

# Police murders spark demonstrations, riots in Chile

Mauricio Saavedra  
11 February 2021

Last Friday Francisco Martínez, a 27-year-old street performer, was shot dead by Carabinero police in broad daylight and in view of dozens of witnesses in Panguipulli, a lakeside town in Araucanía, the poorest region in Chile. Martínez, who suffered from schizophrenia, had lived in Panguipulli for only three years, but was well known, having lived on the streets and relied on community assistance.

In the many interviews given by locals since, Martínez was described as “very helpful” and “respectful.” Martínez was also the uncle of Anthony Araya, the youth who was pushed off a bridge by Carabineros during anti-police violence demonstrations in Santiago last October, which shocked the nation.

Amid angry cries from locals, by whom the young man was well-liked, Sgt. Juan González Iturriaga unloaded five bullets into Martínez, who fell to the ground in the middle of a busy intersection. Crowds descended on the scene chanting “Murderers! Murderers!” as the cops drove off and entrenched themselves in the police station, leaving the dying man abandoned on the street. Then they reappeared en masse to suppress the mass of people protesting the young man’s death.

Minutes earlier three cops were involved in conducting identity checks. In their statement, Carabineros alleged that after Martínez “refused” to provide identification he moved toward the officers with the juggling swords he used in his street performance and threatened to kill the Sergeant.

“He told me ‘I’m going to kill you, f...g cop’” González has claimed. The cops distanced themselves and ordered Martínez to drop what they described as “machetes,” and when he did not comply the sergeant drew his weapon and shot twice at the ground. According to the police report, the young man lunged at González who then “fired three more shots, since his life was at risk, and the assailant fell to the ground.”

Natalia Peralta, a nursing technician who witnessed the events from close range told a very different story: “We were right there with my daughter. The carabinero says to the boy ‘your ID card,’ and the boy says ‘no, I don’t have

an ID card, I lost it, but my name is Franco.’”

Peralta explained that the Carabineros kept insisting that the young man present identification and then threatened to take him to the station for questioning. Elisabeth Matthei Schacht, lawyer for the National Institute for Human Rights, explained that “preventive identity checks ... do not allow (police) to take the person to the police station in case the person refuses.”

Peralta continued: “the boy raised his fantasy knife that he had, but he didn’t mean to hurt (González); we were there. The Carabinero walks back, I don’t know, three steps, and draws his gun. They continue (walking backwards toward the intersection) and he shoots (Martínez) in the legs. He shoots him once, twice ...”

During the arraignment the prosecution explained that there were six shots fired and not five as claimed by police. Five shots hit Martínez. This is visible in a new video from a service center security camera that provides a better view of events. The cop provocatively shoots three times at Martínez who yells repeatedly “paco asesino” (killer cop). Already injured, Martínez then comes out from behind a traffic control box where he was trying to protect himself and appears to lunge at the cop who shoots him another three times.

Peralta, who lent first aid to Martínez, sought help from the cops but “The Carabineros got into the (car) and left. They did not stop the traffic, they did not help at all. The boy was left lying on the ground ...”

Protests and rioting erupted as soon as news of the incident broke. Ten government buildings went up in flames in Panguipulli the same night that Francisco Martínez lost his life. On Saturday, police stations and other government buildings were firebombed or barricaded in several working class suburbs in Santiago, and daily protests were called across the country. In one spontaneous demonstration, hundreds of people jeered at the Carabineros and drove them out of the Plaza de Armas square in Santiago Sunday morning.

Then on Sunday evening, the family of 27-year-old

Camilo Miyaki was told that the young man had hanged himself in a police station cell in the working class Santiago commune of Pedro Aguirre Cerda. He and his girlfriend had been arrested that morning for not carrying a COVID-19 safe conduct pass. She was released during the day.

According to human rights group ANEXPPSA, Camilo had been shifted in the course of the day from one cell to another that “had a blind spot, which did not allow one to see what was happening to the detainee.”

The 53rd police station in Pedro Aguirre Cerda achieved notoriety for torturing detainees. Complaints were filed against officers for having tortured and sexually abused at least two people detained during the mass youth and working class demonstrations at the end of 2019.

In October of that year, student civil disobedience triggered by a hike in public transport was transformed almost overnight as millions of workers, layers of the middle class and youth joined protests, strikes and demonstrations across the country. A mass movement opened up against decades of extreme social inequality, police violence, and in opposition to a deeply hated political caste that emerged in the transition from military dictatorship to civilian rule.

Right-wing president Sebastian Piñera, responded to the protests by decreeing a state of emergency and a curfew, made permanent since the COVID-19 pandemic. The government utilized police state measures, deploying the Armed Forces on Chilean streets for the first time in decades. In the course of three months of quasi-dictatorial conditions, dozens were killed or disappeared, hundreds suffered severe injuries and mutilations and the thousands of those detained suffered beatings, sexual abuse, rape, and torture.

Piñera also entered into national unity talks with the parliamentary opposition and the pseudo-left parties to redirect the explosive mass struggles into the safe parameters of parliamentary politics by promoting a constitutional convention.

These latest police murders threaten to rekindle the widespread struggles that exploded to the surface in 2019 and resurfaced in 2020. Protests and riots were triggered last November, after Carabinero officers raided a juvenile reform center and shot two adolescents weeks after throwing Anthony Araya over the Pío Nono Bridge. But while the Carabineros’ director, Gen. Mario Rozas, was forced to resign over these incidents, police repression has continued unabated under the protection of the latest director and with the full backing of the government.

Fearful of the social forces that may be unleashed, the opposition and the pseudo-“left” are at pains to keep illusions in parliamentary democracy. The Christian Democrats, the Socialist Party, the Party for Democracy, the

Radicals, the Liberals, the Humanists, the Greens, the Broad Front coalition and the Stalinist Communist Party have all called for the reform, or re-founding of the paramilitary Carabinero institution.

The Socialist mayor of Panguipulli, Rodrigo Valdivia, initially backed the police and called for order to be restored, only to do a 180 degree shift the following day.

“Both the fires that occurred in Panguipulli and the death of Francisco, may he rest in peace, are the absolute responsibility of the Carabineros,” the mayor said at a press conference. He denounced the abandonment and negligence of Carabineros who “barricaded themselves in the Fifth Police Station of Panguipulli, protecting the interests of the Carabineros to the detriment of the municipality.”

What drove the change in his position is the same fear that motivated independent deputy René Saffirio’s call for a suspension of the legislative recess to address the crisis.

“It is the future of the country that is at stake, it is the respect for the human rights of all the citizens of our country that is at stake, it is our democracy that is at stake.” He continued, “I believe that a circumstance as painful as this can generate a state of major political convulsion, which could perfectly put at risk our constituent process.”

He recalled that the whole political establishment was caught unawares by the seething mass movement and warned that they could not be placed in the same position again: “Now we do see it, consequently, we have to act promptly, with celerity, with responsibility and with great seriousness.”

To this the youth and the working class will answer “we do not believe you!”

The inevitable response of the Chilean state, the verbiage of the liberals and pseudo-lefts notwithstanding, will be one of repression and a further lurch to the right. The struggle against police murders and violence requires the mobilization of the working class as a united, independent social force against the capitalist system.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)**