

Protesters at APEC summit in Lima, Peru: “Let the world hear, they are killing us.”

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Over the course of three days—November 13, 14 and 15—thousands of public transport workers, teachers from the SUTEP union, members of the General Confederation of Workers of Peru (CGTP), small business owners, and students launched a national strike and mass protests against the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Forum held in Lima during the week.

It was the fourth consecutive strike by transportation workers held in less than two months in response to a growing wave of extortions and killings of public transport drivers, construction workers, schoolteachers and others at the hands of local mafias that control large sections of Peruvian working class districts. Every four and a half hours a Peruvian citizen is killed and there are an average of 90 reports of extortion each day.

The regime of President Dina Boluarte, which came to power in a parliamentary coup backed by the United States and the far right two years ago, deployed 14,000 troops and police officers strategically throughout the city. Additionally, President Joe Biden brought with him to the summit some 600 US soldiers, snipers, and two Black Hawk helicopters equipped with high-caliber weapons, a military strike force that far exceeded the security requirements of the American head of state.

Police cars, motorcycles and ambulances lined the entrances to the hotels where 3,000 delegates from 21 countries stayed for the APEC Forum, which took place at the headquarters of the Public Ministry on Avenida Javier Prado Este, one of the city’s main avenues.

Additionally, dozens of armed soldiers surveilled all metro stations and train stops servicing the routes from the southern part of the city to the north, the main means of transport used by the Lima working class.

On the first day of the strike, however, a few buses from private companies were still in circulation. Additionally, merchants in the Gamarra shopping center opened their doors to serve the public, displaying large posters on electric poles addressed to APEC, stating that Gamarra is a key driver of the Peruvian economy, even though they are also

victims of extortionists.

The protest organizers, including the CGTP union bureaucracy, influenced by the Stalinist Communist Party, maintain an orientation toward negotiations with the authoritarian Boluarte government, while separating the fight against extortion by mafias and their hitmen from the struggle based in the independent mobilization of the working class against social inequality, unemployment and rising poverty.

Julio Campos, the National Transport Alliance vice president, articulated this conciliatory stance. He noted that neither the Peruvian president nor Congress had shown any willingness to engage in dialogue about measures against crime ahead of the APEC Forum.

He further emphasized that the fight against crime should focus on demanding practical actions and the repeal of Law 32108, which hinders the prosecution of extortion mafias connected to business and political elites.

At the same time, the union leader accused Boluarte of misleading foreign investors at APEC by claiming that her government “empowers citizens” and that the situation is “peaceful.”

Boluarte is accused of crimes against humanity following her government’s violent repression of protests against the overthrow of elected president Pedro Castillo, which resulted in the deaths of at least 49 citizens.

Despite the conciliatory stance of union leaders, the socially heterogeneous protests have broadened further, along with their demands. Protesters engaged in powerful demonstrations, showing their determination to fight for their social and democratic rights.

During the national strike’s second day, protests intensified across several cities. In Arequipa, citizens blocked traffic, while in Junín, Ancash and La Libertad, vehicles were stopped due to blockades on major highways.

In Iquitos, located on the shores of the Amazon River, protesters chanted, “We cannot allow more murders; we demand justice and security for our families.”

In the northern city of La Libertad, about 500 Otuzco

ronderos (autonomous rural patrols) joined the strike and blocked roads, declaring, “We are workers; we want security.”

In Cusco, the old Inca capital and major tourist center, protesters obstructed access in Sicuani. Also, traffic was interrupted on the highway connecting Huancayo-Huancavelica, two important commercial cities in the Central Andes.

Puno, the department bordering Bolivia, had the most blockades. Juliaca’s Llave Bridge, vital for transporting goods from Cusco and Bolivia to the seaport of Matarani, was also closed.

Lima was the epicenter of unrest. Protesters traveling to Lima reported being violently detained and surrounded by the National Police for over an hour. “They practically kidnapped us. We were violently repressed when we only came to peacefully protest,” said one leader.

The Lima Sur Popular Assembly, the National Organization of Relatives of the Victims of the Massacres of 2022-2023, and local merchants led a massive march toward San Borja, where the APEC Forum was held.

Carrying banners stating, “Dina Boluarte, Out” and “Enough of extortions and murders,” the protesters reached the forum’s vicinity, shouting, “Let the world hear, they are killing us,” as delegates to APEC gathered.

The protests caused significant delays for delegates, including the president of Indonesia, who had to wait over 10 minutes to enter the Government Palace.

Members of one of the Chinese delegations found themselves caught amid the protests that had begun on the morning of November 14 near the APEC Peru 2024 headquarters.

On the second day, police began violently confronting protesters gathering at the intersection of Aviación and Canada avenues, using tear gas and shotgun pellets.

The Transport Union Committee banner raised several political demands: “Repeal Law 32108, reject the Pro-Crime Legal Package, provide reparations for debtors, and oppose the privatization of water.”

A mother of a youth killed by security forces during anti-Boluarte demonstrations traveled from Puno, dressed in the region’s traditional clothing. She held a sign stating: “Neither bullets nor machine guns will silence the people.”

Another banner featuring the image of the president was labeled “Dina murders,” with the text: “There are already more than 70 dead, and nobody is saying anything.”

The protesters maintained a high spirit, chanting, “Dina and Congress, the people repudiate you.”

A woman who preferred to remain anonymous shared her thoughts with the WSWS:

“This APEC does not represent us. It gives away our

territory, our homes, our oil, and our mining resources. They extract minerals without proper supervision.

“There is unemployment, and we are living in a state of insecurity. There is not enough money for our needs.

“We cannot afford to send our children to school or help them find work. University education costs around 500 soles [US\$133, which is 49 percent of the minimum living wage].

“I work in house-cleaning and earn 1,000 soles a month for working eight hours a day. That is not a decent salary, while members of Congress receive a Christmas bonus. Politicians profit from our taxes, making it easy money for them because they do nothing.”

She urged workers struggling in other countries:

“If you appreciate our people fighting against this murderer [Dina Boluarte], join us. This murderer does not represent us, and neither does Congress.”

The average congressman will receive around 46,700 soles (US\$12,450) in their year-end payment, including remuneration, bonuses, allowances, and representation fees. In contrast, a construction worker earns approximately 30,000 soles a year, including one month vacation and a two-month bonus for Independence Day and Christmas. This means that a single year-end payment for an average congressman is comparable to a year and a half of work for a construction worker.

In a different location, students from the National University of San Marcos faced police violence, with several detained while protesting against the Boluarte administration. They denounced the police for confiscating their protest materials and attempting to seize their ID cards.

The protesters demanded that the government repeal the so-called “Organized Crime Law,” which ultimately serves to protect members of Congress with ties to criminal organizations.



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