

Public transport union leaders sabotage 5th general strike in Peru

Cesar Uco
17 February 2025

On February 6, Peru saw its fifth national strike in less than 12 months against the hated government of President Dina Boluarte. The strike was called because both the executive branch and Congress have resisted tackling the mafias that have deployed extortionists and hitmen who control the streets of working class districts in Lima and Trujillo. These mafias originated in this second northern city in the late 1990s.

The first four national strikes by public transport unions received strong support from workers and students. In contrast, the fifth strike was far weaker. Union leaders claimed 50 percent participation in Lima and the neighboring port city of Callao, while the government reported only 20 percent.

From the beginning, these strikes have been dominated by employer organizations that represent both small operators and major transport companies. At the last minute before the latest action, the Coordinator of Transport Companies of Lima and Callao announced that it would not participate in the strike. Similarly, the micro and small merchants (MYPES) of Gamarra and Mesa Redonda declared that they would hold peaceful marches instead of closing their businesses. Lima's far-right mayor announced that the Metropolitan transportation system, the Lima Metro, and the supplementary corridors would operate as usual.

In January, there were 796 reports of extortion in Lima—an average of 26.5 per day—a significant increase compared to the previous year. In Trujillo, there were 402 reports of extortion, an enormous amount considering the population of Trujillo is one-tenth that of Lima. Last year, the country recorded 2,140 murders, many of which were related to extortion and contract killings.

Extortionists fired shots at a bus full of passengers in Chorrillos, a working class district south of Lima, just

one day before the planned strike. In response, the government implemented strict security measures. Prime Minister Juan José Santiváñez announced that he would ensure safety and maintain a zero-tolerance policy for violence. This was backed by the deployment of 2,794 officers from the Peruvian National Police, along with 134 patrol cars, 368 motorcycles, and one drone to monitor the situation. This police mobilization would be turned against the strikers themselves.

The latest strike, like the four previous ones, raised demands for the resignations of President Boluarte, Prime Minister Gustavo Adrianzén, and Minister of the Interior Juan José Santiváñez, along with the repeal of the Organized Crime Law 32108, which shields extortionists and corrupt government officials.

The core issue in the strike's failure is that the union leaders represent the profit interests of private companies rather than those of the transport and other workers.

Hector Vargas, president of the Coordinator of Transport Companies of Lima and Callao, claimed that recent strikes do not represent legitimate transport interests and blamed informal and illegal sectors for the actions. This echoed the repressive perspective of Interior Minister Adrianzén who connected the strikes to criminal activities and political motives.

This found direct expression in the government's response to the latest strike, which culminated in the repression of a march that began at the central Plaza San Martín and was headed toward the Ministry of the Interior, located in the affluent San Isidro district.

As the protesters moved through the banking district, often referred to as "Sanhattan"—a nod to Manhattan—the police surrounded the crowd, forcibly containing them and preventing anyone from entering or leaving. The furious crowd shouted, "They have

kidnapped us,” drawing attention to a new crowd control tactic employed by the Peruvian police modeled on the “kettling” tactic used by police in the US and the UK.

They also chanted “Dina murderer,” referencing the president’s responsibility for the lethal police response during protests from December 2022 to March 2023, which resulted in the deaths of 50 protesters.

The crowds also shouted: “Listen, police, protesting is a right; murder is a crime.”

But the strike’s leaders defended the police, claiming the officers were just following orders not to let the crowd reach the Ministry of the Interior. After most leaders had left the march, one tried to blame the protesters for being “kidnapped,” because they had been warned not to head towards the Ministry of the Interior while still at Plaza San Martín. This indicates that the strike leaders were aware of the police plans for forcibly stopping the march. At the end, the transport leaders worked to calm the protesters and persuade them to return to Plaza San Martín, under heavy police guard.

Street crime is a significant issue in Lima and Trujillo, with working class families the most affected. This issue cannot be confronted outside of overcoming the prevailing conditions of unemployment, under-employment and poverty that provides an ample pool of recruits for the local mafias. The program advanced by the employer-dominated unions, however, only plays into the hands of the government. It uses crime as a pretext for the buildup of state repression even as it protects the gangs, which enjoy influence in the highest echelons of state power.

Some leaders have proposed emulating the approach in El Salvador of President Nayib Bukele, who declared a state of exception to assume military powers and to jail nearly 2 percent of the country’s population, the highest incarceration rate in the world.

Since the failed strike of February 6, the government has signaled that the Peruvian bourgeoisie intends to follow the path of President Javier Milei in Argentina and of Elon Musk in the US, leading to the massive destruction of state jobs. This right-wing turn found direct expression in Boluarte’s submissive stance last month at Davos, where she sought Trump’s favor by offering Peru’s collaboration with US imperialist plans for Latin America. Her government has accepted

without a whimper the arrival of US Air Force cargo planes carrying Peruvian deportees in chains.

The deteriorating social conditions that have brought Peruvian workers into the street again and again are rooted in the global crisis of capitalism. A recent study by the International Labor Organization (ILO) found that Peru’s level of labor informality exceeds all other countries in the region, with no less than 72 percent of the workforce toiling in the informal sector without adequate pay or benefits.

At the same time, however, global supply chains link Peruvian miners to the most advanced productive facilities in China, where Peruvian copper is refined into copper wire for the manufacture of electric vehicles. This production chain, now facilitated by the Chinese-built mega-port at Chancay on Peru’s Pacific coast, has served to amplify the power of the Peruvian working class. It has also placed Peru in the crosshairs of US imperialism, which seeks to utilize threats of military aggression to upend China’s increasing dominance in terms of trade and investment in South America.

The decisive question confronting the Peruvian working class is that of constructing a new revolutionary leadership based on a socialist and internationalist program to unite its struggles with those of workers throughout the Americas and beyond. This means building a Peruvian section of the International Committee of the Fourth International.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact