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Peru

Between regime crisis and a possible late {progresismo} in Peru

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Johnatan Fuentes is an activist in *Corriente Amaru* He spoke to *Punto de Vista Internacional* about the current situation in Peru. The interview took place on 28 March, before the first round of presidential elections on 11 April [1] which saw left-wing trade unionist Pedro Castillo and far-right politician Keiko Fujimori going through to the final round on 6 June 2021. [2]

What is the background to this political crisis?

The defeat of Keiko Fujimori and Fuerza Popular in the second round of the 2016 elections by Pedro Pablo Kuchinsky (PPK) opened a scenario of political tension in the institutions of the Peruvian state. A congress with a *Fujimorista* majority was formed that blocked some government measures except those of an economic nature. These political tensions worsened after the investigations into Odebrecht since it involved PPK and several former presidents such as Alejandro Toledo, Ollanta Humala and Alan García who ended up committing suicide after the progress of the investigations against him.

The *Fujimorista* far right, Fuerza Popular, which dominated parliament, chose to use the presidential vacancy mechanism on two occasions that were finally frustrated by the understanding of a sector of Fuerza Popular led by Kenyi Fujimori, Keiko Fujimori's younger brother, with the PPK government. The progress of the investigations for corruption against PPK was overwhelming and videos were also discovered in which parliamentarians linked to the Kenyi faction negotiated with the ruling party during the second vote, which forced PPK to resign its presidential office in 2018.

The accession of Martin Vizcarra, vice president of PPK, to the presidency of the republic in March 2018 came about as a result of a brief reconciliation with *Fujimorismo* that quickly ended with the resumption of political tensions between the parliamentary majority and the ruling party. Martin Vizcarra decided to dissolve congress on 30 September 2019 with significant support from the Peruvian people in the face of the congress's great loss of prestige.

Can we talk about the new relationship of forces in the congress?

The formation of the new 2020 congress evidenced the decline of the traditional ultra-right, Fuerza Popular and APRA, and the consolidation of emerging rights such as Alianza para el Progreso (APP) and Podemos Perú (PP). At the same time, the resurgence of the traditional centre-right through the Acción Popular party (AP), whose more oligarchic and conservative fraction had in the dissolved congress played a role as a minor partner of *Fujimorismo*. In the absence of a ruling bloc, the Partido Morado (PM), a new centre-right force, serves as a support for government measures.

Unión por el Perú (UPP) and FREPAP were the surprise of the electoral process since they were almost invisible in the electoral polls. Both political forces are located on the right, although they are more permeable to some specific progressive measures in the economic sphere and are conservative in terms of gender or environmental issues. UPP is a coalition based in nationalism and linked to Antauro Humala, brother of former president Ollanta Humala, while Frepap is a theocratic organization with important grassroots community work with community logics.

On the left, only the Frente Amplio obtained parliamentary representation, although with various tensions within its organization. Nuevo Perú participated in an alliance with Juntos por el Perú (JP) but did not win seats, repeating the poor performance of the regional elections of October 2018. Peru Libre (PL), also did not achieve parliamentary

representation in these elections.

Is the regime crisis generating restorationist manoeuvres as a counterpoint?

The political crisis worsened with the political manoeuvring in the parliament of the emergent rights, UPP, *Fujimorismo* and a sector of the AP, who voted in favour of the presidential vacancy of Martin Vizcarra on 9 November. Just as Vizcarra institutionally closed the congress last year, the new congress dismissed Vizcarra using the institutional mechanisms under the pretext of the corruption cases that he is accused of. In both political sectors, institutional mechanisms have been used to politically nullify each other, leading us to this crisis due to their conflicting spurious interests.

AP quickly declared through its organic channels that it would not join the new Manuel Merino cabinet, as well as the different parliamentary forces that voted for the presidential vacancy. The assumption of Manuel Merino, representative of the conservative sector of the AP, to government did not have popular legitimacy and his cabinet was made up of far-right groups such as Coordinadora Republicana, former Aprista ministers, representatives of business organisations which accounts for the level of political isolation of the brief government and its weak alliance with the emergent rightists. All this reflects the internal fissures in the bourgeois parties and the precariousness of the institutional framework of the neoliberal constitution of 1993 that allowed the political impasse that has been going on for years, since we are actually witnessing a profound crisis of the neoliberal political regime that triggered the awakening of the youth and popular outrage nationwide.

