

# General secretary of the Association of the Relatives of the Arrested & Disappeared in Chile: “The principle of justice and human rights has to be rescued”

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Mireya García is the general secretary of the Association of the Relatives of the Arrested & Disappeared in Chile. The *World Socialist Web Site* interviewed her outside the House of Lords in London on Tuesday, where the appeal against the High Court decision to grant immunity to the dictator Augusto Pinochet is continuing. Ms. García spoke to the *WSWS* after witnessing the day’s proceedings, during which Claire Montgomery, from Pinochet’s defence team, argued support for the decision of the High Court to grant Pinochet “sovereign immunity”.

“We hope to get out of this at least the recognition that there exists a road to justice. This has been the most far-reaching case experienced in the life of our country during the last 20 years. We have been trying to break the closed circle of impunity that exists in Chile. We feel that from now on everything that happens is going to be positive. We hope that the appeal against the demand for protection, which was ruled in favour of Pinochet, will have a different outcome today. The ruling given by the High Court recognising his status as head of state was extremely devious, because it did not abide by international standards. It establishes Britain as a country where dictators who want to escape justice are welcome.

“My brother, Vicente Israel García, was arrested and disappeared after April 30, 1977. He was a young man of 19 when he was arrested and an active member of the Socialist Party. He was taken to a clandestine centre of imprisonment by a branch of the DINA [Chilean secret police] and from there he disappeared. We never heard from him again.

“I think that the position of the Socialist Party today is very complex. On the one hand, they are under pressure due to their own position as socialists, and on the other they are under pressure because they are part of the coalition government. They are in a difficult situation, but in this case decisions must be taken on the basis of principle. There is no other way.

“To define oneself from a strictly political, functional point of view in relation to what is happening here is not the best way, not the most healthy way, nor the most honest. Here it is necessary to define one’s attitude in accordance with basic principles. And if the principle of justice and human rights is one which we all feel has to be rescued, has to be struggled for, then that has to be done, even if it is costly.

“The government of Eduardo Frei has done things badly, very badly. From the beginning, it could have avoided getting involved in the case. From the moment that it decided to be involved and begin its defence of the dictator, it has placed itself once more in the position of defender of the victimiser and not of the victims. Obviously the government has been under extreme pressure from the right wing, but it has allowed itself to be pressured.

“Not for nothing does the right today state that Eduardo Frei is a statesman of high calibre who has defended the dignity of the fatherland, and so on. What the government is doing is distancing itself more and more from the aspirations, the hopes and the expectations of the people.

“The youth are disoriented. They feel this is a just cause and a cause that has to be supported. But in face

of the statements of the politicians and the pressures they sense on all sides, the youth find it difficult to take a position. They ask themselves, where is the truth? What is ethical? What is principled? What can we base ourselves on in deciding what to think and what to do? They are not yet conditioned by political views.

“It is a complex situation. I think that the result will be that Chile will show itself as it really is, and that is positive. If Chile shows itself to be divided, not reconciled, not united, then that is the reality of that country.

“This is the best proof that Chile has no possibility of reconciliation. In that country you have two very well-defined sections: those of us who are against what was a dictatorship and its repressive policies and those who continue to support the dictatorship because they benefited greatly from it; because they became rich, because they had economic and political privileges.

“The truth is that we Chileans have become more and more polarised, rather than uniting. I think it is for the best that this polarisation has come to the surface, that it has been seen, because up to now it had been hidden.

“The reconciliation between the rich and the poor is always going to be difficult, because it is a question of one class being over and above the other, and one class will always try to dominate the other. In today’s world, one that is so globalised, we are all supposedly taking part in the sharing of wealth. The class system, the differences between the two classes which is so well defined in Latin America, is supposedly beginning to be watered down.

“On the other hand, this case has shown that those who are on the side of Pinochet are the bourgeoisie. It is clearly demonstrated, and they say so in their statements defending Pinochet. They have not only sided with the dictator by defending him regarding the crimes he committed, but also in terms of what it was all about—the domination of one class over the other.

“The American government was the main factor responsible for the coup d’état. That has to be admitted. We must not stop saying so, because we are beginning to forget a little history. In this instance, the United States government, like the other governments who have national victims, should assume the defence of their own nationals assassinated by Pinochet.”

“Pinochet’s defence has been terribly biased. There have not been judicial arguments; there have not been

arguments about human rights, but only political arguments. What they have said in there is of great concern. England will come off really badly if it sets a precedent where crimes committed in a sovereign state are legitimate. This is critical not only for Chile but also for humanity.

“This argument should be opposed internationally. It is not possible to accept that the murders, torture and forced disappearances of people can be legitimate acts because they are committed by a sovereign state. That is an aberration. It is a barbarity in this time and age for humanity.

“I believe that today we are living in different times, in terms of the legitimacy of international standards, respect for human rights and the imposition of sanctions against those responsible for abuses and crimes. We cannot permit anybody to have recourse to decades-old legislation, as the defence has done today. One has to base oneself on the situation as it exists today. Crimes against humanity can be tried and must be tried. The problem in Britain is that legislation is based on precedents. That is what is so critical here, that with this case they might set another precedent which will become law.”



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