

Behind Boric's defeat and strengthening of fascists in vote on Chile's constitution

Mauricio Saavedra
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On May 7, Chileans went to the polls for a second time to decide on replacing the country's authoritarian constitution after the first proposed draft, falsely coined by the liberal press as the "most progressive constitution in the world," was resoundingly rejected last September.

The pseudo-left coalition government of President Gabriel Boric suffered a punishing defeat in the latest compulsory elections. Boric's governing coalition, *Unidad para Chile* (Unity for Chile), which includes the Communist (PCCh), Broad Front (FA), and Socialist (PS) parties, barely managed to win 16 of 50 seats to the constitutional council—an insufficient number to block proposals, much less make changes to the current charter. This is in keeping with the declining approval rating for the administration, which according to polls is now languishing at under 30 percent.

The election also saw the traditional center-left wiped out. The traditional center-left coalition *Todo por Chile* (All for Chile), which, allied with the PS, had governed since the return to civilian rule, did not win a single seat, demonstrating yet again that this political corpse is kept alive through artificial means, namely their incessant and overrepresented coverage in the bourgeois press and by Boric placing them in leading positions in his cabinet.

In an ominous sign, the political party to receive the most votes was the fascist Republicans, a choice that Chilean capitalism has opted for in the past. The Republican Party, founded in 2019 by José Antonio Kast, the son of a Nazi German officer and admirer of US president Donald Trump, won 23 seats on the constitutional council.

With the 11 seats of *Safe Chile* (*Chile Seguro*), the coalition of ultra-right, free-market forces that include the political heirs of the dictatorship of Gen. Augusto Pinochet in the Independent Democratic Union (UDI) and National Renovation (RN) parties, the right wing will have a two-third's majority, enabling them to maintain intact Pinochet's constitution or insert even more authoritarian articles.

The victory of Kast, a *Pinochetista* with deep Nazi roots and a favorite of the corporate and financial world, rallied the markets. The *Wall Street Journal* enthused that "the Santiago stock exchange rose 2.3% as investors became more confident that Chile wouldn't make far-reaching changes to an economic model they credit for years of strong growth."

Kast boasted that "Chileans have gone to the ballot box to give a strong and clear signal about the path that they want for our country."

Kast's triumphalism is contradicted by the immense number who either consciously voided their ballot (more than 2.1 million voters who rejected all the lists!), left their ballots blank (over half a million voters), and who abstained despite threat of a hefty fine (almost 2.3 million people.) Altogether they accounted for a third of the 15.1 million-strong electorate.

This is under conditions where the working class confronts an increase in the official unemployment rate to 8.8 percent, a 24 percent increase in the cost of the basic food basket over the last year, wage readjustments below inflation for most of the last two decades and a fiscal monetary policy that cut spending by 23 percent in 2022.

The results indicate that the country not only remains deeply polarized, as it was in 2019 when an incipient revolutionary situation erupted to the surface, but that the Communist Party and the Broad Front, brought forward to save capitalism, are in record time becoming a spent force.

Four years after the 2019 mass rebellion, the Chilean and international working class have entered a new stage in the struggle against mass unemployment, deepening social inequality, high interest rates and skyrocketing inflation, amid a criminally negligent response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the drive towards war between nuclear armed powers.

Chile's constitutional process: a cynical bid to divert the class struggle

The profoundly cynical exercise to change the constitution was initiated three years ago as a conscious attempt by the political establishment to bring to a close the historic anti-capitalist demonstrations that swept the country in 2019 and which created the sharpest crisis of bourgeois rule since the mid 1980s.

In November of 2019, the Chilean parliamentary "left" entered into national unity talks with the beleaguered administration of right-wing president Sebastián Piñera to prevent it from collapsing.

With a new lease on life, the government shifted even further to the right, initiating a slate of law-and-order measures that would mark the remainder of its tenure, and of Boric's from the beginning.

Firstly, with Congressional approval, Piñera decreed a state of exception with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, curtailing freedom of movement and assembly. This placed the military in charge of checkpoints across the entire country, and curfews were imposed. These measures did nothing to protect the population from the virus that has killed over 61,000 and infected millions. Their purpose was to intimidate the population.

Piñera then sent to Congress a train of bills criminalizing social protest and allowing for violent crackdowns on working class communities, student protests and wildcat strikes. He also sent a dozen bills concretizing the police state. The all-encompassing bills included the strengthening of the intelligence apparatus by unifying the various departments from the armed forces and police and allowing for the mobilization of the military to secure "critical" public and private infrastructure.

Finally, Piñera stepped up an age-old campaign against the impoverished indigenous Mapuche communities, placing the southern region of Chile under a State of Exception in October 2021. The attack on the indigenous population was coupled with a vile anti-immigrant witch-hunt, which became one of the electoral issues around which all of the political parties sought to outdo each other.

It was in this polarized climate that Boric and Co. came forward. With the help of the corporatized trade unions dominated by the Stalinist PCCh and pseudo-left FA coalition, as well as their Morenoite satellites, Boric recycled for purely electoral purposes the false national reformist nostrum that the capitalist state, as a supposed arbiter of irreconcilable class contradictions, can gradually regulate the market at the national level and rein in the excesses of capitalism.

The *World Socialist Web Site* warned that the parties of the so-called “left” were committing a monumental fraud, especially the Stalinist PCCh, the second-oldest political party in Chile. As part of the Popular Unity government under Salvador Allende they had decapitated a revolution by straitjacketing the embryonic workers’ councils (*cordones industriales*) and other independent workers’ initiatives, opening the way for the fascist-military coup in 1973.

