

Peru's coup regime imposes national mourning for ex-US-backed dictator Alberto Fujimori

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Peru last week officially observed three days of national mourning following the death from cancer on September 11 of the country's ex-president and US-backed dictator, Alberto Fujimori, at the age of 86.

The official tribute, ordered by the coup regime of President Dina Boluarte, exposed both the continuing grip of *fujimorismo* on Peru's state apparatus 24 years after the dictator's ignominious fall, as well as the sharp divisions within Peruvian society. On the one hand, Boluarte's order to mourn a convicted war criminal was met by indignant protests and rejection, while, on the other, thousands lined up to file past Fujimori's coffin, laid out replete with an Army honor guard at the Ministry of Culture building in Lima.

Boluarte, along with other prominent state officials and leaders of political parties, made their pilgrimages to the coffin to deliver their condolences to Fujimori's family and political heirs, chief among them his daughter Keiko and son Kenji.

By all rights, Fujimori should have died in prison, having been sentenced to 25 years for his role in the deaths squad massacres and massive corruption carried out during the decade that he ruled Peru, from his assumption of the presidency in 1990 until the ignominious collapse of his dictatorial regime in 2000.

He was freed, however, through a pardon issued last December by three members of the Constitutional Tribunal, who had been recently appointed to the high court, selected by Congress based on their ties to Peru's far right. The release triggered protests, including by relatives of Fujimori death squad victims, as well as warnings from the Inter-American Court of Human Rights that Peru stands in violation of the treaties establishing the inter-American tribunal.

The release marked the second time that Fujimori had been granted a politically motivated pardon. In December 2017, then-President Pedro Pablo Kuczynski gave Fujimori a

humanitarian pardon that appeared to be a political quid pro quo for the *fujimorista* Fuerza Popular party providing the necessary votes in Congress to block Kuczynski's impeachment on corruption charges. That pardon was subsequently overturned by Peru's courts, and the ex-dictator was placed back behind bars in January 2019.

Fujimori was originally sentenced in 2007, including in connection with two infamous massacres carried out under his presidency by the Grupo Colina, a military death squad that utilized intimidation, terror and murder to silence and crush opponents of the Fujimori regime.

In the November 1991 Barrios Altos Massacre, the death squad massacred 14 people, including an eight-year-old child, at a family party, allegedly having received erroneous intelligence that members of the Shining Path guerrilla movement were meeting at the location.

The second massacre for which Fujimori was convicted took place in July 1992, when nine students and a professor at La Cantuta University were kidnapped, tortured and murdered by the death squad.

Fujimori was first elected in 1990, winning by a landslide in a run-off against Mario Vargas Llosa, the well-known Peruvian novelist and standard-bearer of the traditional right. An agricultural engineer and son of Japanese immigrants, Fujimori ran as the supposed representative of the common people against Vargas Llosa, who advocated a series of free market "reforms" and privatizations to combat a raging 2,000 percent annual inflation rate.

In the end, Fujimori, elected with the support of the various Stalinist, Maoist and Pabloite revisionist organizations comprising the Izquierda Unida electoral front, imposed even more sweeping counter-reforms described as "fujishock." In April 1992, he carried out his so-called "auto golpe," or self coup, assuming dictatorial powers in collaboration with the military, shutting down Congress, curtailing the powers of the courts and declaring a state of emergency that suspended basic constitutional rights.

He subsequently succeeded in imposing a 1993 constitution that prescribed sweeping privatizations, unrestrained pursuit of profit by foreign-based multinationals and native capital alike and the wholesale gutting of what little Peruvian workers enjoyed in terms of social rights. This constitution, which remains in effect to this day, is regarded by the Peruvian ruling class and foreign capital as his premier contribution.

Fujimori was able to retain a base of support rooted in his fake populist appeal, his supposed taming of the economic crisis and his crushing of the Sendero Luminoso guerrilla movement, which had alienated wide sections of the population, including with attacks aimed against factories and trade unions based on the retrograde Maoist theory of a peasant-based insurrection encircling the cities from the countryside.

In the end, however, a mounting crisis of rule developed out of the unbridled corruption and police-state-style repression that characterized the regime. This exploded to the surface with the leaking of a videotape of Fujimori's intelligence chief, Vladimir Montesinos, offering a \$15,000 bribe to an opposition legislator in return for his support. It soon emerged that there were hundreds of these tapes, which became known as "vladivideos," implicating many politicians, business figures and media owners.

It is widely believed that the source of the leaked video was the US Central Intelligence Agency, which had recruited Montesinos as a valued "asset" in the 1970s, when as a young Army officer, he came to Washington offering intelligence on Peruvian purchases of Soviet arms. Under Fujimori, he emerged as the power behind the throne, directing the repressive apparatus of death squad massacres, assassinations, kidnappings, torture and suppression of any political or media opposition as part of a "dirty war" that claimed an estimated 70,000 lives.

Regarded as a key ally in the US "war on drugs" which increasingly became the pretext for US military intervention in Latin America following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Montesinos fell afoul of his CIA sponsors when it emerged that he was making deals with drug traffickers, using surveillance equipment against political opponents rather than the drug gangs, pocketing US funding and selling automatic weapons to the FARC guerrillas in Colombia, a principal target of the so-called drug war.

While Montesinos, who today remains in jail, and Fujimori both initially claimed that they had themselves uncovered these illicit activities, which they attributed to others, the evidence steadily mounted against them, leading Fujimori to flee the country for Japan and tender his resignation via fax. Traveling to Chile in 2005 with the apparent aim of mounting a return to political life, he was extradited back to

Peru and forced to stand trial.

In addition to the 1993 Constitution and the destruction of social rights for millions of workers, Fujimori leaves behind a political culture characterized by virulent anti-communism and unbridled corruption. His style of right-wing populist politics combined with capitalist "free market" economic policies and police state repression have found echoes in other contemporary Latin American figures ranging from Bukele in El Salvador to Milei in Argentina.

Boluarte's declaration of an official mourning period for Fujimori was motivated in part by her need to placate Fuerza Popular, the largest party in a Congress which, like her presidency, has an approval rating in the single digits. She is also driven to defend Fujimori's crimes as a precedent for defending her own, having come to power herself through a parliamentary coup and then overseeing the security forces' massacre of nearly 50 people involved in unarmed protests against the ouster of Peru's elected President Pedro Castillo in December 2022.

In addition to the mourning of Fujimori, the Peruvian Congress and the courts have engineered the dropping of a case involving a genocidal campaign of forced sterilization of indigenous women in the Andean highlands during the dictatorship and pushed through an amnesty for human rights and war crimes carried out before 2002, granting impunity to all the military and civilian criminals from the Fujimori era.

Just as Washington backed Fujimori as a defender of big business interests and vehement anti-communist, so today it supports the illegitimate Boluarte regime, including with military aid and training.

The dependence on such figures to defend their profits and strategic interests is a measure of the combined crisis of US imperialism and Latin America's native ruling classes. Mounting economic crisis and the relentless drive to global war are creating the conditions for the emergence of a powerful new wave of revolutionary struggles of the working class in Peru and throughout the region.

What is required is a new revolutionary leadership based on the assimilation of the bitter lessons of the 20th century and dedicated to the unification of the struggles of Latin American workers with their counterparts in North America and internationally in the common fight for socialism. This means building sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International throughout the hemisphere.



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