

Ecuador's president dissolves Congress to halt impeachment

Andrea Lobo
19 May 2023

With the support of the military and the police, Ecuador's President Guillermo Lasso triggered on Wednesday a "mutual death" clause to dissolve Congress before it could vote to impeach him on corruption charges.

The legislative building and the streets of downtown Quito were heavily militarized as the armed forces threatened to "act firmly" to defend the decision. Highlighting the authoritarian dangers posed by Lasso's measures, the military high command had held a closed-door meeting with Defense Minister Luis Lara on Tuesday in the "War Room," where Lasso's next steps were discussed.

The "mutual death" provision was enacted in the 2008 Constitution under the presidency of Rafael Correa, whose party Union for Hope (UNES) was leading the impeachment drive against Lasso. The clause allows the president to rule by decree for up to six months until a new administration takes office and sets a three-month deadline for presidential and congressional elections.

Lasso has sent an extensive package of long-planned economic decrees to the Constitutional Court, which takes over legislative powers and quickly approved Lasso's "mutual death" on Thursday. The economic decrees reportedly include a regressive tax reform, a free trade zone project, an Investment Act, reforms to the Social Security Institute and measures related to oil extraction.

US Ambassador Michael J. Fitzpatrick backed Lasso's actions, declaring: "The government of the United States respects the internal and constitutional processes of Ecuador."

This endorsement has again exposed US imperialism's hypocritical pretensions to defend "democracy." Just five months ago, when the pseudo-left Peruvian president Pedro Castillo shut down Congress citing similarly vague constitutional provisions in response to an impeachment drive based on corruption charges, the US ambassador, Lisa Kenna, a CIA veteran, gave a green light for ousting and arresting Castillo, as well as violently suppressing protests.

Washington has consistently backed the authoritarian measures taken by the Ecuadorian government. The Trump administration supported the repression of mass anti-austerity demonstrations in October 2019 that forced then-president Lenín Moreno to temporarily relocate his government to the coastal city of Guayaquil, resulting in 11 dead.

In 2021, Biden's Secretary of State Antony Blinken visited Quito to proclaim that "exceptional measures" were "required" as the already beleaguered Lasso was resorting to dictatorial states of emergency and threatening to violently repress strikes in 2021.

Amid mass protests and a national strike sparked by food and fuel price increases in 2022, the Biden administration defended Lasso after a crackdown that left at least seven dead and hundreds injured.

The opposition parties have insisted that there is no "grave political crisis or civil commotion"—the cause cited by Lasso as the grounds to trigger the "mutual death" clause—and that Lasso's actions are illegal.

However, the UNES party has refused to call for protests, with Correa tweeting: "The measure is unconstitutional, but what is best for the Fatherland is to hold elections. The future is in your hands. Will you let them fool you again?"

The Indigenous federation CONAIE, which has led repeated anti-government protests and whose presidential candidate came third in 2021, also called off protests.

Even before Lasso's announcement, CONAIE leader Leonidas Iza, who has been promoted by other indigenous leaders as a likely presidential candidate, sought to preempt a social eruption by calling off any demonstrations or "roadblocks" that were reportedly already being prepared.

"If the government makes the wrong decisions and provokes a social reaction... we will declare a national mobilization," he said in a press conference. "We are standing by."

Only the Stalinist-led "Popular Front," including the Teachers Union UNE, organized a handful of roadblocks in Quito. The trade union federation FUT announced a convention in June to decide on a response to Lasso's package of economic measures.

So far, there have not been any major demonstrations. However, Lasso's attacks against democratic and social rights will inevitably provoke massive opposition. Workers and all oppressed sectors must conclude from the soporifics and stalling by the official leaderships that they are determined to isolate and suppress any struggles by channeling them behind empty electoral promises.

The Ecuadorian ruling class has been facing a decades-long political crisis involving repeated resignations and impeachments. Such political instability, including conflicts between the old banking and agro-export oligarchy and the newer finance-industrial bourgeoisie, has been the norm since the end of the military dictatorship in 1979.

The 1971 and 1975 general strikes and growing union movement had rattled the ruling class as the urban working class had surpassed the rural population, demonstrating its enormous power.

