

“This party needs to expand otherwise how can we change the whole situation”

Chilean exile supports SEP campaign against Australia’s anti-democratic electoral laws

Eduardo Ballesteros
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Eugenia Torrealba, 70, came to Australia in 1987, after living under Augusto Pinochet’s military dictatorship for 14 years. With a background in medical sciences, she learnt English and studied social sciences at the University of South Australia and ultimately became a family relationship counsellor.

Torrealba is an electoral member of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) and joins in the SEP’s campaign to defeat Australia’s anti-democratic electoral laws, which were rammed through parliament on August 26. As part of the campaign the SEP is holding a public meeting Sunday, October 31. [Click here to register.](#)

To join the SEP campaign against the legislation, sign up as an electoral member today.

Eugenia was studying obstetrics and paediatrics at the University of Chile in Valparaíso when the Popular Unity government of Salvador Allende was toppled by a US-backed military coup d’état in 1973.

“That year I was elected as a head of the student union. The year before I was already working as the secretary of the union trying to make changes in allowing students to decide about subjects, but also promoting access to people with low incomes to study.

“I was the only member of a political party at that school. It was called MAPU [*Movimiento de Acción Popular Unitario*—Popular Unitary Action Movement], but it doesn’t exist anymore [following the ban on political parties after the coup]. The academics didn’t like it at all. The doctors and dentists were very conservative, right-wing people,” she told the WSW.

“I was living with my mum’s younger sister and her

husband and children. My aunty and uncle were supporters of Allende’s government and members of the Socialist Party of Chile. Our house was raided on the day of the coup, and they had orders to arrest all the adults. But they didn’t arrest me because they thought I was a child. It was horrible,” she continued.

“Some people were taken by surprise,” she said, “because they thought that the army was apolitical and would not do anything. This was the line of the Popular Front government, that the military were the people in uniform.

“The Communist Party has a lot to answer, twisting history, creating illusions and myths. All their nationalistic views, the promotion that you could build socialism from within the capitalist system and within one country. How can you? The nation-state is part of the capitalist system.

“Allende didn’t want to hear the working people who were organised. They were warning that the military was going to seize power. And he said no, no, no, and asked Pinochet himself, ‘Do you think there is anything being plotted against me?’ But they did, and it was a big price that the people paid,” she said.

Eugenia explained that her aunt was taken to La Esmeralda, an infamous Chilean naval ship that was used to torture political prisoners, and her uncle transported by ship to Pisagua, an internment camp in northern coastal Chile where many political prisoners were executed and or “disappeared.” While her aunt was released, her uncle remained a prisoner—first in Pisagua and then in Valparaíso—until 1975 when he fled during a brief period that allowed people to apply for

exile.

“I stayed in Valparaiso in the period between my uncle’s arrest and his family’s exile in 1975,” Eugenia said. “During that time, I got married and had kids but was not allowed to finish my studies because I was considered a ‘danger to the entire security of the university.’ The mentality was, ‘Anyone who is not with us is against us.’ That’s what they did with many young people.

“Even in 1975, when I tried for the last time, I was given a piece of paper saying that my application to be reinstated was not accepted and was told by one functionary, ‘You’re not too ugly, you’re still good looking and you can find a husband. Why do you need to study?’ When I persisted another official said, ‘If you want the reasons I can take you to the army barracks.’ So that was it.”

While Eugenia met a representative of the Socialist Labour League (SLL), the forerunner of the SEP in Australia, during the early 1990s, she had already become aware of Trotsky while still living in Chile.

“I’m an exception to the rule because I never liked the Communist Party and secondly, somebody smuggled to me a couple of books by Leon Trotsky, in particular *The Permanent Revolution*. Me being a rational, logical and scientific person, this material all made sense.

“All of the concepts that the SEP stands for: internationalism; for the working class, are things that can be difficult to comprehend for a lot of people because it challenges their preconceptions. But now with the pandemic you can see very clearly that it is a world crisis, not simply an issue for Australia or Chile, much less for Adelaide or Santiago. My world is part of the rest of the world.

“You cannot disconnect yourself from what happens to the workers of China or Indonesia, etc. We have far more in common with the workers of the United States than we have with the US government,” she said.

The US-led drive to war against China, she added, was Washington “making external enemies to cover up the mess that capitalism has created in all countries. COVID has shown all the holes in the capitalist system; all the things that are supposed to be working are not working.”

Referring to Australia’s new electoral laws, Eugenia said: “They’ve sold us the sweet pill for a long time

but there’s no more sugar. Now they’re using ‘the hard hand’ and increasing repression. These are very antidemocratic laws and show that Australia is not a democracy.

“Democracy is not something that gets given to you and stays there, as we in Chile know very well. Under capitalism, they go from being apparently democratic to using more repressive ways of ruling because they don’t want change. Unless you change the whole system that is centred on profit-making, there’s not going to be justice, there’s not going to be better health and education.

“Look at what the New South Wales premier is doing with COVID-19, hastening the opening up of borders. He’s saying, ‘You get sick and die but I don’t care as long as we’re making profit’ and anybody who says otherwise will be silenced.”

The SEP, she concluded, “needs to expand otherwise how can we change the whole situation. There needs to be a political party that has the clarity to be fighting against the political system at a world level. It’s necessary to present these ideas to young people and encourage them to form rank-and-file committees and connect struggles with one another like the teachers in Britain.

“A lot of things need to happen but they’re not going to happen if we go home and cry. They [the ruling elites] would like people to do nothing but that’s not how you change a system and create a world of possibilities for our great grandchildren and our great, great grandchildren. That will be our heritage.”



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