

Pseudo-left uses constitutional election to conceal danger of dictatorship in Chile

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“Friend, I think the most important thing is to try to keep a cool head, not continue to brood, because what’s coming is very, very, very serious. They brought forward the curfew because it was known that the strategy is to break the entire supply chain, food, even in some zones the water supply, pharmacies, they tried to burn down a hospital and tried to take over the airport, in other words, we are absolutely overwhelmed, it’s like a foreign invasion, alien invasion, I don’t know how you say it, and we don’t have the means to fight them. Please, let’s keep calm, let’s call the people of good will, take advantage of rationing the food, and we’re going to have to diminish our privileges and share with others.”

In this leaked conversation of October 21, 2019, Cecilia Morel, the first lady and wife of the richest man in Chile, President Sebastián Piñera, gives a sense of the overriding fear that gripped the ruling class with the massive social explosion beginning that month. One gets the impression that she felt her Marie Antoinette moment had come, that the days of obscene privilege of the Piñeras and their class were numbered.

The mobilizations formed part of an eruption of the global class struggle, illustrating that the enemy of the working masses is one and the same financial and corporate capitalist elite. From Chile to Lebanon, Iraq, Argentina, Bolivia, and Ecuador, across Europe, Asia and the United States, millions upon millions have taken to the streets over the last two years against wanton death caused by capitalism’s criminal response to a deadly pandemic, as well as years of social inequality, poverty, the threat of fascism and dictatorship and ever-growing police-state violence.

Despite the immensity and potential of the protests, demonstrations and strikes that shook Chile in 2019, the working class has been unable at this point to pose a revolutionary alternative to capitalism. This is fundamentally due to the political domination of the nationalist left, beginning with the Communist Party (PCCh), the pseudo-left Frente Amplio coalition, the Socialist Party and its countless satellite tendencies and organizations.

Amid the greatest crisis of bourgeois rule since the revolutionary period of 1968–73 and the growing danger of police-state dictatorship, the Chilean “left”—through its control of the union apparatus, domination of social and community organizations and posts in the municipal and regional governments and the national Congress—played a decisive role in saving capitalism.

As in the 1970s, the task fell to the Chilean Stalinists to lead this campaign. Having broken with revolutionary Marxism very early in its existence, the PCCh has remained wedded to the Stalinist interwar “Popular Front” and the Menshevik “two-stage” theories, which advanced a national and parliamentary road and the formation of coalitions with the native bourgeoisie.

Part and parcel of this ideology is their promotion of national exceptionalism, which claims that Chile has democratic traditions and adheres to constitutional norms. This specious theory was used throughout the 20th century to deny the necessity of the working class taking up a socialist and internationalist revolutionary struggle against capitalism. The

PCCh’s primary function has been to sow illusions in parliamentary democracy.

This political straitjacket proved decisive in allowing the debilitated Piñera regime to remain in power, recalibrate and lay the groundwork for dictatorial rule.

How the pseudo-left saved Piñera

In November 2019, the Chilean “left” accepted Piñera’s call for “national unity” talks. The meaning of national unity became clear during the pandemic when the Congress rubber-stamped pro-business policies. The union apparatus implemented these policies, forcing the export-oriented sectors back to work, helping impose wage cuts, agreeing to the furloughing of hundreds of thousands of workers and refusing to call any industrial action against poverty, hunger, insecurity and evictions impacting the working class.

Amid hunger riots, wildcat strikes and protests against continued police murders, torture and mutilations, the parliamentary left channeled popular anger into toothless appeals to reform the virtually autonomous, militarized Carabineros. A few symbolic human rights cases that were permitted to proceed through the courts were cynically exploited by the pseudo-left to sow illusions in the institutions of the bourgeois state.

They also initiated parliamentary proceedings against the police director, the interior minister, the health minister and even Piñera, knowing full well that the right and centre parties in Congress would quash these actions.

The most significant political operation orchestrated by the pseudo-left was the year-long referendum campaign to overturn the 1980 authoritarian constitution and to promote illusions in the election this April of a Constituent Assembly, whose function will be to draft a new constitution.