Through broad mobilizations of a democratic nature young people achieved the resignation of Manuel Merino in less than a week, which later made possible the formation of a new government, now under Francisco Sagasti, of the Partido Morado. This new defeat of the right-wing, emerging and conservative opposition by the liberal right had the following factors: 1. The support of a sector of the media related to the ruling party 2. The neutrality of the armed forces 3. The erosion of the Peruvian neoliberal institutional framework. 4. An awakening of youth as it had not been seen in years.

In December 2020, the agricultural proletariat of the southern and northern coast of Peru embarked on a process of struggle against the special labour regime that has governed them for decades, the so-called Chlimper Law. Of course, this struggle did not have the support of the mass media, nor of the liberal right; even so, the historically questioned law was repealed.

Some progressive neoliberal/liberal right intellectuals tried to discredit this struggle by linking it to an alleged coup attempt, now against Francisco Sagasti. The truth was that it did not have the support of any parliamentary sector except the Frente Amplio. Somehow the coup/anti-coup cleavage has been installed in political debate as a form of renewal of the classic Fujimori/anti-Fujimori cleavage, with the usual aim of subordinating the left.

It seems that a disintegration of the right is taking place, is there a danger of the rise of the extreme right before the 2021 elections?

According to the latest electoral poll by the Peruvian Studies Institute (IEP) released on 28 March, two weeks before the general elections, the traditional centre-right Acción Popular party (AP), which is supporting the presidential candidacy of Jonhy Lescano, leads the electoral preferences with 11.4% of voting intentions. Lescano represents the AP political sector, apparently the majority, which did not support the dismissal of Manuel Merino. This political sector is more permeable to specific short-term progressive measures in the economic-social plane but is framed in the social market economy and therefore represents a *sui generis* variant of progressive neoliberalism. They oppose the wealth tax and do not propose a comprehensive reform of the pension system. In addition, several of its candidates

for Congress represent the most oligarchic and conservative sectors of the party.

In second place is the businessman Rafael López with 9.7%, from the far-right Renovación Popular party which went from being a stranger in national politics to achieving sustained growth in electoral polls, although this latest survey shows relative stagnation. He is located to the right of *Fujimorismo*, constituting an open and unbridled extreme right political project, different from *Fujimorista* pragmatism. Rafael López has declared that he wants to prevent Peru from becoming Cuba or Venezuela at all costs, he is a member of Opus Dei and strongly opposes the legalization of abortion and the gender approach. In sum, he represents a real danger to the democratic freedoms of the working class, women, and sexual dissidents, entering into tune with extreme right-wing political phenomena like Bolsonaro in Brazil.

Fourth place is occupied by Hernando De Soto with 8.5% of voting intentions, from the Avanza País party. Hernando is an organic intellectual of the Peruvian extreme right, he was a presidential advisor to the autocrat Alberto Fujimori who implanted neoliberalism in Peru with blood and fire, and recently advised Keiko Fujimori in the 2016 presidential campaign. Fifth place is occupied by George Forsyth with 8.2%, from the right-wing Victoria Nacional party and sixth place is held by Keiko Fujimori with 7.9%, from the far-right Fuerza Popular party that continues the nefarious legacy of *Fujimorismo*.

The right-wing dispersion is shocking, and political forces such as Victoria Nacional and Fuerza Popular characterized by a certain pragmatism and political accommodation will surely try to capture votes from the political centre of the national electorate. *Fujimorismo* has been partially defeated within the framework of the inter-bourgeois struggle in recent years and has not been able to regain the political/electoral weight it previously had. And in this scenario, it is possible that their traditional/conservative vote will migrate to other candidates from the extreme right like Rafael López or Hernando de Soto.

Do you think it is pertinent to refer to the contradictions of late progresismo to understand the Peruvian situation?

Verónica Mendoza, originally from Nuevo Peru, is participating for the second time in the presidential elections, now through the electoral coalition now through the electoral coalition Juntos por el Perú (JP) and occupies third place in the IEP survey with 9.6% of voting intentions, a relative advance after a few weeks of stagnation in the polls. Unlike the 2016 electoral process that was promoted by the Frente Amplio, the parties of the traditional left (PCP, PCP-PR, MS) with a bureaucratic character and known for their policy of class collaboration, make up the leading team of the coalition that supports the candidacy.

JP's program is anti-neoliberal, neo-developmental and soft post-extractivist, consisting of redistributive economic measures that do not intend to seriously modify the privatized management of natural resources in our country and that strongly promote productive diversification. Regarding the environment, they propose territorial ordering, economic ecological zoning, and oversight by indigenous peoples on energy projects in forest areas; while in the aspect of gender and sexual diversity they propose comprehensive sexual education, equal marriage and decriminalization of abortion, among other interesting measures embodied in the so-called Micaela Plan. Regarding the agrarian question, they propose a second agrarian reform that, centrally, consists of granting credits to small farmers without posing a direct questioning of the concentration of land, which is the main problem in agriculture. *The progresismo* that Verónica Mendoza represents is in tune with the new late progressive governmental processes in Argentina and Mexico, in terms of moderation of the proposals for change and geopolitical alignment. Anti-capitalist tendencies that dispute the strategic and programmatic orientation do not find a place within their political project.

Perú Libre (PL) is a party of a Stalinist matrix which supports the presidential candidacy of Pedro Castillo, a teacher and former social leader who was prominent in the teachers' strike in 2017 during the neoliberal government of PPK.

He occupies seventh place with 4.3% of voting intentions, which shows a certain growth and a good campaign in areas of the southern Andean region that by tradition tend to be oppositional voters and lead struggles.

PL's program is anti-neoliberal, neo-developmental, and extractivist. From the beginning of its campaign, it emphasized the proposal to nationalize natural resources as a central axis, but at the same time it is quite limited in the aspects of environment and gender. In general, it proposes redistributive measures, media regulation, popular consultation mechanisms to decide on the composition of the Constitutional Court and a new constitution through a popular constituent assembly. Like JP, it lacks anti-capitalist tendencies within the party that dispute the political orientation. This project expresses another variant of Peruvian *progresismo* but very marked by a certain regionalism and campism, too uncritical of the extractivist policy of progressive Latin American governments.

Both leftist formations lack a policy of promoting popular self-organization and have not managed to build a project of popular majorities that will overturn the electoral board. And although electoral polls are not defining, they do provide a certain approximation to the performance of the political forces in contention. There is 20.2% of the national electorate that will spoil or void their vote, which reflects the process of political disaffection exacerbated by the Covid 19 health crisis. It is key to target this sector of the people, but with radical proposals that go beyond regionalism and the moderation still present in the campaign of the left.

In this electoral process, there is no anti-capitalist candidacy, and it is very possible that the second electoral round will take place between the right wing candidates, which would mean a disaster for the lives of working people who suffer the onslaught of the social, ecological, economic and health crisis. Given the possible rise of the extreme right with Rafael López and the consolidation of the traditional centre-right of the AP, it is essential that the radical left deploy a tactic in accordance with the political tasks of the moment.

The approach of a critical vote for Verónica Mendoza and JP in the first round aims to hinder an inter-rightist ballot that prolongs the political crisis still unresolved in the dynamics known until now. Recognizing the limitations and problems of JP, considering its relative better electoral position, and assessing the progressive nature of its proposals on issues of sovereignty, environment and gender.

If the Peruvian radical left wishes to rebuild the political representation of the popular classes, it must come out of its isolation by building bridges with the most combative social sectors that have certain expectations in reformist projects without adapting to their leadership, while dedicating ourselves to building a radical political alternative to the left of *progresismo* and open to pluralism. Strategic delimitation or building from below around the perspective of the constituent popular assembly are insufficient if they are not articulated to a project of power, which is the ongoing strategic task for this political period.

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Original; [Punto de Vista Internacional](#).

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[1] *The Guardian*, 12 April 2021 ["Peru faces polarizing presidential runoff as teacher takes voters by surprise"](#).

[2] *The Guardian*, 3 June 2021 ["Leftist teacher takes on dictator's daughter as Peru picks new president"](#).