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European Languages

زبانهای اروپایی

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19.06.2021

Peru ending second week since presidential election with no declared winner

Peru is gripped by sharp political tensions, as the country is set to complete a second week since the June 6 presidential election without a winner being officially declared.

With 100 percent of the ballots counted, Pedro Castillo, the former teachers' strike leader and candidate of the Peru Libre party, leads the right-wing Fuerza Popular candidate Keiko Fujimori, the daughter of former dictator Alberto Fujimori, who is imprisoned for 25 years for crimes against humanity, by a margin of 50.12 percent to 49.87. Just 43,000 votes out of the more than seventeen and a half million cast separate the two candidates, but it is clear that Castillo has won.



Supporters of Fujimori (left) and Castillo (right) demonstrating in Lima (Credit: Andina)

A declaration that Castillo has won, however, has been blocked by the Fujimori camp, which has mounted a legal offensive based on spurious claims of election fraud, seeking to overturn the results from hundreds of polling stations in the Andean highlands and Amazonian regions where Castillo won by overwhelming margins.

As of Wednesday, the National Election Board (JNE) announced that of the 942 challenges brought by the Fujimori camp, 792 have been resolved, without one of them establishing electoral fraud of any kind. Most of the claims had been brought after a June 9 cutoff for making such challenges.

While the challenges have no basis in either fact or law, they have been brought by an army of high-powered lawyers drawn from Lima's top law firm, with the aim of delaying confirmation of the election results as long as possible. The Fujimori camp is playing for time, with the intention that its challenges and ceaseless claims of fraud will create the conditions for overturning the election by extra-constitutional means, up to and including a military coup.

This conspiracy enjoys the support of the corporate media, the bulk of the country's financial oligarchy and sections of the military.

The similarities between the tactics pursued by Fujimori and those employed by Trump in the 2020 US presidential election do not stop at the use of fabricated charges of electoral fraud to overturn the election or, at the very least, delegitimize the incoming government. Like Trump, Fujimori, along with other members of her family and top aides, face the prospect of criminal conviction and imprisonment if they fail to seize the presidency.

The Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office has asked that Keiko Fujimori be returned to pre-trial detention on charges of money laundering connected to political bribes, including from the Brazilian construction giant Odebrecht. She is also charged with heading a criminal organization, i.e., her own party, Fuerza Popular.

The threat of political violence or even a military coup is real. Fujimori's followers have staged fascist demonstrations, replete with torches and the singing of the national anthem while giving the Nazi salute.

Castillo's supporters, including many who have come to Lima from the interior, have also demonstrated in the capital demanding that their candidate be officially declared the winner.

Meanwhile, 63 retired generals and other high-ranking officers issued a communique demanding the resignation of the head of the election board, warning of the danger of a Castillo victory and calling for the "strengthening of confidence in the armed forces and the police." The Defense Ministry felt compelled to issue a statement in response deploring the use of official military symbols in the communique.

Ever since Castillo emerged with the highest number of votes in the first round, and Fujimori with the second highest—each of them with less than 20 percent—the Peruvian right and the media have conducted a rabid campaign branding Castillo a "communist" and a "terrorist," charging that he would turn Peru into another Venezuela.

Since winning the second round, Castillo and his backers have sought to disassociate themselves from radical policies, including the nationalization of mining industries called for in Peru Libre's platform, while drawing in a group of moderate "advisers." The most prominent among them is Pedro Francke, a Catholic University economist and former official at the World Bank and Peru's central bank. Francke had served as a chief adviser to Veronika Mendoza, the candidate of the pseudo-left Juntos por el Perú party, who placed a distant sixth in the first round of the presidential elections.

The increasing role of Mendoza's advisers is politically significant. In the 2016 presidential election, Mendoza threw her support to the ex-Wall Street financier Pedro Pablo Kuczynski as the "lesser evil" in his successful second round run-off with Keiko Fujimori, making clear Mendoza's "responsible" approach to the interests of Peruvian and international capital.

At a press conference in Lima Tuesday, Francke reassured the Peruvian and international bourgeoisie: "There will not be expropriations, there will not be nationalizations. Nor confiscations, nor anything." It is widely expected that Francke will be tapped as Castillo's economy minister.

Earlier in the week, Scotiabank Peru, the country's third-largest financial institution, issued a statement declaring its approval of Francke's role and of a document issued in Castillo's name "suggesting a softer, more pro-market (or at least, less radical) stance on issues such as property rights, respect for economic institutions, the relationship with private business, price controls and other concerns." It concluded that rather than being a "radical leftist," Castillo's chief economic adviser is a "Keynesian."

Both Castillo and Francke have carried out a whirlwind of meetings with big business figures. As a result of these meetings, Roque Benavides, head of the Buenaventura mining company, which for decades has extracted billions of dollars' worth of minerals at the cost of the destruction of Peru's rivers and valleys, and also president of the main business organization, Confiep, declared that he would accept proposals for tax increases, but he would not tolerate nationalizations.

Castillo's program has been whittled down to tax reform, renegotiation of royalties from the transnational mining corporations and an agrarian reform that forswears any expropriation or redistribution of land.

The corporate media and the Peruvian political establishment have demanded that Castillo prove his reliability by breaking with the founder of Peru Libre, Vladimir Cerrón, the ex-governor of the central department of Junín. Combining pseudo-Marxist rhetoric, populist demagoguery and extreme right-wing social policies—embraced by Castillo—on issues such as abortion and "gender politics," Cerrón was criminally convicted on corruption charges.

The official declaration of Castillo's victory will hardly resolve Peru's deep-going political, social and economic crisis. The country is among the hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic, registering the highest per capita death toll in the world. The effects on the economic conditions of the working class and oppressed masses have been catastrophic, with an estimated nine million jobs wiped out, poverty increasing by 10 percent and soaring prices of basic commodities.

The real fear of the Peruvian bourgeoisie is not of Castillo, who is already making clear that he is someone with whom they can do business, but of an eruption of class struggle driven by declining living standards and a dramatic increase in social inequality as those at

the top have enriched themselves, while working people have faced death, disease, unemployment and impoverishment.

World Socialist 18.06.2021