Unlike all the other machinations, this gargantuan effort has proved temporarily effective from the standpoint of blinding the working class to the preparations being made for dictatorship.

On the day of the referendum last October 25, Piñera said, “Until now, the Constitution has divided us. As of today, we should all collaborate in making the new constitution a symbol of unity and stability.”

In one way or another, this cynical lie was echoed by the entire pseudo-left. “Today we are celebrating a great triumph of the sovereign people ... and a new historical and democratic cycle for our country,” said Frente Amplio Senator Juan Ignacio Latorre. “Unity is required, social and political unity, great alliances for the transformations that are coming for the Chile of the future.”

Undoubtedly, Augusto Pinochet's 1980 Constitution was an authoritarian instrument aimed against the working class. The main author of the dictator's constitution was Jaime Guzmán, founder of the fascistic UDI, who drew inspiration from Nazi German jurist Carl Schmitt and reactionary Spanish clericalism.

Some of Guzmán's politically authoritarian and neoliberal economic philosophy codified in the constitution are well known. It enshrined the conception of the subsidiary state, which meant subordinating all social areas: education, health, social security, utilities and water to the market, and proscribed any attempt at nationalization. Changes to articles concerning political parties, the military, the electoral system, mining and constitutional reform required a two-thirds majority approval.

Less discussed was Guzmán's embrace of the State of Exception theory that Schmitt developed as part of providing a quasilegal garb to Adolf Hitler's dictatorship. The theory essentially granted the dictator extraordinary powers—giving him executive, as well as legislative powers and possessing the highest legal authority—in a period of exception or emergency. Both the separation of powers and the rule of law were subsumed in the rule of the Führer.

In Chile this served to provide *post factum* legal immunity to the countless crimes committed during the counterrevolution against the politically radicalized working class, student youth and political opposition. The fascist-military junta orchestrated a political genocide, an attempted "extirpation" as Pinochet called it. During military rule, especially its first five years, the courts repeatedly declared human rights cases inadmissible, rejecting thousands of complaints and habeas corpus writs and systematically refusing to investigate state crimes.

Articles 40 and 41 in the 1980 Constitution concerned the State of Siege, one of the four "States of Constitutional Exception." Article 40 stated that in the case of internal war or internal commotion, the president could declare a state of siege on all or part of the territory. Congress had a deadline of 10 days to accept or reject the decree, and silence was consent. Only by a two-thirds majority could Congress terminate the state of siege.

Article 41 dealt with the suspension of rights. It stated that the president may:

move people from one point to another in the national territory, arrest them in their own homes or in places other than prisons or other intended for the detention or imprisonment of common criminals, and expel them from the national territory. (He) may also restrict the freedom of locomotion and prohibit certain persons from entering or leaving the territory. (He) also, may suspend or restrict the exercise of the right of assembly and freedom of information and opinion, restrict the exercise of the rights of association and syndication and impose censorship on correspondence and communications.

The article went on to state that with regards to the courts:

Appeal for protection shall not proceed in states of exception with respect to acts of authority adopted subject to the Constitution and the laws that affect the constitutional rights and guarantees that, in accordance to the rules governing said states, may have been suspended or restricted. ... In the cases of the previous paragraphs, the courts of justice may not, in any case, enter to qualify the factual basis of the measures that the authority has

The center-left governments that have ruled for 24 of the past 30 years since the return to civilian rule in 1990 kept these provisions, albeit in modified form. The reason why must be clearly understood so workers and youth do not fall into the deadly trap of believing that reforming the charter will guarantee democratic and social rights or change class relations. Far from it.

Under capitalism, the purpose of the Constitution is first and foremost to uphold and protect the sanctity of the private ownership of the means of production. Private property is consecrated even in the revolutionary documents of the French and American constitutions that are imbued with the spirit of Enlightenment. The 18th century constitutions and the principles they articulate were the cause and the effect of a national revolutionary struggle between feudalism and the forces of reaction against the great mass of the nation, given political leadership by the then revolutionary bourgeoisie.

