

Bachelet enlists Chilean CP in electoral coalition

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28 September 2013

With Chile's presidential elections set for next November, all of the polls are showing former president Michelle Bachelet of the Socialist Party (PS), the candidate for the of "center-left" New Majority coalition, winning the vote by a wide margin over Evelyn Matthei, candidate of the the right-wing ruling party.

Since 2011, Chile has been rocked by social upheavals. Masses of Chilean student have staged continuous protests against the high cost and privatization of education, producing the largest social movement since the end of the dictatorship. Sporadic strikes have broken out in the mining sector—Chile is the largest copper producer in the world. There have also been mobilizations workers in other sectors and protests by indigenous peoples in defense of their rights. All of this has served to undermine the government of President Sebastian Piñera, the first formed by the Chilean right since the end of the dictatorship of General Augusto Pinochet in 1990.

Piñera, the richest man in the South American nation and leader of a party that included the political heirs of Pinochet, managed to win the presidency in 2010 due to broad social discontent with the policies of the so-called *Concertación* (Concert of Parties for Democracy), the "center-left" coalition between Bachelet's Socialist Party, the Christian Democrats and two smaller groups, which ruled Chile for 20 years. Throughout that period, successive governments have maintained the essential economic policies and governmental structures imposed under Pinochet.

According to media reports, Bachelet—who has a 74 percent approval rating in the polls compared to 30 percent for her right-wing rival Matthei—has provoked anxiety within Chile's business sectors by including within her New Majority slate members of the Chilean Communist Party (PCCh). In an interview, Bachelet responded to these concerns by saying, "It is better that people are sitting at the table than to have them outside, feeling excluded and thus reacting in a way that is not the most constructive or democratic."

Bachelet's hope that bringing in representatives of the PCCh representatives will help control "anti-democratic" social reactions is an indication of the kind of government she will lead. The list of candidates compiled by New Majority, according to a media report, is dominated by "representatives of

big local economic groups, neo-conservative collaborators from her previous 2006-2010 government, Christian Democratic and Socialist Party economists ... The most relevant members on this team with the greatest real influence share the common denominator of a neoliberal ideology that runs to their core."

The real work of the protagonists of New Majority will be to continue attracting foreign investment, which has already made Chile one of the most socially unequal countries in Latin America. The representatives of the PCCh will serve merely as figureheads in this process, without any positions of responsibility.

Nonetheless, New Majority is more than a cosmetic change of name. It represents the recognition by the Chilean bourgeoisie that it needs to bring into government elements from the leadership of the mass student movement in order to contain this movement and prevent it from spilling over into an uprising by the masses of the working class. This political path was largely paved by the betrayal carried out by the student movement's leadership, which has ties to PCCh and other pseudo-left organizations, when it diverted this movement into negotiations with Piñera.

This what lies behind Bachelet's desire to incorporate the Chilean Stalinists into her coalition. As PCCh president Guillermo Teillier cynically put it, the party's presence gives the New Majority candidate "guarantees of governability." In other words, its inclusion is aimed at impeding the further polarization of Chilean society along class lines.

The Chilean PCCh on its web site continues to defend its record of having been one of the first parties to implement the Stalinist policy of the popular front, having participated in bourgeois governments in Chile since the 1930s. It shamelessly recognizes that these bourgeois presidents, once elected with the party's support, turned against the working class and even the PCCh itself, returning its electoral favor with brutal repression.

Among the new pseudo-left standard bearers of Bachelet's New Majority coalition are Camila Vallejo and Camilo Ballesteros, who became internationally known as the principal leaders of the Chilean student movement. Their support for Bachelet has outraged Chilean students, who have experienced the political bankruptcy of this student leadership, which

subordinated the mass movement to a policy of pressuring and negotiating with the government over its education policies.

In an attempt to pacify this movement and quell social unrest, the Piñera government agreed to lower interest rates on student loans, which are the most expensive in the Americas after the US.

In her election campaign, Bachelet is promising to initiate an educational reform that she claims would establish free education in six years. Her previous government, however, maintained the Pinochet model of education and confronted massive student protests. Bachelet's record lends no credibility to her election promises. To change the opinion of students, the New Majority candidate is relying on Vallejo and Ballesteros, who have applauded her proposal.

The overwhelming support for Bachelet is a distorted expression of the intense popular hostility to the right-wing government of Piñera, who is leaving office with an approval rating of barely 30 percent.

However, what predominates in Chile is indifference and disgust toward the political class as a whole. Within the Chilean ruling class there is concern that Bachelet will prove unable to control a mass social explosion amid a global economic slowdown and the impact it is having on Chile. After the failure of the Piñera government and its "compassionate" Pinochetism, these layers are turning toward a more aggressively right-wing policy in the person of Matthei, the daughter of an air force general and member of the Pinochet junta.

The legacy of the September 11, 1973 coup remains paramount in Chilean politics to this day. The fact that millions of Chileans are still trying to understand and draw political conclusions from this tragedy was made evident by the thousands of conferences, meetings and demonstrations as well as the publication of new books, plays and novels about the coup that occurred over the course of September marking the 40th anniversary of the CIA-backed military coup.

The PCCCh and the Socialist Party of Bachelet have done their best to cover up the real reasons for the defeat in September 1973: the disarming of the working class both politically and literally in the face of the fascist military coup. This was the result of Chilean Stalinists' subordination of the working class to the Popular Unity government of Allende and their criminal claims that in Chile there existed a "parliamentary road" to socialism and that the military constituted "the people in uniform."

Nor do other sections of the pseudo left have any interest in critically examining this history, particularly those organizations that emerged from the Pabloite revisionist tendency that broke with the International Committee of the Fourth International. Their role during this period was to promote the dead-end politics of Castroism and guerrillaism in Latin America, which served to divert elements among the youth away from the struggle to build a new revolutionary leadership in the working class and into disastrous armed

adventures.

Today those groups with their origins in Pabloism are incapable of drawing a balance sheet of this internationally critical experience of the working class. The revisionists of the Workers International League (LIT), the Morenoite tendency, for example, published a statement entitled "40 years since the September 11 coup," stressing the "importance of the Popular Unity government" and the "colossal advance" of workers voting in 1970 for Allende "the first (self-proclaimed) Marxist president in the history of the world."

The statement makes no attempt to analyze the terrible events that led to the coup, allowing only that the "traditional parties"—the social democrats and Stalinists—as well as the centrist MIR (Movement of the Revolutionary Left) "did not pass the test of history."

Such empty and pompous phrases only pave the way to this tendency's capitulation to a new and even more reactionary attempt to resurrect popular front politics under the New Majority and its candidate Bachelet.

The next Chilean government, almost certainly with Bachelet at its head, will confront a sharp intensification of the class struggle driven by the world capitalist crisis, which is already taking its toll in the form of stagnating economic growth, manufacturing output and domestic demand.

The decisive task is the construction of a new revolutionary leadership in the working class based on the assimilation of the lessons of the bitter defeat of September 1973. This means building sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International in Chile as well as in all the other countries of the continent.

The authors recommend:

Forty years of the military coup in Chile
[11 September 2013]



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