Questions over May Day demonstration shootings in Santiago, Chile: Who ordered the attack on unarmed protesters?

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So brazen are the forces of repression in Chile—due to the infinitesimally small probability of being charged with human rights crimes—that Carabineros Special Forces nonchalantly provided protection to at least 11 gunmen and dozens of other right-wing gangsters, who in broad daylight shot at and threw projectiles at unarmed demonstrators commemorating May Day in Santiago, Chile.

The actions of the riot police and other state forces in protecting these criminals are all the more brazen given that hundreds of smart phones were there to capture these events.

Five people, including three journalists from independent media organizations, were shot at while reporting on the demonstrations. One reporter, Francisca Sandoval from independent media *Señal 3 La Victoria*, was rushed to the capital's main emergency hospital after receiving a bullet to the face. She remains in critical condition. Another reporter, known as Aby, of *Radio 7 Bajos de Mena*, was also shot in the shoulder with live ammunition, and three others were taken to the same hospital.

In an interview for *La Red*, Benjamín Lillo, director of *Señal 3*, said that the gunmen "were shooting directly at us. Of the five people who were injured, three are from the independent press. The attack was premeditated."

There is every reason to believe that this attack was premeditated and politically motivated. One of the recently identified assailants has connections to the fascistic Republican Party.

Authorities had granted permission for the Central Clasista de los Trabajadores y Trabajadoras (Class-conscious Workers' Central, CCTT)—an anarcho-syndicalist organization ostensibly created in opposition to the official trade union apparatus, the corporatist Central Unitaria Trabajadora (CUT)—to hold a counter-march to the CUT's official rally.

The shootings occurred at midday as the CCTT rally moved away from the city on Bernardo O'Higgins Avenue, Santiago's main thoroughfare, and had reached a spot known as Barrio Meiggs, a neighborhood that has become notorious because of its connection with organized crime. In that neighborhood hundreds of ambulant stores in blue tarpaulins are daily set up by desperate petty shopkeepers trying to eke out an existence. Here deeply oppressed, declassed and criminal layers comingle. From these elements cops hatch their informants and assets.

Although having earlier received permission and garnered a police escort until that point, the marchers found themselves unexpectedly confronted with being shot at by a throng of criminal elements that surfaced from the makeshift blue tarps on the north side of Bernardo O'Higgins Avenue, and on the other side with a thicket of Carabinero Special Forces, equipped with water cannon trucks and armored vehicles.

In the surreal situation that unfolded, which is possible only in a country where the police have complete license to commit crime with impunity, Carabineros not only did not arrest a single gunman but cracked down on the marchers with tear gas and water cannon.

In an interview, Aby, one of the injured journalists, explained that she and a member of a human rights brigade who came to her assistance had to beg the police to allow her to receive medical attention.

Another member of the independent media,

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photographer Manuel Iturra, witnessed Sandoval being shot. He told *Agencia Uno* that he approached the Carabineros to warn them that the marchers were being fired at but was totally ignored. “Behind me came another colleague raising the same concerns, and they ignored him. The only thing we achieved at that moment was for the Carabineros to tear gas and drench us with contaminated water on the south sidewalk, where we and the demonstrators were. Meanwhile, we were being shot at from the north sidewalk.”

Special Forces had been mobilized to deal with disturbances that were occurring at exactly the same place and time as the column of marchers was passing through Barrio Mieggs. Dozens of hooded men uniformly dressed in black began breaking into the strip mall stores closed for the May Day public holiday and proceeded to erect barricades with the ransacked goods and furniture. It remains to be verified if they were *agents provocateurs*, but it created the intended effect of associating their actions with the march.

Christian Democrat-linked *Cooperativa* wrote, “Parallel to the march organized by the [CUT] which marched from Plaza Baquedano along the Alameda to the west, a second demonstration—or ‘counter march’—of the (CCTT) took place, which resulted in looting of commercial premises in Estación Central, in addition to the burning of the blue tarps installed in the Barrio Meiggs sector and confrontations with Carabineros personnel.” The other right-wing corporate and state-run media followed suit in the misinformation campaign.

In the three days since, demonstrators and independent media have uploaded on social media a mass of photos and videos showing just how closely the Carabineros worked with the anticommunist gunmen and criminals.

It can be safely said that without the independent media groups identifying at least 11 gunmen, not one would have been arrested. As it is, only three have been arrested: Marcelo Naranjo was booked and placed in preventive detention for shooting Francisca Sandoval; and Luis Flores and Yonaiker Fuenmayor were booked and placed under house arrest for illegally carrying and using firearms. The gunmen responsible for shooting the other four victims remain at large.

“The family expresses its rejection and repudiation of the actions of the Prosecutor’s Office, which did not request preventive detention for carrying, possession and shooting against the demonstrators,” declared the Sandoval family’s lawyer.

He continued: “The family wants to express its rejection of the opportunistic acts of the Minister of the Interior (Izkia Siches), who was present yesterday to talk with them, and other political operators of the government, who have sought to come here to lower the profile of the situation and not assume their responsibility for the actions of the Carabineros, who acted in collusion and protected the gangsters.”

While the parliamentary left sectors of the government have made empty noises calling for an investigation into the police, calling for the resignation of the director of Carabineros, and even dredging up the call to “refound” or “democratize” the institution, the pseudo-left administration of Gabriel Boric has felt no compunction to follow suit.

On the contrary, this Wednesday the Ministry of the Interior seized on Sunday’s shooting spree to fully back the Carabineros and its chief and to announce measures to increase police presence in the Metropolitan Region and in the regions. This, they reason, is necessary to strengthen the National Intelligence System “in order to have a State with information that will allow us to anticipate conflicts.”

The *World Socialist Web Site* condemns the shooting of the unarmed protesters and journalists in Chile last Sunday. This vile criminal act bears all the hallmarks of a provocation aimed at immediately inciting a riot. In the longer term, it is an attempt to intimidate an increasingly insurgent working class and youth, who struggle against continual police-state repression and harassment, the soaring cost of living, derelict social infrastructure and obscene levels of social inequality.

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