

The politics behind the selection of the American-Peruvian Pope

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The selection of Cardinal Robert Prevost as Pope Leo XIV is a calculated political decision by the Catholic Church, not a theological one. He has been chosen as the figure deemed most capable of giving capitalism a facelift amid an unprecedented global crisis.

As Trump's second term is defined by threats of neo-colonial conquest and global war abroad, and mass deportations and fascist reaction at home, the Catholic Church is positioning itself as a "moral" counterweight to the naked oligarchic rule now dominating the center of global capitalism.

With 1.4 billion adherents worldwide—nearly half concentrated in the Americas and 20 percent in rapidly growing African nations—the Catholic Church remains a critical bulwark of the capitalist status quo, playing a central role in containing class struggle and suppressing working-class radicalization in much of the world.

Despite deep divisions within the Church, Prevost reportedly won broad support from cardinals across Latin America, the US, Europe, Asia and Africa. His multilingual fluency—Spanish, Italian, French, Portuguese and English—along with dual US-Peruvian citizenship and leadership roles in both countries, were seen as ideal qualities to aid the Church's efforts to intervene in global politics by channeling popular grievances in both advanced and oppressed countries.

Trump's social media praise for Prevost—a "great honor for our country"—masks underlying tensions. Prevost has publicly criticized Trump's mass deportations, climate change denial and Vice President JD Vance's perversion of medieval Catholic doctrine to justify the persecution of immigrants. He previously denounced Trump's "bad hombres" rhetoric as racist. Prevost's defense of immigrant rights—which resonates with most workers internationally—risks upstaging Washington's would-be *Führer*.

Prevost's election also reflects the Church's concern

over rising nationalist divisions and conflicts within the US-led imperialist bloc. As theologian Miguel Perez told the *Huffington Post*, he "has always talked about bridges and dialogue, about overcoming confrontations, in a context in which multilateralism is damaged, especially by leaders like Trump."

Among the leaders of European powers, who would have been consulted in the process of selecting Prevost, there is no doubt a hope that the pope will be an ally in its conflict with the Trump administration.

Expressing the generally favorable view of the new pope prevailing within sections of the American ruling class, CNN Vatican analyst Elise Ellen described him as a "calm and balanced" centrist, who is "even-handed" and an "exceptional leader." On the other hand, Trump's former chief advisor, the fascist Steven Bannon, called his selection "jaw-dropping" due to his previous statements criticizing Trump officials.

Another political consideration behind Prevost's selection is an effort somehow to contain growing social anger among broad masses of the population throughout the world.

In his inaugural prayer, speaking in Spanish and Italian, Prevost warned of "a third world war in pieces," citing Ukraine and India-Pakistan tensions, and called for a "ceasefire" in Gaza and "authentic peace." He directly addressed AI-driven inequality and climate disasters in an appeal to workers and the poor facing job losses from automation and ecological collapse.

Prevost's chosen name invokes the legacy of Pope Leo XIII. The latter's 1891 encyclical *Rerum Novarum* sought to counter the influence of Marxism during industrialization at the turn of the last century. The document endorsed unions and fair wages while condemning socialism and revolution, declaring: "Capital cannot do without labor, nor labor without capital. Mutual agreement results in the beauty of good order, while

perpetual conflict necessarily produces confusion and savage barbarity.”

By framing class conflict as a moral issue resolvable through Church-mediated “dialogue,” the *Rerum Novarum* sought to divert workers from the class struggle and Marxism, which identifies scientifically the intrinsic contradictions of world capitalism that lead to extreme inequality and other social ills. “Accumulation of wealth at one pole is, therefore, at the same time accumulation of misery, agony of toil, slavery, ignorance, brutality, mental degradation, at the opposite pole,” Marx explained in *Capital*.

Prevost’s papacy is a conscious revival of his namesake’s strategy. He has praised *Rerum Novarum*’s “commitment to social justice,” while upholding the sanctity of private property, a stance engraved in the explicit rejection of socialism by the *Catechism*, or the official doctrine of the Church.

While posturing as a reformer, Prevost was selected to better maintain and nurture the Church’s alliance with capital and to protect its own major landowning and financial interests. Consequently, so-called “progressive” elements such as Prevost are always reduced to empty platitudes and impotent moral appeals to an insatiable capitalist class, such as his longwinded calls for AI ethics to focus on “human dignity” and for “inclusion” and “listening” to youth and marginalized groups.

The elevation of figures such as Prevost and his late mentor Pope Francis (Jorge Mario Bergoglio) are only the latest examples of the Church’s historic role of “loyal opposition”: criticizing war and social degradation, while upholding the capitalist order from which they inevitably flow.

For instance, in 19th-century Europe, the Church promoted “Christian labor associations” to rival socialist unions, emphasizing the supposed harmony between workers and bosses. Germany’s Kolping Society and Italy’s ACLI used this model to fragment working-class unity.

While 1960s Latin American liberation theologians like Gustavo Gutiérrez advocated class struggle, the Vatican suppressed radical elements. The “Dirty War Pope,” Bergoglio himself denounced the “ideological colonization” of the Church and collaborated with the Argentine dictatorship’s “disappearance” of radical elements within the Church.

Post-*Rerum Novarum* encyclicals, including *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931) and *Centesimus Annus* (1991), refined the Church’s “third way” or reformist

rhetoric denouncing both socialism and unfettered capitalism while upholding private property.

Despite his extensive curriculum vitae, which includes criticizing the “injustices” under the late Peruvian dictator Alberto Fujimori, Prevost’s image as a “progressive” quickly came under fire after reports emerged that he refused to address clerical sexual abuse cover-ups in Peru and Chicago.

Most recently, in Peru, in 2022, three women reported to Prevost that two priests from his diocese had sexually abused them as minors in 2004. The women claimed Prevost failed to conduct a thorough investigation, did not inform civil authorities adequately and did not impose restrictions on the accused priests.

AI-driven job losses, climate disasters, genocide and imperialist war are inherent to a system prioritizing profit over human need. Prevost’s pacifist appeals and moral denunciations of inequality and fascist reaction are aimed at covering up the deep roots of these social issues in capitalism.

However, even the meager reforms mediated through religious or bourgeois institutions in an earlier epoch to counter revolutionary consciousness are today rejected outright by ruling elites confronting a much more advanced stage of the crisis of global capitalism.

The Church itself, an institution steeped in medieval obscurantism, can only respond to the wildfire of AI technology reaching the palms of workers in every corner of the globe by clinging desperately to the tailcoats of the capitalist oligarchy and offering all its reactionary services.

Today’s emerging upsurge of strikes and protests—from Peruvian miners to US autoworkers—signals the emergence of an explosive wave of global class struggle that no papal encyclical can contain. “Authentic peace” and protecting the livelihoods and lives of workers anywhere require the revolutionary overthrow of the capitalist profit system under the leadership of the world Trotskyist movement—the International Committee of the Fourth International.



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