

# Peru: General strike unites opposition to Toledo

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The 24-hour general strike against the government of Alejandro Toledo on 14 July was described as a "complete success" by the Peru trade union federation CGTP.

Between 75-90 per cent of the population in the interior and around 60 per cent of Lima's population joined the protests which demanded Toledo's resignation. More than 150 unions joined together for the protest. The CGTP claimed up to 300,000 participated.

In the days running up to the strike the government claimed the protests would lead to massive violence - they even suggested the demonstrators were terrorists- by the demonstrators but in the event the strike was largely peaceful. The only violent incidents were caused by the police when they tried to clear several road blockades. Running battles broke out in Lima and 74 arrests were made.

The chief of the cabinet, Carlos Ferrero, surrounded by his ministers appeared before the press to claim "the strike was a failure and that "between 96 and 98 per cent of the population went to work"

The CGTP insisted that between 75 and 90 per cent of people observed the strike call. An independent agency - Defensoría del Pueblo - confirmed the strike was "by a substantial part of the population in at least 14 cities."

Ten thousand protestors attended a rally in the Plaza Dos de Mayo where they heard speeches by CGTP leaders and leaders of left parties' All were united in their call for an immediate change in the neo-liberal policies of the government and for the formation of a Constituent Assembly to consider urgent amendments to the constitution. Toledo has rejected these demands.

Mario Huamán, CGTP president received enormous support when he told the crowd in Plazo de Mayo that Toledo must nbot spend another day in office. He insisted that his policies of privatisation and tax cuts has "only benefited a few large companies" and demanded the restoration of trade union and labour rights taken away from them by the previous Fujimori government. Despite strong economic growth in the last two years inequality and poverty have increased sharply; more than half the population live on less than \$1.25 a day.

CGTP leader, Juan José Gorriti gave Toledo until 28 July (the third anniversary of his election victory) to meet the union's demands. If not, he warned, then further strikes would have as their aim the removal of Toledo from office.

Gorriti compared the strike to the major general strikes of 1977 and 1999 which had demanded the removal of dictatorships.

One member of Congress Javier Diez Canseco, observed that the strike "underscored the isolation of the government" and that the CGTP demands were supported by 84 per cent of the population. Opinion polls consistently show that Toledo only has the backing of 7 per cent of the population. He predicted the strike

opened up a new critical phase for the government and that events would speed up from here on.

Former president of Peru and leader of APRA, Alan García backed the strike at the last minute, although he did not go on the demonstrations or attend the rally. He did call for the resignation of cabinet chief Ferrero "for having lied when he said the strike would be violent".

Alan Garcia is no friend of the Peruvian labour movement. Peru under his rule in the 1980s was plunged into economic chaos in which inflation robbed the poor of the value of their hard won wages. His time in office prepared the ground for the populist demagoguery of Alberto Fujimori who won the 1990 election and then launched a coup against the constitution two years later.

Toledo is weak; he is hated by many and distrusted by most. He has betrayed every promise he made to the workers and poor to get elected. Now is the time to remove him. The success of the 24-hour general strike showed the willingness of hundreds of thousands to act.

But many of these workers are poor and cannot afford a long drawn-out, hesitant battle plan. A determined all-out strike to get Toledo out must accompany the convocation of a constituent assembly to decide upon a national emergency action plan to raise the people out of poverty.

The "handful of large companies" that have exclusively gained from Toledo's time in office must be taken over by the state and run by the workers who toil in them. A huge wealth tax must be levied against the domestic and foreign companies to provide resources to fund a living minimum wage and finance job creation for the unemployed.

Only a workers and poor peasants' government based on council of action in each town and village - protected from state intimidation and provocation by a workers' militia - can ensure that the ousting of Toledo's government leads to a root and branch assault on capitalist exploitation which is the source of Peru's present misery.

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