

Transport strike in Peru joins growing “Gen Z” protests

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Mass protests against the government of Peru’s President Dina Boluarte intensified markedly throughout September in Lima and across the country and have continued to escalate into October.

On October 2, the 12th transport strike in Lima and the neighboring port of Callao brought much of economic activity to a halt.

In the cities, youth have led so-called “Gen Z protests,” taking to the streets since late September with banners and signs brandishing “Z” and images from the popular Manga series *One Piece*.

Joined by many poor rural communities and the unemployed, the protests were sparked by a reactionary bill reshuffling the pension system in favor of AFPs, or private pension funds, but they have been characterized by general opposition to Boluarte and the far-right regime she leads.

The situation in Peru is part of a growing wave of working class struggles internationally, with youth leading the protests saying they were inspired by “Gen Z protests” in Nepal that brought down the prime minister.

Mass protests in Peru, Ecuador and other countries express growing opposition against the escalating turn by the ruling elites everywhere toward dictatorship and social attacks on workers in response to the crisis of global capitalism.

The “Gen Z” slogan has been exploited by the corporate media in Peru and other countries to present the protests as a generational issue extraneous to the sentiments and demands of the rest of the working class. However, the youth-led protests herald the escalation of workers’ struggles, as demonstrated by the transport strike and an increase in the class struggle across Peru.

According to an official report of the Ombudsman’s Office, by August of this year there were 148 active conflicts, out of a total of 195 registered conflicts, of which only half were addressed, although without a resolution. Forty-seven conflicts are in a latent state, that is, they are permanent. The largest number of social conflicts are in the departments of Loreto, in the northeast, in the Amazon (25 cases); Puno, in the south of the country, bordering Bolivia (19 cases), Cusco (17 cases) and Ancash (17 cases). In the month of August alone, there were 250 protest actions and a general strike in May.

The October 2 transport strike, organized by the National Association of Transport Integration (ANITRA) and the National Transport Alliance, exposed the contradictory nature of the sector’s demands. While leaders pushed for greater state intervention—through police and military—to fight the extortion and murder terrorizing transport workers, many rank-and-file drivers, fare collectors and controllers expressed opposition to the leadership’s calls.

The strikers’ fight for survival amid urban chaos collides with a government apparatus deeply tied to criminal gangs and incapable of

providing genuine protection, revealing the social decomposition under bourgeois rule.

The night before the strike, gangs shot at a bus full of passengers in San Juan de Miraflores, exacerbating drivers’ fears, with estimates that 30 percent have ceased working to avoid extortion threats and assassination attempts. While the Boluarte government claimed normal bus circulation, this was fiercely contested by strikers and reporters alike, fueling a greater mobilization with vehicles withdrawn, bus windows smashed and tires cut to immobilize services.

A police presence of 3,000 officers and hundreds of vehicles was concentrated in working class neighborhoods of northern Lima to contain the protests. Still, the strike led to widespread clashes with police and blockades of key roads like the Panamericana Norte and avenues in the heart of Lima, with arrests and police violence targeting demonstrators.

Of particular note was a convoy of buses without passengers traveling from various districts to the Congress, where over 1,000 workers, students and union delegates protested. Slogans denounced Boluarte as a “murderer,” and several unions, including construction federations and university students, joined the mobilization demanding improved working conditions.

The governing coalition, in both the executive and Congress, have agreed in the wake of the latest protests to advance a bill against “urban terrorism” to harshly repress the protests. This measure is hardly exclusive to Peru. In the United States, fascist President Trump speaks a similar language, railing against an “internal enemy” and intervening militarily in several cities (Los Angeles, Washington D.C., Chicago, Memphis, Portland and others) with the aim of imposing a dictatorship. Capitalist governments the world over have declared war on the working class, knowing there is widespread repudiation of their authoritarian, anti-democratic and outright fascist measures.

After clashes with the police, denunciations of “urban terrorism” have been revived. With the defeat of the Shining Path Maoist guerrilla movement, the Fujimorist neoliberal dictatorship extended the use of “terrorism” to label protest demonstrations and distort them. Today those in power repeat this script. The popularly hated Peruvian Congress approved in a second vote the law Against Urban Terrorism with which it seeks to prevent a new generation of Peruvian workers, students and oppressed from drawing real lessons from the bitter experience with Shining Path and the dirty war waged by the Peruvian state against them and from rising up against the oppressive economic and political regime.

The current crossroads faced by Peruvian youth and workers urgently raises the need to take stock of their experiences with the

different variants of bourgeois nationalism and petty-bourgeois radicalism.

