

Protests in Chile continue in opposition to promises of new Constitution

Andrea Lobo
19 November 2019

Despite great fanfare by the corporate media, the “Agreement for Social Peace and a New Constitution” reached by the right-wing Chilean government of Sebastián Piñera administration and several opposition parties has failed to quell the month-long protests.

This ongoing militancy shows that for the millions of workers and youth across Chile, life under capitalism has become intolerable. Protesters have defied a brutal military and police-state repression in which 23 people have been killed, hundreds have lost their eyes and many have denounced torture and sexual abuse by the state.

The horror stories are innumerable. Reuters wrote Friday of Alex Núñez, a 39-year-old repairman and father of three, who died shortly after his skull was fractured by police when returning from work during a curfew.

On Sunday, Piñera referred to the pact in a televised address: “I had to decide between two paths: the path of force through the establishment of a new state of emergency or the path of reason...we chose the path of reason to give a new opportunity for peace.”

As he promises a new Constitution, acknowledges “abuses” by state forces, and sends the military back to the barracks, Piñera has continued to pursue the “path of force,” calling retired police back into service and escalating the repression.

The agreement involves a referendum on April 2020 with two questions: 1) Do you want a new Constitution?, and 2) What type of organization should write it, a constituent convention or a mixed convention? The constituent convention would be fully composed of Chileans elected for that purpose, while half of the mixed convention would be current parliamentarians. The elections for the constituent assembly would take place on October 25 along with the scheduled provincial elections.

The constituent assembly would redraw the Constitution, which was established in 1980 by the military dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet and was

invoked by Piñera to deploy the military against protesters. The process will include votes on whether to change each existing article, with a two-thirds majority required for modification or elimination. In other words, any one-third bloc could veto all modifications. Then, a final popular referendum will either approve or reject the resulting document.

All parties in Congress agreed to this constituent scheme except for the Stalinist Communist Party (PCCh) and a minority of the pseudo-left Broad Front coalition. Shortly after, however, the PCCh called its supporters to vote in the referendum for a “constitutional convention,” effectively legitimizing the whole charade.

Throughout the weekend, demonstrators responded to these maneuvers by again filling the streets of Santiago, Valparaíso, Antofagasta and other major cities to protest the agreement. On Sunday, a media stunt by the former presidential candidate for the Broad Front, Beatriz Sánchez, who received over 20 percent of the vote in 2017, failed when demonstrators chanted for her to leave the main plaza of Santiago calling her a “traitor.”

These actions follow two national strikes since protests began on October 18, involving millions of teachers, dockers, miners and other workers, as well as widespread roadblocks and mass concentrations across all the major cities.

A group of PCCh and Broad Front legislators responded Monday by announcing an impeachment bill against Piñera citing human rights abuses. Meanwhile, the Roundtable for Social Unity, which includes the trade unions, student federations and protest organizations led by the PCCh and Broad Front, released a statement promising to convoke another general strike to demand a “Plurinational and Equal Constituent Assembly,” citing the inclusion of “territorial assemblies, town halls and *trawun* [Mapuche assemblies]” that Social Unity bureaucrats control.

Despite some internal disputes among competing careerists, the PCCh and Broad Front efforts fit entirely within the distribution of labor in the political establishment to channel protests behind Chilean capitalism, which is unable and unwilling to concede any real social and democratic reforms.

The PCCh and Broad Front, however, have been severely discredited after countless betrayals by their trade unions and the participation of the PCCh and Humanist Party (Broad Front) in past austerity-driven administrations. More recently, their leaders initially responded by criminalizing protests as “vandalism” and have fed illusions in the possibilities of a constituent assembly under capitalism.

Across the major “popular assemblies,” within the trade unions, and through its online publication *La Izquierda Diario*, the Revolutionary Workers Party (PTR) has played a key role in legitimizing the PCCh and Broad Front and channeling all opposition behind them. It has claimed that these assemblies run by tested and tried officials loyal to bourgeois rule are a necessary step toward “popular self-organization.”

PTR leader Nicolás Bustamante said at a rally in Buenos Aires on Saturday organized by its Argentine partner PTS, that the PTR created one such assembly “from the Colegio de Profesores [teachers’ union]...with the goal of expanding this organism to the rest of workers organizations, from dockworkers to miners, and the most organized neighborhoods.” Their assembly has so far voted for “a campaign against repression” and “demanding that the trade-union bureaucracy of the Social Unity Roundtable ... again demand ‘Out Piñera’ and a general strike to achieve that.”

Watch David North’s remarks commemorating 25 years of the *World Socialist Web Site* and donate today.

The role played by the PTR further exposes the nationalist and pro-capitalist nature of the trade unions and the pseudo-left. Even while speaking to audiences internationally amid mass social upheavals across the region, these Pabloite officials spout the national-opportunist outlook that all workers and youth can hope for is backing or becoming advisers for the local Stalinists and trade-union bureaucrats.

Meanwhile, speaking for American ruling circles, the *New York Times* wrote this weekend, “Today, in Chile, capitalism itself is now on trial.” In a podcast, the *Times* correspondents noted that demonstrators “demand a reckoning on the promise of prosperity that never came,” with a “growing anger and a sense that the entire system

might be illegitimate, not just the distribution of money but fundamental fairness and who the government was working for and who it was taking for granted.”

The global character of this increasingly uncompromising militancy among workers against social inequality and empty promises by capitalist governments is evidenced in the streets of Iraq, Lebanon, Hong Kong, Ecuador, Haiti, France and most recently in the mass popular resistance against the US-backed coup in Bolivia.

As Bloomberg wrote Monday about Latin America, “governments are on the run and investors are unloading assets as fast as they can.” It cites James Bosworth, a risk analyst, who bluntly states, “Governments haven’t dealt with the roots of the problem, and those problems aren’t going away...in many ways, governments are trapped.”

Capital flight, which has cut the value of the Chilean peso to its lowest level in a decade, is a warning by investors that amid the current global economic slowdown any step backward by the Chilean ruling elite will be punished by a recessionary and inflationary spiral like Argentina or worse. As in the early 1970s, under capitalism, the only alternative is a return to fascism, which the ruling class is again preparing for by using the Stalinists, Pabloites and trade union bureaucracies to chain workers to bourgeois politics.

Even Bloomberg suggests that “some in Chile maintain that they’ll only be satisfied if Piñera resigns.” However, as recognized in the chant “It’s not 30 pesos, it’s 30 years”—referring to the betrayals by the entire political establishment since the end of the Pinochet dictatorship—the replacement of Piñera by another capitalist regime would only be another charade like the constituent assembly to leave intact the profit interests of the local oligarchy and global finance.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact