

# Evidence presented in 1973 murder of Chilean poet Pablo Neruda

Rafael Azul  
13 March 2023

Following a 12-year investigation, firm evidence has been established that Chilean poet Pablo Neruda was poisoned in Santiago's Santa María Clinic on September 23, 1973.

His death took place 12 days after the country's Popular Unity government, led by Salvador Allende, was ousted in a US-backed military coup that put Gen. Augusto Pinochet in charge of a brutal and bloody dictatorship. He died the day before he was set to leave Chile and go into political exile.

The official story at the time attributed the poet's death to advanced prostate cancer and malnutrition. While some suspected then that Neruda had been murdered, it has taken 50 years to establish the truth. The winner of the 1971 Nobel Prize for literature, the Chilean poet, diplomat, and Stalinist politician had indeed been poisoned.

At the time of the poet's death, witnesses to his hospitalization reported seeing Neruda injected with an unknown substance. Clandestine photos taken by a reporter confirmed that Neruda was not emaciated, thus debunking claims that his death stemmed from advanced cancer.

Neruda's former driver, Manuel Araya Osorio, gave an interview to the Mexican magazine *Proceso* in 2011 in which he testified that he was with Neruda at the clinic when he called his wife and told her he had been given an injection and believed that his doctors had been ordered to poison him.

A forensic investigation by a panel of judges and experts has confirmed that Neruda was in fact poisoned by an injection into his chest of *Clostridium botulinum*, a bacterial poison associated with botulism. Two labs, in Canada and Denmark found the deadly agent in one of Neruda's molars and in a femur in 2017. They completed the presentation of their findings to a Chilean tribunal last month.

This botulinic poison would later be used against political prisoners of the regime; in 2017, five former military officers of the regime were tried and found guilty of using such a biological agent against opponents of the Pinochet regime in a Santiago jail.

A Chilean judge will have the final say on the evidence pertaining to the cause of Neruda's death.

Neruda was a leading member of the Chilean Communist Party, having been elected in 1945 as a CP candidate for senator for the northern provinces of Antofagasta and Tarapacá.

In the early 1970s, he became a prominent supporter of Chilean President Salvador Allende and his Popular Unity (UP) Socialist Party-Communist Party coalition, serving as its ambassador to France from 1970 to 1972.

Allende, the UP and the Communist Party-led trade unions called for a peaceful "Chilean road to socialism," with the gradual nationalization of private businesses. During its 1,000 days in power, under the hammer blows of an economic implosion, a spontaneous movement of the working class established *Cordones Industriales* (Industrial Commissions) which proceeded to occupy factories, farms and mines, and place them under workers' control.

The response of the UP government, the Communist and Socialist parties, and the Trade Unions was to betray that movement, relying on the Armed Forces to repress it; thus, paving the way for the September 1973 coup. Eager to dissipate the revolutionary struggle of Chilean workers, Allende and Neruda fostered illusions in the military, criminally describing the Armed Forces as "the people in uniform."

The Pinochet dictatorship (1973-1990) declared all opponents of the regime "enemies of the state." Claiming to represent the majority of Chileans—while in fact defending the interests of the US financial oligarchy, the copper mining multinational corporations, the CIA and US imperialism, along with Chile's ruling oligarchy—it kidnapped, disappeared, murdered and drove into exile tens of thousands of workers and left-wing opponents of the regime.

## Spanish Revolution

Neruda belonged to a layer of Latin American writers and intellectuals that was profoundly affected by the Spanish Revolution (1936-1939), and the failure of the working class to take power. The sequence of events between the fascist military uprising in 1936 and the beginning of the rule of Francisco Franco in 1939, which included the violent assassination of Andalusian poet and playwright Federico Garcia Lorca, impacted the lives and work of Latin American workers and

intellectuals. Many of them had joined international brigades to fight on the side of the Spanish working class. Neruda's poetry, reflecting Lorca's execution at the hands of Franco's fascists and the events of the Spanish Civil war, was profoundly transformed.

A layer of intellectuals, artists and writers, disenchanted and having lost confidence in the revolutionary potential of the working class, turned to Stalinism. In addition to Neruda, these artists included Cuban poet Nicolas Guillen and Peruvian poet Cesar Vallejo.

This pessimism toward the working class was expressed in anguished poetry dedicated to the combatants, to the world's children and to Spanish poets, by the above authors, including Guillen's *España, poema en cuatro angustias y una esperanza* (Spain, poem in four torments and one hope) Neruda's *España en mi Corazón* (Spain in my heart) and Cesar Vallejo's *España, aparta de mí este cáliz*. (Spain, take this cup away from me).

By placing their blame on the church, the monarchy, the wealthy, and even the Moors, these three works of poetry exemplify a general whitewashing of the criminal role played by Stalinism in the betrayal and defeat of the Spanish Revolution. Neruda would become a loyal follower of Stalin; he even collaborated in the plot to assassinate Leon Trotsky in Mexico City in August 1940.

## Ode to Stalin

In 1953, the year of Stalin's death, Neruda affirmed his support in a lengthy poem, *Oda a Stalin* (Ode to Stalin), elevating Stalin, the "grave-digger" of the revolution above its leader, Vladimir Lenin.

Neruda's Ode is a complete and criminal falsification of Stalin's real role, opposing Lenin and Trotsky, in the 1917 Russian Revolution and Bolshevik internationalism. His policies were directly responsible for the defeat of the German working class and the rise of Hitler, and for the disarming and crushing of the Spanish proletariat, as powerfully depicted in literature by George Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia*.

Throughout his political life, Neruda demonstrated total indifference to the many crimes of Stalin, including the Moscow Trials and the extermination of the generation that led the October 1917 revolution, the assassination of Andrés Nin in Spain, the Stalin-Hitler pact and the suppression of the Hungarian workers' revolt of 1956.

While there is little evidence that Neruda was directly involved in the August 20, 1940, assassination of Leon Trotsky, he participated indirectly, using his role as a diplomat in Madrid, Paris, and Mexico City to aid the Stalinist secret police. It is well known that he used his diplomatic credentials

to help the Stalinist Mexican muralist David Alfaro Siqueiros flee Mexico after he led a gang in a machine-gun assault on Trotsky's compound, the first unsuccessful attempt to assassinate the revolutionary leader in Mexico City in May of 1940.

## Post-dictatorship, Neruda's legacy

Following the end of the Pinochet dictatorship in 1990, Chile went through periods of economic development and inflationary crisis (largely tied to the export prices of copper and agricultural products) together with increasing socioeconomic inequality that continues to aggravate social tensions.

The governments that followed, including those joined by the successors of Allende's Unidad Popular (Socialist and Communist party elements in the government and in the trade unions), have pursued neo-liberal financial policies, attacks on health care and social benefits, while, at every turn, sabotaging the struggle of miners, dock workers, farm workers and students.

This includes the current Apruebo Dignidad government, an alliance which includes the Socialist and Communist parties along with layers of the Chilean petty-bourgeois pseudo-left, led by President Gabriel Boric. It uses pseudo-left phrases along with the politics of identity (such as feminism and indigenous nationalism) as a cover for its defense of capitalist interests, its hostility to asylum rights and immigration, its reliance on the armed forces of the state against workers struggles, and its close foreign policy relationship with the United States. In essence, it continues to pursue a right-wing program that apes that of the Pinochet regime.

As workers enter into a new upsurge of revolutionary struggles, it is vital that they politically arm themselves with an understanding of the counterrevolutionary history and legacy of Stalinism, which Neruda worshipped.



To contact the WSW and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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