Pedro Castillo survived his first year as president from July 2021 to December 2022 because his promotion as a left populist and rural teachers union leader. The alignment of all pseudo-left forces behind him was useful to the ruling class for diverting an emerging movement of the working class behind empty promises of social reforms. This political disarmament facilitated the murderous repression that followed Castillo's overthrow.

The Maoist ideology promoted by Shining Path leader Abimael Guzmán was hostile to the movement of the working class. It rejected the Marxist perspective of the independent political mobilization of the working class and the struggle to educate a revolutionary workers' leadership. Instead, it advanced the pernicious theory of a "people's war" based on the protracted warfare of a peasant army surrounding the cities. In practice, this amounted to terrorist attacks in which the masses were relegated to the role of passive bystanders.

Shining Path carried out assassinations of leftists, union leaders, leaders of peasant organizations and workers who did not comply with the strikes it decreed. It attacked factories, destroyed machinery and dynamited transmission towers and roads, cutting off the supply of electricity and food to the cities.

The Peruvian working class must reject with contempt the anticommunist propaganda of the bourgeoisie, while learning the bitter lessons of the experience with Maoism, a tendency that combines bourgeois nationalism, peasant radicalism and Stalinism, whose purpose is to block the construction of proletarian revolutionary parties.

In Latin America, the influence of Maoism was facilitated by the Pabloite revisionist tendency that rejected both the revolutionary role of the proletariat and the primary mission of the revolutionary party in the struggle for the development of socialist consciousness in the working class. Worse, Pabloism sought to liquidate the cadres of the Fourth International into Stalinism, bourgeois nationalism and the petty-bourgeois guerrilla groups, both Maoist and Guevarist.

If the political agents of the current capitalist regime in Peru, together with the media, are so determined to revive the refrain of "terrorism" and exalt the security forces, it is because they know that revolutionary struggles are on the horizon in a country where the working masses are condemned to poverty and misery.

The trade unions have been transformed over the course of decades into direct instruments for the intensification of the exploitation of the proletariat and the defense of their "own" national state. The Stalinist bureaucracy of the CGTP (Confederación General de Trabajadores del Perú) is part of this process.

The betrayals of the union bureaucracy and the tendencies that proclaim themselves left have helped to create a devastating social crisis that underlies today's social ferment.

According to data from the INEI (National Institute of Statistics and Informatics), monetary poverty in 2024 affected 27.6 percent of the country's population, which is equivalent to more than 9 million Peruvians. In other words, one in three Peruvians is poor. Monetary poverty, measured through spending on goods and services, means that incomes are insufficient to cover the cost of the Basic Consumption Basket (food and essential goods). But there are regions of the country with a monetary poverty index of more than 43 percent, such as Loreto (43 percent) and Cajamarca (45 percent). Extreme monetary poverty affected 5.5 percent of the population, that is, nearly 1.9 million people who do not have enough money to feed

themselves.

Unemployment is very high, and labor informality abounds, exceeding 90 percent of the Economically Active Population (EAP). In these households, poverty reaches 31.9 percent.

Homelessness is another unresolved problem and worsens with population growth. Almost 1.7 million families are homeless.

The healthcare system is fragmented with multiple socially segmented public subsystems, with equitable access and quality of care in sharp decline. To this must be added the huge increase in the price of medications.

Parallel to this crisis, and feeding it, has been the devastation caused by COVID-19, two years of drought and ups and downs in the economy due to the international capitalist crisis and the war in Ukraine. These have triggered high unemployment rates and a drastic increase in the cost of living, especially food prices.

The search for national solutions leads inexorably to the subordination of the working class to the capitalist policies of adjustment, political reaction and trade war pursued by each native bourgeoisie. There is no way out of this stagnation except on the basis of proletarian internationalism, that is, the struggle to unite workers internationally against the capitalist nation-state system.

Technological advances associated with the invention and advancement of the integrated circuit and, above all, the development of AI have produced revolutionary changes, accelerating a process of global economic integration that is directly at odds with nationalist ideologies. But these economic and technological advances, far from opening up new historical prospects for capitalism, have raised the fundamental contradiction between the world economy and the current capitalist nation-state system, and between social production and private property, to an unprecedented intensity. This is what fuels the present struggles in Peru which are part of a wave of international struggles (Morocco, Indonesia, Ecuador, Nepal, Madagascar, Kenya and Angola).

All these struggles can and must be unified, but without a conscious political leadership in the working class there is no way out of the profound crisis facing Peru and the entire planet. This is the Achilles heel of the workers' and popular struggles in Peru and internationally—a weakness exploited by the pseudo-left representatives of sectors of the affluent middle class that not only discard the potential power of mobilizing the proletariat but have become consciously hostile to it.

The decisive question is the construction of a new revolutionary leadership, a Peruvian section of the International Committee of the Fourth International.



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