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Toledo's Cabinet Resigns

by LADB Staff

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Much of Peruvian President Alejandro Toledo's Cabinet stepped down in August, following the lead of Prime Minister Carlos Ferrero who objected to Toledo allies' support for coca legalization in the department of Cuzco. Toledo's first appointment after Ferrero's revolt was Fernando Olivera as minister of foreign relations. The appointment caused unprecedented resignations among Toledo's top officials and yet another political crisis for Toledo.

Olivera, leader of the Frente Independente Moralizador (FIM), resigned the day after he took the diplomatic post, saying no one from the FIM would again serve in Toledo's government. Toledo then moved Pedro Pablo Kuczynski from his spot as head of the Economy Ministry to prime minister, overcoming the latest in a series of political calamities.

Coca legalization support, party politics cause conflict

The decision of Carlos Cuaresma, former FIM deputy and current regional president of Cuzco, to legalize coca cultivation in his region sparked the crisis in the Toledo government (see NotiSur, 2005-08-19). Cabinet chief Ferrero condemned the decision in no uncertain terms, while Olivera backed his fellow party member. The FIM is part of the governing coalition that joined Toledo's Peru Posible (PP) party in a 2001 governability pact.

The coalition has undergone repeated stresses and Olivera's support for Cuaresma apparently made PP figures unwilling to continue under Toledo. Peru's anti-drug czar Nils Ericsson, president of the Comision Nacional para el Desarrollo y Vida sin Drogas (Devida), was another prominent figure to threaten to resign because of Toledo's backing of Olivera.

Newspaper cartoons portrayed Olivera as Toledo's puppeteer during the crisis. Once Toledo replaced respected, trilingual Foreign Relations Minister Manuel Rodriguez Cuadros with the combative, extremely unpopular Olivera on Aug. 11, several top ministers decided to quit.

Toledo's decision to put the monolingual politician who, the press said, has "nothing diplomatic" about him, as the country's top envoy led Housing Minister Carlos Bruce, Justice Minister Eduardo Salhuana, and Health Minister Pilar Mazzetti to quit.

PP Congress member Henry Pease, named as a potential replacement for Ferrero, refused to head a Cabinet with Olivera in one of its most prominent slots. Never before had the appointment of a foreign relations minister created so much internal conflict. Toledo then asked for the resignations of the entire Cabinet, though he replaced only about half the ministers. By Aug. 13, the president and the denunciations against him had alienated Olivera.
One day after his swearing-in ceremony, the FIM chief said, "Never again will I serve in any Cabinet of President Toledo, never again will anybody from the FIM participate in any post of this government." The split was the latest and worst blow to the PP-FIM coalition, but Olivera did not say that the governability pact the two parties signed in 2001 was null and void. Seven new ministers, 9 remain Toledo finally quelled the ministerial crisis by putting Economy Minister Kuczynski also known by his initials PPK in as prime minister.

Toledo named the following individuals to head seven ministries: Prime Minister: Pedro Pablo Kuczynski Foreign Relations: Oscar Maurtua Defense: Marciano Rengifo Economy and Finance: Fernando Zavala Interior: Romulo Pizarro Justice: Alejandro Tudela Housing, Construction and Sanitation: Rudecindo Vega

In nine ministries Toledo rejected the resignations he solicited and kept the previous ministers in place: Education: Javier Sota Nadal Health: Pilar Mazzetti Agriculture: Manuel Manrique Labor and Job Promotion: Juan Sheput Foreign Commerce and Tourism: Alfredo Ferrero Energy and Mines: Gloromiro Sanchez Transportation and Communications: Jose Ortiz Rivera Production: David Lemor Women and Social Development: Ana Maria Romero

Latest reshuffle reflects pre-electoral year positioning

Resignations from the Cabinet and reshuffling its members have been frequent during Toledo's presidency (see NotiSur, 2002-07-19, 2003-07-04, 2003-12-12, 2004-01-09). Wall Street analysts have distinguished political crises in his government from the economic state of the country, pointing to 46 months of continuous growth despite abysmal public approval for the president.

Popularity figures for Toledo have wavered between single digits and the low teens, with one survey after the Cabinet reshuffle showing his public approval at 8%. His reputation since his triumphal inauguration in 2001 has declined precipitously because of his inability to reduce widespread poverty around the country, perceived indecisiveness, and alleged corruption. With numerous members of his family under investigation for corruption and, in the case of his older brother Luis Toledo Manrique and Luis' son Guillermo, for verbally and physically attacking reporters on camera on Aug. 19, Toledo has achieved a poor standing with the populace.

Nonetheless, analysts have predicted that Toledo is likely to serve out the remaining 11 months of his elected term, with ousters in neighboring Bolivia and Ecuador serving as possible object lessons in the economic destructiveness of removing presidential figures. Both political coalitions and popular groups have either lacked the organizational power or will to remove Toledo up to this point.

Olivera has enough strength to weaken Toledo's power significantly, but he may instead want to focus on his party's chances for next year. Jockeying for next year's presidential and congressional races has begun in earnest, with several figures from different parties announcing their intentions to run. The mass resignation of Toledo's Cabinet may reflect the ministers' efforts to distance
themselves from the extremely unpopular president in anticipation of the 2006 race. Carlos Ferrero is preparing a congressional run for next year.

Even ex-President Alberto Fujimori (1990-2000), in self-imposed exile in Japan to escape facing multiple charges for corruption and human rights crimes, has used his 25-year-old son Kenji to capitalize on his popularity.

On Aug. 12, Kenji, Alberto's youngest child, said in a brief television address that his father would return next year and run under the Si Cumple party banner. Polls have shown that Fujimori is the most popular name in hypothetical presidential politics in Peru at the moment, winning a plurality of would-be voters even though he faces arrest and prosecution if he returns from Japan. A majority of Peruvians, conversely, hate the ex-president for his authoritarian policies and widespread corruption during his term.

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