Party-Bandera Roja and its split Patria Roja have had devastating

effects on the socialist consciousness of workers in Peru.

In the name of left-wing politics and socialism, these organizations and their Morenoite and Pabloite partners worked for decades to channel social opposition behind one or another bourgeois politician, from the nationalist military dictator Juan Velasco Alvarado, and broad bourgeois coalitions like United Left (IU) in the early 1980s, to the pseudo-left Broad Front and Nuevo Perú in the last 15 years.

Most recently, employing the politics of lesser-evilism with respect to the far-right Fujimorists, the Stalinists have endorsed the right-wing former presidents Ollanta Humala, Alejandro Toledo, Pedro Pablo Kuczynski, Martín Vizcarra and Pedro Castillo. These repeated betrayals are responsible for politically disarming the working class and paving the way for the effective return of the Fujimorists to power behind the Boluarte coup regime.

While the current mass protests in Peru remain widespread, they are approaching a political dead end, and workers in Peru and internationally need to extract and act upon key historical lessons of this struggle.

Fundamentally, the only alternative to the nationalist and pro-capitalist politics of Stalinism and today’s pseudo-left is the struggle for permanent revolution as elaborated by Leon Trotsky, who founded the only organized movement against the Stalinist degeneration of the Soviet Union and the Communist International.

Trotsky insisted that freedom from imperialist oppression, the abolition of landlordism, the securing of the land rights and welfare of indigenous and peasant communities and other democratic issues cannot be resolved by any faction of the national bourgeoisie. Only the working class—united across both the backwards and advanced countries—can secure genuine democracy and the social rights of workers by leading behind it the rural poor in a permanent revolution that overthrows capitalist profit relations and establishes socialism globally.

Everywhere, the objective conditions for the development of socialist consciousness in the working class have long ripened, but this development must be consciously fought for by a political leadership rooted in the historical lessons of the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the struggle against Stalinism waged by the Trotskyist movement, which is led today by the International Committee of the Fourth International.



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