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European Languages

زبانهای اروپایی

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09.01.2023

## ***Mass protests resume across Peru against the coup regime and social inequality***

Since Wednesday, mass protests and roadblocks have taken place daily across Peru. Beyond the initial demands for the resignation of the Dina Boluarte administration, the shutdown of Congress and general elections, protesters are increasingly advancing social demands over the high cost of living and staggering social inequality.



Demonstrators block the Pan-American highway to protest against President Dina Boluarte's government and Congress in Ica, Peru, Friday, January 6, 2023. [AP Photo/Martin Mejia]

The latest upsurge follows a holiday lull in the nationwide demonstrations triggered by the December 7 impeachment and arrest of president Pedro Castillo. On the same day, his vice president, Boluarte, was installed as part of a parliamentary coup orchestrated by the far-right parties in control of Congress, the US embassy, and the Peruvian military leadership.

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The unrest increased dramatically after the suspension of democratic rights and the deployment of troops under a national state of emergency since December 14. The repression by the military and police has resulted in at least 28 demonstrators killed and hundreds injured, including many from live ammunition. Mock coffins have become one of the most common props carried by demonstrators.

In the context of a “national strike” since Wednesday, thousands have marched in the capital Lima, Arequipa, Ayacucho, Huancayo, Cusco, and Puno, while roadblocks were set up across the country, primarily in the south. The southern Pan-American highway remains blocked. The police and military have harassed marchers, blocked the entry to the locations frequented by protesters and used tear gas, rubber bullets, batons, fists, and boots to disperse them.

On Friday, 46 roadblocks were still reported, primarily in the southern departments of Cusco and Puno. As commercial activities grind increasingly to a halt due to the roadblocks and the participation of many workers and small shopkeepers in the protests, several trade unions in the service sector have been compelled to join the strike.

While Castillo’s 16 months in power were marked by concessions to the far right and foreign capital, including the suppression of protests over inflation and mining practices, the coup is widely recognized as a preemptive move by US imperialism and the Peruvian oligarchy. Their aim is to clamp down on the years of social protests and political instability in order to secure the operations of the transnational mining corporations and as a means of further imposing the burden of the deepening economic crisis on the backs of workers and the rural poor.

In an interview with *La República*, Maritza Paredes, head sociology professor at the Pontifical Catholic University of Peru, explained that demonstrators don’t express support for Castillo and that recent polls showed that most Peruvians believed that “if Castillo goes, they should all go.”

“The demonstrators are responding quite viscerally since, when they place rocks, block the highways, and kidnap police officials, they don’t know what to do next. There is no coordination or major social organizations,” she indicated.

At the same time, there are indications of a growing self-awareness that the struggles are being driven by opposition to social inequality and capitalism.

A young protester at a roadblock in Ica told *La Lupa*, “It’s because the poor people are rising up sweating that they have deployed the military, to oppress us, to beat us, to shoot

at us. This is the march of the poor—the agricultural, mining, and rural workers. They don't care if they kill 100, 200, 300 ... We are all agricultural workers here.”

A small farmer at a roadblock in Asillo, Puno, told a local reporter who asked if he was a terrorist, “I feel the hunger, the need, the misery that we all carry here in Peru and other nations. Our needs compel us. We are nothing. On the contrary, Dina Boluarte is a terrorist. The congresspeople are terrorists. We are fighting because of our needs and we must fight until the last consequences to achieve our objective because they are looting the resources of our Peru.”

A demonstrator in Andahuaylas said that the government “doesn't represent them.” He added: “We struggle every day. Look at how much a potato costs. What we make is not enough for anything. If Peru has silver, why are we poor? That is why people are fighting here.”

There is no institution or organization in Peru that retains any political credibility, which hinders the efforts of the ruling elite to contain and channel the incipient uprising into safe channels. However, the spontaneous and leaderless character of the protests also makes them vulnerable to a further crackdown that is consciously being prepared.

The Peruvian corporate media has been filled with mentions of “terrorist groups,” in some cases citing extinct guerrilla groups. The narrative is systematically being fabricated that the massacres of disarmed youth with live ammunition, the brutal beatings and volleys of tear gas canisters are somehow justified by this nonexistent threat. Throughout the 1990s, such language was used to promote the authoritarian regime of Alberto Fujimori, who is now jailed for corruption and organizing death squads.

After naming several teenagers killed in the protests, whose impoverished rural background was reported by the local press, the host of the ATV evening news, Juliana Oxenford, ranted: “It must be investigated whether any of them belonged to terrorist bands, teams of genocidal killers. Of course, we need to rest assured that the police and military had to use the tool of firearms.”

The reactionary detention of Castillo and the persecution of his former prime minister Aníbal Torres on trumped up charges of “rebellion” is also being exploited to evoke the threat of armed insurrection by “terrorists.” Even their lawyer Wilfredo Robles was smeared as a “terrorist” on live television for his ties as a youth to the Maoist guerrilla group Sendero Luminoso.

The corporate media and police promoted rallies on Tuesday demanding the suppression of the protests under the Orwellian slogan of “Peace and Democracy.” The affluent

attendees took over the San Martin Plaza in downtown Lima, which is blocked to demonstrators.

The events in Peru are part of a global offensive of the working class in defense of its independent class interests. As the *World Socialist Web Site* wrote in its New Year's statement, "It is true that the crisis of capitalism leads to revolution. But the revolution must be prepared and fought for. The socialist resolution of the crisis of capitalism requires the resolution of the crisis of working class leadership."

**World Socialist 06.01.2023**