In October 2020, over 80 percent of the population voted in favor of a referendum to change the constitution imposed under Pinochet’s fascist civilian-military dictatorship and maintained by the traditional center-left.

Similarly, in the May 2021 elections for the 155 seats in the constitutional convention, the right and old center-left parties were reduced to a rump, while Stalinist, pseudo-left and Morenoite-aligned “progressive” academics, social activists, union bureaucrats, and middle class radicals won a two-third’s majority.

While only 40 percent of the eligible electorate voted, those who did so overwhelmingly sought candidates who promised to inscribe into the nation’s new charter guarantees to public health, education and pensions, an end to extreme social inequalities, a redistribution of wealth, environmental protections, an end to police repression and an expansion of rights.

Identity politics was a centerpiece of the pseudo-left’s campaign from the beginning of both the constitutional convention and the presidential election at the end of 2021. Touted as the most “progressive” constitution by swathes of the pseudo-left internationally and sections of the professional middle class and academia, its central thrust was to increase the size of the state, creating a new indigenous bureaucracy and guaranteeing gender parity in the civil service and the state.

In this vein, a deceitful campaign was launched to promote the PCCh-FA “Approve with Dignity” electoral pact as the only progressive means of preventing the coming to power of the fascist Kast in the December 2021 presidential runoff.

Fourteen months in office

Well before the March 11, 2022 inauguration, the Stalinist-pseudo-left “Approve with Dignity” (*Apruebo Dignidad*) coalition had revealed its true colors and *modus operandi*—Gabriel Boric, the face of the new administration, makes endless appeals for “dialogue,” a euphemism for accommodating his government with imperialism, the ultra-right and fascists, while brutally repressing the class struggle. His partners in the PCCh, meanwhile, issue demagogic denunciations of imperialism and the right.

On foreign policy Boric has openly aligned himself with the strategic objectives of US imperialism against Russia. He accused Russia of launching a war of aggression, while voicing no opposition to US-NATO expansion or Washington’s stated aim to inflict a strategic defeat upon and dismember the Russian Federation. With an equal display of toadyism, Boric denounces Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela for “authoritarianism,” but stays mum about the greatest threat in the Western Hemisphere, the United States.

Domestically the pseudo-left administration has complied with finance

capital’s demands by further integrating the old center-left political caste into his government and by implementing a fiscally tight monetary policy, ending stimulus programs to aid working and middle class families as inflation reaches levels not seen since 1992.

In the 14 months since coming to office, the pseudo-left government has also implemented the police-state laws of the previous government. Boric’s reaction to the outbreak of hunger riots, ongoing school occupations, strikes and indigenous land seizures in the course of the year has been to unleash the Carabinero special forces and deploy the Armed Forces—the institutions at the center of human rights violations on an industrial scale in the past 50 years.

The Boric administration has expanded the arsenal of the Carabinero forces as part of a 4.7 percent increase in the public order and security budget and ceded to the military an increased role in public order functions, including their deployment to protect “critical infrastructure.”

A permanent State of Exception has been decreed for the regions of Biobío and La Araucanía. This is a continuation of the militarization policy begun by the Piñera government, where the armed forces are being used in the southern regions against the indigenous Mapuche populations claiming ancestral lands.

More recently, the government ordered the deployment of the armed forces to the Peruvian and Bolivian borders. The measure authorizes the military to use force against mainly undocumented Venezuelan, Haitian and Colombian refugees fleeing humanitarian catastrophes caused by years of instability, largely due to US imperialist sanctions and meddling. Refugees began detouring into Chile in 2016 when their destination of choice, the US, was closed off by the resumption of mass deportations by the Obama administration, which has only escalated under Trump and now Biden.

The military is backing police patrols at the borders with Bolivia and Peru and is allowed to use lethal force against refugees. The scenes of Colombian and Venezuelan migrants being violently manhandled by Chilean and Peruvian forces in the Tacna-Arica regions that caught international media attention have become the new normal.

The most far reaching law—known as “*Naín-Retamal*”—gives the military and police a license to kill and provides retroactive legal immunity from prosecution for use of excessive and lethal force. Already, several cases have been dismissed by the courts.

Apruebo Dignidad’s shift from pledges to initiate “transformative” changes to police-state measures should serve as a lesson to the working class and the youth internationally as to the role of the pseudo-left and its promises of social reforms through the capitalist state.

More astute bourgeois politicians have recognized that the level of alienation and disenfranchisement revealed in the latest elections, coupled with a deepening economic crisis, portends social convulsions. So with much fanfare Congress passed three pieces of legislation that on the surface appear social reformist. The first reduces the working week from 45 to 40 hours. The second gradually increases the monthly minimum wage from the current 400,000 pesos (\$502 in current US dollars) to 500,000 (US\$628) by mid 2024. The third is a mining royalty bill that establishes a maximum tax burden on large mining operations that will collect up to US\$450 million.

The devil is in the details however. While more will be written on these laws, the first enshrines the further flexibility of labor and threatens penalty rates. The second does not reach the poverty line. The third has loopholes that allow the mining industry to avoid paying the paltry sums the law proposes to collect.

As the *WSWS* foretold, the political role played by the Stalinists, Broad Front and Morenoites has only emboldened the most right-wing and fascist forces, who feel they have the upper hand. The present dangerous political situation needs to be recognized and the lessons of the past assimilated by the working class as the first step in breaking from the

entire Chilean fake left.



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