In response, the so-called "return to democracy" saw an attempt

to integrate an elite of the still massive rural indigenous population into the bourgeois political establishment, beginning with 1979 provisions to expand the electoral participation of indigenous peoples. By 1986, the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE) was formed to unite regional leaderships, and a decade later it formed its electoral wing, the Pachakutik party. Shortly after, basing its program on “land rights,” “anti-globalization” and “anti-neoliberalism,” the CONAIE gained control of dozens of provincial and municipal governments and won hundreds of municipal council posts.

Along with the Stalinist-led trade union bureaucracy, the CONAIE repeatedly placed itself at the front of mass protests to channel opposition against austerity, environmental destruction and land rights abuses behind illusions in the election of one or another bourgeois politician, as well as in the capitalist constituent assemblies of 1997-98 and 2007-08.

In 1998-2000, a pre-revolutionary crisis erupted that saw most banks collapse, a currency run leading to a chaotic dollarization of the economy, rampant inflation that sent over 70 percent of the population into poverty, and untenable debt levels. The CONAIE, the Stalinist Communist Party, along with the trade union bureaucracy and their pseudo-left apologists, scrambled to channel the resulting mass upheaval, ultimately backing the former colonel Lucio Gutierrez (2003-2005), who integrated several CONAIE and Pachakutik leaders into his cabinet. Gutierrez then defended the dollarization and agreed to another IMF structural program, which led to mass protests and his own downfall.

Then these same forces of the official “left” backed the coalition Alianza País under Rafael Correa, a US-trained economist. By then, Chinese demand was driving up prices of commodities like oil and minerals, allowing the Ecuadorian economy to grow more than fivefold between 2000 and 2014.

This allowed Correa not only to pay back the public debts and provide massive profits for the local ruling elite and the transnationals, but also to increase spending on public education, health care and social assistance. At the same time, Correa used states of emergency and troop deployments to crush indigenous protests against the rapid expansion of natural resource extraction. In 2017, he handpicked his right-wing successor Lenín Moreno, who moved to implement austerity measures and regressive labor reforms to pay back new massive debts. He also withdrew the asylum granted WikiLeaks editor Julian Assange at the Ecuadorian Embassy in London, handing him over to the British police.

Moreno’s reactionary policies paved the way to the election of the right-wing multi-millionaire banker Lasso. Under Lasso and amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the eruption of war in Ukraine, a continued slowdown of the Chinese economy and growing US pressures against Chinese influence in Latin America, Ecuador has suffered an economic downturn.

The Ecuadorian ruling class is desperate to impose social austerity and attack wages and job security to attract investments as its public debt has grown from 17 percent of its GDP in 2011 to 69 percent last year. The economy has effectively stagnated for almost a decade.

Only about a third of workers in Ecuador have an “adequate job” (40 hours and a wage of at least \$450 per month), but this falls to

about 12.3 percent for indigenous people. Meanwhile, almost four out of every 10 Ecuadorians suffer multidimensional poverty, and this rate is more than twice as high for the indigenous rural communities. The indigenous leadership, now firmly integrated into the local and national governments, has demonstrated its inability to pursue an independent orientation.

Across Latin America, whether it’s under openly right-wing forces like Lasso and Boluarte in Peru or governments associated with a second wave of the so-called “pink tide” like Lula in Brazil, Boric in Chile and Petro in Colombia, the same attacks against the working class and poor are rapidly discrediting the entire political establishment and preparing massive social eruptions.

Correa and his party UNES are no exception and have long reassured foreign capital and US imperialism that they will do their bidding. In an interview with the Spanish website CTXT in 2021, for example, Correa insisted that, “Under no circumstances do we believe that there could be attempts to destabilize or undermine democracy” by the Biden administration.

While indicating that mechanisms “such as the National Endowment for Democracy” have been used to pressure governments, he said, “we hope that these mechanisms are now used for strengthening democracy.” Given the NED’s long history of use by the US State Department to sponsor coups all around the world, Correa statement amounted to an offer to sell his movement to the CIA.

These experiences in Ecuador have a strategic importance for workers and the oppressed everywhere. Only the independent political mobilization of workers under a socialist and internationalist program, opposed to all pro-capitalist and nationalist parties and organizations, offers a way forward.



To contact the WSWWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)