But with the further development of the productive forces arose sharp and irreconcilable antagonisms between the two main classes within the international capitalist economic order: capital and labor.

The rapid expansion of the proletariat in Chile took place alongside the explosive development of capitalism sponsored by incursions of imperialism into Latin America in the late 19th and 20th centuries. British and American capitalism dominated the technology, supplies, railroads, shipping and finance associated with their almost complete control of Chile's nitrate and copper mines.

At no point has there ever been a sector of the Chilean capitalist class that sought to rally the nation in an anti-imperialist bourgeois revolution. This class, which consisted of the wealthiest landowners and simultaneously constituted between a third to half the parliament, happily lived off mining export revenues and never hesitated to drown revolutionary struggles in blood in the interests of mining barons.

The struggle against imperialist domination and superexploitation and for the defense of democratic and civil rights and for social gains has been left exclusively to the proletariat. The working class must be organized in opposition to the bloodstained, ruthless and venal Chilean bourgeoisie utterly subordinate to its imperialist masters.

What the working class has lacked in its entire history is a leadership able to transform an insurgent class struggle into the fight for the conquest of power.

Outside a brief window with the founding of the Chilean section of the Communist International in 1922, the young, untested and inexperienced cadre of the PCCh came under the influence of the rightward shift that accompanied the rise of the Stalinist bureaucracy in the Soviet Union. It was soon co-opted into the state and participated in drafting the 1925 constitution as the country, in the middle of a deep economic crisis provoked by the collapse of saltpeter exports and declining British imperialist interests, was in the throes of explosive labor struggles and a military revolt.

Preparations for dictatorship

When Piñera decreed for the first time in the 30 years of civilian rule a state of emergency and brought the armed forces onto the streets, this shocked the country, and it drew international attention. The unprecedented police-state violence resulted in untold numbers of deaths and thousands of injuries and mutilations, the reports of mock executions, rape, torture and torture chambers, of severe beatings resulting in death

and forced disappearances.

However this was only the most visible component of Piñera's "war" against "a powerful, ruthless enemy."

In the past year and a half, with the tacit and explicit endorsement from Congress, the ultraright government has passed more than a dozen laws beefing up the state, revamping anti-terror laws, utilizing the military to impose order, granting legal immunity to the repressive forces, erecting multi-institutional and multinational intelligence and surveillance task forces, and criminalizing social protest, targeting refugees, indigenous communities and the youth. All these measures are beginning to take form and are being used today.

For the first time since the military dictatorship, the country has been kept in a permanent state of emergency with tens of thousands of national defense forces controlling checkpoints in the 16 regions. The measure was sanctioned by Congress last March to contain the spread of the pandemic. In reality, it has been used to monitor and control the population.

Also the Army has been deployed to protect critical infrastructure, and the Marines, armed with the latest military equipment, have been deployed to reinforce Carabinero police in border control and surveillance.

And last February, parliament approved the dispatch of military personnel and a massive battery of armored vehicles to reinforce Carabinero Special Forces in the south. Ostensibly aimed at countering a wave of violence and acts of terrorism, which the government and the corporate media have without evidence accused the Mapuche indigenous population of inciting, the armed forces will provide intelligence and conduct policing operations in the regions of La Araucanía, Biobío and Los Ríos.

The bourgeoisie has used the constitutional convention as a deliberate decoy to grant itself time to prepare for the inevitable social eruption that will come as a result of the criminal mishandling of the pandemic and the unprecedented growth of unemployment, poverty and social inequality.

This is the significance of the increasingly indiscriminate use of the armed forces, and it must scream danger! The drive to dictatorship is real and far advanced.

The only progressive alternative lies in the political mobilization of the working class and youth in the fight for a workers' government based on a revolutionary socialist program. This means breaking with the entire fake left and developing an independent political movement of the working class.

Chilean workers must turn to their international class brothers and sisters who are their true allies, adopting a program of world socialist revolution and building a section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, the party founded by Leon Trotsky.



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