

Public transport strike in Peru challenges Boluarte government

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On October 10 and 11, a public transport strike took place in the metropolitan area of Lima and the port province of Callao. The key demand was the implementation of state measures to stop a wave of violence against public transport workers by criminal organizations that have been extorting bus operators for the payment of “quotas.” At least seven people, including drivers and passengers, have been killed in extortion attempts since August, according to the police.

Another demand was the repeal of the recently approved and controversial Law 32108, which alters the definition of criminal organizations like the extortion mafias, making it more difficult to investigate and prosecute them. Journalists and analysts have denounced the measure as an instrument to undermine prosecutors’ investigations into high-profile corruption cases such as the Lava Jato scandal, which involved high-ranking politicians, including former presidents. A significant number of congress members who voted for the bill stand to directly benefit from it in their own criminal investigations.

Other recent laws that favor crime are 31751, which limits the maximum time to investigate a crime to one year, and 32107, which bars the prosecution of crimes against humanity that occurred before 2002. This means that no one who committed the mass killings, torture and other abuses during the dirty war of the 1980s and 1990s could be charged.

Transport workers struck successfully for the first time on September 26. They decided to strike again after the government failed to fulfill its promises.

The transport workers’ initiative is significant as it has attracted the support of other sectors linked to small and medium-sized enterprises (PYMES in Spanish), which provide much of the country’s employment.

Pharmaceutical, construction, warehouse and textile workers not only support the transporters’ initiative but also have made clear their intention to participate in a national strike.

Despite the highly confused and contradictory character of the demands, this unified struggle has the potential to channel the workers’ grievances and discontent across the country including over the permanent and terrible social inequality which, along with poverty and failing living standards, are the direct cause for the harrowing surge in crime. Deprived of a future under capitalism, young people (15 to 29) who neither work nor study (“ninis”) are pushed into crime due to economic desperation and are recruited by politically connected mafias that have targeted public transportation with protection rackets. Those who refuse to pay up face serious consequences, including murder by hired killers.

Following the September 26 strike, President Dina Boluarte declared a State of Emergency in 14 working class districts, where 57 percent of Lima’s population reside. That night, she deployed the Armed Forces as a show of force in the most populous district of the capital, San Juan de Lurigancho (1.24 million inhabitants).

Boluarte is a reviled figure whose 4 percent approval rating testifies to her lack of any mandate to rule. She is nothing but a puppet of a small caucus of political gangsters in Congress who are the representatives of the real powers in the country. The entire government is a blood-soaked regime that inaugurated its rule by massacring 49 people opposed to the ousting and jailing of former president Pedro Castillo.

On the morning of October 10, some transport operators did not participate in the strike arguing that Congress needed more time to implement laws against

crime and extortion. However, by the afternoon, all transport was paralyzed.

In the north (known as “Cono Norte”), protesters took to the streets to prevent buses from taking to the road. There are photos published on X/Twitter that show protesters stopping buses that tried to operate in the afternoon. In addition, there was a huge march that interrupted traffic on the Panamericana Norte, one of the three access roads to the capital. In solidarity with the transport unions, businesses such as grocery stores, pharmacies, and restaurants did not open their doors in the Cono Norte and the south (“Cono Sur”).

There are 117 trade unions representing public transport drivers in Lima, but they did not play a significant role in the recent strikes. The organizations that called for the stoppages represent the operators of transport lines and are not a union of drivers. Their goal is to urge the government to pass laws addressing crime in the streets of Lima, and to resume their operations in a peaceful environment.

Representatives from these industry groups negotiated with Congress on October 10 for their demands. Miguel Palomino, president of the National Association of Drivers, told the legislators: “These laws, since the president took office and you have passed, are simply laws just to protect yourselves. Are you going to pass laws that benefit the people or that benefit yourself and the multinationals? (...) We pay our taxes and therefore we energize the country.”

According to Julio Campos, Vice President of the National Alliance of Transporters, during their talks, congressmen from the right wing Fuerza Popular party and the pseudo-left Peru Libre gave them assurances that they would vote to overturn Law No. 32108, only to vote in favor of keeping it the following day. He then announced an indefinite national strike.

The Committee of Transport Guilds made an announcement on October 15th:

“Despite the resounding national strike on October 10 and 11, the majority coalition in Congress has refused to repeal Law No. 32108 and to shelve the terrorism bills, which only seek to repress protests and label as ‘terrorists’ those who oppose them. They have turned their backs on the national clamor in favor of life and of those who continue to be extorted.”

The “Urban Terrorism” bill, submitted by the executive branch to Congress earlier this month, was

presented and discussed the same day congressmen voted against abolishing Law No. 32108. It proposes a set of oppressive measures that would further empower the state repressive apparatus and has been compared to the US Patriot Act. This means that the Peruvian government is preparing brutal dictatorial measures aimed at repressing, without any hesitation, the mass movement that is developing.

Even though they are at the forefront of the current strike initiative, the politics of the Transportation Guilds along with the small business-related organizations are limited largely to pressuring the extreme right-wing politicians in Congress and executive branch to implement a more stringent law-and-order crackdown against crime. During the first strike at the end of last month, some leaders of the transport associations voiced support for the “Urban Terrorism” law, backing down only after its provisions, which apply the methods utilized in Peru’s “dirty war” not only to crime, but also any political opposition.

The domination of the recent wave of protests by small business groups is primarily due to the failure of the nationalist and reformist policies of the main trade union federations and the betrayals of the so-called left-wing parties. These political organizations long ago jettisoned any attempt at serious political mobilization and abandoned the Peruvian working class to its own fate. The result is the election of pseudo-left charlatans like Pedro Castillo and the disarming of the working class in the face of savage state repression.



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