

Mass protests in Peru over pardoning of Fujimori

By Cesar Uco
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President Pedro Pablo Kuczynski's (PPK) "humanitarian pardon" of former President Alberto Fujimori, who had been serving a 25-year sentence for crimes against humanity has unleashed a wave of demonstrations.

According to a poll, 78 percent of Peruvians believe that the pardon, which came only three days after Kuczynski survived a Congressional impeachment vote, was the result of a corrupt political deal. Their opinion is bolstered by revelations that on December 11—just four days before Congress by large majority called for the impeachment vote—Fujimori submitted his request for pardon and on December 24, Kuczynski granted it.

During the last week, multiple demonstrations were held against the pardon throughout the country, with as many as 40,000 joining a march in Lima.

In the provinces, the reaction has been similar. One of the most significant marches took place in Ayacucho—the epicenter of the dirty war waged during the 1980s and 1990s against the Maoist guerrilla organization Shining Path. Ayacuchanos, including members of the National Association of Relatives of Peru's Kidnapped, Detained and Disappeared, marched carrying signs reading: "Peru does not forget, Fujimori never again," "Down with the pardon! Fujimori must return to prison," and "With impunity there is no dialogue or reconstruction."

In Cusco, more than 5,000 protesters marched. The demonstrators doused an effigy of PPK dressed as Uncle Sam (the icon of US imperialism) with gasoline and set it ablaze, along with a giant mockup of the Peruvian constitution. The march was organized by the construction guild and the General Confederation of Workers of Peru (CGTP).

In Puno, protesters shouted: "Urgent, urgent, new

elections! Urgent, urgent, new president!"

In Moquegua, hundreds of citizens marched through the streets in rejection of the ex-dictator's pardon. They asked for Kuczynski's resignation and new general elections. Several workers' organizations participated, among them, the CGTP, Sutep, Suter, the Civil Construction Workers Union and others.

In Tacna, around a thousand people formed a Unitary Command of Struggle and marched in the center of the city. Ten labor and human rights organizations supported the mobilization. The protesters called for Kuczynski's resignation. They mocked the name the government gave the year 2018 ("Year of Reconciliation"), an obvious reference to the illegal pardoning.

In the Amazon city of Iquitos, several guilds, student groups and the so-called "apus" of different native communities participated in the "March against the Fujimorist coup."

Meanwhile, the CGTP has called a national march for January 21 on the demand for new elections. The aim of the trade union federation is to channel the growing popular anger over government corruption, the Fujimori pardon and the continuing growth of social inequity back into the framework of bourgeois politics.

Some 5,000 supporters of Fujimori and his party (Fuerza Popular)—which is led by his daughter Keiko—held one march supporting the pardon on January 12 in the Campo de Marte park in downtown Lima. They labeled it a "March for Peace and Reconciliation" and marched through several streets of downtown Lima. Fujimori's son and Keiko's brother Kenji—who was reportedly the main behind-the-scenes promoter of the pardon—led the pro-pardon march. Thirty buses were used to bring people into the capital for the pro-pardon march.

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights is set to meet on February 2 in Costa Rica on the Fujimori pardon, having denied a request by the ex-president's attorney to appear on his behalf. The main point under discussion will be whether President Kuczynski is complying with the sentences on human rights violations meted out against Fujimori for his role in the massacres carried out in Barrios Altos and La Cantuta in the early 1990s. A pronouncement from the commission is expected one week after it meets in Costa Rica.

The pardon has unleashed an internal crisis within Fuerza Popular (FP), the party that upholds *fujimorismo* and that has an absolute majority in the nation's congress. It is known that Keiko, Alberto's daughter, fears being charged for having received money for her electoral campaign from the Brazilian mega-builder Odebrecht, involved in the sprawling Lava Jato corruption scandal that has implicated politicians throughout the continent in multi-billion-dollar bribery schemes. She also fears that her father's release will undermine her almost absolute control over the FP.

Her brother Kenji sought his father's freedom because he himself has presidential aspirations. His opposition to his sister has led to two suspensions from the Fujimorist bloc, one of 60 days and the second, still in force, of 120 days. A third censure would lead to the expulsion of Kenji from the party.

Having survived impeachment, PPK has announced a new cabinet under the leadership of Prime Minister Mercedes Araoz. Referred to by the president as a "cabinet of reconciliation," it includes nine ministerial changes. Among the new ministers are two members of the APRA party, both of whom have been expelled from the party.

The ministerial changes were necessary due to mass resignations of ministers and presidential advisors in protest over the pardon. Others refused to serve in the cabinet, an indication of diminishing support for Kuczynski among even his own circle of technocrats and entrepreneurs.

For her part, the representative of the bourgeois left, Veronika Mendoza, made statements revealing her overriding commitment to maintaining national stability in which she spoke of defending "the fatherland."

The crisis of the Kuczynski is part of a deepening crisis of bourgeois rule in Peru that is increasingly threatening to undermine the country's political-economic outlook for 2018, creating conditions for a resurgence of class struggle.

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