

Chile's ruling right wing suffers crushing defeat in election of Constitutional Convention

Mauricio Saavedra
21 May 2021

Last weekend's Constitutional Convention election in Chile saw a crushing defeat for the ruling right wing and the traditional parliamentary opposition in the selection of 155 constituent seats. The results reveal both a deepening of the leftward shift among the masses and the urgent necessity for the working class to break with dangerous illusions in the parliamentary road promoted by the Communist Party and Frente Amplio and their satellite pseudo-left organizations.

Only 40 percent of the eligible electorate voted in the multi-elections that included posts for regional governors, municipal mayors and councilors. The Constitutional Convention will have up to a year to draft a new constitution, the key provisions of which must be approved by a two-thirds majority. After that, another national referendum will decide whether or not to accept the new constitution.

Those that voted overwhelmingly sought candidates who promised to inscribe in the nation's new charter guarantees to public health, an education and pension system, democratic rights, an end to social inequality, the redistribution of wealth, environmental protections and indigenous rights.

It needs to be said from the outset that capitalism cannot guarantee any of these demands because it is a system based on social inequality and exploitation. Illusions in bankrupt reformist myths are all the more dangerous today as capitalist governments, from the most powerful imperialist nations to the semi-colonial countries, deal with political, health and social crises by "letting it rip."

With the coronavirus pandemic, "democracies" as varied as Spain and India, France and the US have guaranteed only wanton death. The deliberate implementation of herd immunity policies that put profits above the lives of millions has permitted the global financial and corporate elite to increase their wealth by US\$4 trillion to \$14 trillion in the last year—while workers and their families have had to eat into savings, suffer depression-level unemployment, and see loved ones die in understaffed and under-resourced hospitals and have been forced to send unvaccinated children to school.

Confronted in the last two years with explosive industrial action and an eruption of the international class struggle, bourgeois governments of all types are flirting with authoritarian, conspiratorial and fascist forms of rule and externalizing their crises of rule by menacing border conflicts and regional wars.

Chile is no exception. Right-wing billionaire President Sebastian Piñera turned to the military to deal with the social eruption of 2019 and decreed a state of emergency for the first time since the return to civilian rule. With the support of Congress, Piñera also passed draconian laws beefing up the repressive apparatus and allowing the

use of the military for policing measures. A case has been presented to the International Criminal Court by a group of human rights organizations charging Piñera and civilian and military authorities with crimes against humanity for the police repression that resulted in 36 deaths, disappearances, hundreds mutilated and injured and thousands of human rights abuses, atrocities which continue to this day.

While professing to oppose the government and threatening legal charges against it, the entire parliamentary left including the Frente Amplio coalition and the Stalinist Communist Party unions came to the rescue by offering to work with the beleaguered Piñera government and overseeing national unity peace talks.

They did this to divert the massive anti-capitalist demonstrations into harmless appeals to change the constitution imposed under the dictatorship of Gen. Augusto Pinochet. A general strike in mid-November 2019 forced on the Stalinist-dominated union confederation, the CUT, proved to be the last called, as an agreement between the parliamentary right and left laid the groundwork for the plebiscite, held last October, challenging the authoritarian constitution.

From then on, the left and CUT initiated token protests and stunts achieving only the dissipation of workers' militancy, while the unions in mining, Chile's most important industry, entered into roundtable discussions agreeing to wage freezes and took no industrial action despite the spread of COVID-19 in key mining towns.

Amid the carnage caused by the coronavirus pandemic in Chile—with 1.5 million confirmed and suspected COVID-19 cases over the past 14 months and 35,000 confirmed and suspected deaths—communities rioted against hunger, the lack of running water, government negligence, and indiscriminate police violence. Distribution committees and soup kitchens spontaneously emerged to meet the dire needs of the population.

The parliamentary left and the trade union bureaucracy again sought to divert these initiatives with populist appeals and political stunts.

One was in favor of a series of laws permitting withdrawals from contributions to private pension funds. In reality, the working and middle classes were underwriting their own economic hardship (some US\$50 billion has been withdrawn from the AFPs).

Another political stunt was the promotion of a one-time 2.5 percent levy on the super-rich and a temporary 3 percent increase in the corporate tax rate, which, even if passed in the Senate, will prove thoroughly inadequate to finance a so-called basic income for destitute households. Meanwhile, Chile's billionaires doubled their wealth

during the pandemic from \$21 billion in March 2020 to \$42.7 billion in April 2021.

Yet another is a Royalty Bill on copper sales approved at the committee level in the lower house on April 26, three weeks before the constituent elections. In the proposed bill, royalties slide from a marginal rate of 15 percent when the copper prices rise above US\$2.00 per lb. to 75 percent when prices exceed US\$4.00 per lb. This last maneuver has raised concerns among the mining giants, though it is unlikely to pass in the Senate.

It came as a surprise to no one, except possibly a section of the elite, that both the incumbent right and the traditional parliamentary left would suffer a significant setback in the election held over the May 15-16 weekend. In the October plebiscite, 78 percent had voted to repeal Pinochet's charter and to elect a constitutional convention. Moreover, poll after poll has shown that the population despises the establishment parties, the courts and the repressive institutions—Piñera's support has remained in the single and low double digits for two years.

President Piñera's extreme-right coalition "Chile Vamos," made up of late Gen. Augusto Pinochet's civilian accomplices from National Renovation and the UDI, as well as the fascistic Republican Party, garnered only 39 out of the total 155 constituent seats, an insufficient number to make up the one-third vote required to veto changes.

The center-left "Approve" coalition, made up of the Socialist Party, the Christian Democrats, the Party for Democracy and the Radical Party, which governed for 24 of the last 30 years of civilian rule, won a mere 25 seats.

While the "Approve Dignity" coalition of the Stalinist Communist Party (PCCh) and the pseudo-left Frente Amplio (Broad Front) garnered only 27 seats, they likely will receive backing from the 48 independent constituents, many of whom are from Stalinist-aligned social organizations, as well as the 17 indigenous representatives with reserved positions.

The danger lies in the unfounded expectation that the Stalinists and pseudo-left will fight for the interests of the working class and impoverished masses. These parties and their satellites, many of whom ran as independents, are led by layers of the upper-middle class tied to the capitalist state or who wish to be integrated into the state and derive sustenance from it. They all are proven guardians of capitalist private property.

Chile's Stalinist Communist Party (PCCh) has a long historic record in this regard, having paved the way to the 1973 military coup and the violent repression of the Chilean working class by subordinating its struggles to the so-called "parliamentary road to socialism" and the bourgeois Popular Unity coalition government of Salvador Allende.

Chile under Pinochet was a laboratory for the social counterrevolution that spread worldwide with capitalist globalization. The "renovated left" and trade union bureaucrats readily accommodated themselves to the new normal in the 1980s, abandoning even the pretense of social reforms during the so-called democratic transition from military rule. If the Stalinists didn't participate in the coalitions that governed during the first two decades of the return to civilian rule in 1990, it wasn't due to some principled opposition.

Fast forward to the 21st century and these organizations rest on a new social base composed of the upper-middle class—bureaucrats and functionaries, professionals, academics, journalists, lawyers, celebrities—who promote identity politics as the means of climbing up the political, social and income ladder. With this in mind, they are

presenting "gender parity" in the Constitutional Convention and other state institutions and indigenous and minority representation as an illustration of a progressive, democratic victory when the entire parliamentary exercise has been given the imprimatur of imperialist reaction.

The Economist, mouthpiece of British imperialism since the 1840s, wrote in March, "Chile is embarking on a potentially constructive process of redefinition... In a country where politicians and institutions, from the Catholic church to the police, are discredited, the process is almost as important as the product. There are important novelties: the assembly must have broadly equal numbers of women and men, 17 seats are reserved for indigenous people and several candidates standing for independent lists are likely to be chosen..."

The influential US imperialist think tank the Council on Foreign Relations was more categorical in a report issued earlier this month:

Gender parity in the Constitutional Assembly could also represent the first step towards **equal access to positions of power and decision-making processes** for women. ... Such commitments to political inclusion are necessary to strengthen Chile's democracy and to meet the long-neglected needs of its most vulnerable citizens. ... But no matter the result, the inclusion of women and indigenous groups at unprecedented levels is a step towards true democratic governance ... (emphasis added).

Rewriting the constitution will not bring an end to the capitalist crisis, the class struggle or the threat of dictatorship in Chile. Nor can the capitalist state be reformed, refounded or "democratized." Rather, it must be must be overthrown by the working class in the fight to establish a new state based on workers' control.

The critical question confronting the Chilean working class and youth is that of revolutionary leadership. A new party must be built based upon the genuine program of revolutionary international socialism fought for by the International Committee of the Fourth International. Founded by Leon Trotsky, only this international party has defended the political continuity of Marxism through its implacable fight against Stalinism, Social Democracy, Pabloite revisionism and every other form of nationalist anti-Marxism. To take the revolutionary fight forward in Chile youth and workers must study these strategic political and theoretical experiences and draw the necessary conclusions.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact