

Jacobin promotes defeatist politics of Salvador Allende after far right wins vote in Chile

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On the year of the 50th anniversary of the CIA-backed coup which overthrew President Salvador Allende and installed the fascist-military dictatorship of Gen. Augusto Pinochet, *Jacobin* magazine is calling on the “left” to follow Allende’s example. This advice would condemn workers and youth, not only in Chile, but in the US and internationally, to an even worse fate today.

As the mouthpiece of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), a faction of the Democratic Party, *Jacobin* has invoked the disastrous legacy of Allende as a political model in response to the strengthening of Pinochet’s political heirs amid a deepening political crisis of the pseudo-left government of Chilean President Gabriel Boric, who was effusively endorsed by *Jacobin*.

Last month, the fascist Republican Party, whose leader Jose Antonio Kast is a rabid defender of “anyone who violated human rights” under Pinochet, and the Democratic Independent Union (UDI), the direct political heir of the 17-year-long dictatorship, won a sweeping victory in a national election. Together, they will control two-thirds of the seats in a “Constituent Council” that will re-draft the 1980 constitution imposed under Pinochet.

This electoral debacle for Boric’s government has taken place amid mass opposition among workers, youth and much of the middle class to Pinochet’s economic and political legacy. In October 2019, mass protests and several general strikes erupted against social inequality, as the culmination of earlier waves of mass strikes and protests against privatized pensions, the high cost of living, for free higher education and health care, indigenous land rights and other social and democratic issues.

The entire political establishment, including the Stalinist Communist Party and pseudo-left Broad Front that today lead the Boric administration, channeled these protests behind an “Agreement for Social Peace and a New Constitution” with then President Sebastián Piñera, a rightwing billionaire. (Both Kast and Piñera have brothers who were ministers under Pinochet.)

In 2020, nearly 80 percent of voters favored replacing the hated Pinochet constitution in a referendum in which half of Chileans abstained, demonstrating mass distrust in a mere reform of the capitalist state. The share of seats for the far right in the initial Constitutional Convention was only 23 percent, while most seats went to activists and local leaders tied to the pseudo-left.

Boric was elected in late 2021 after two rounds in which about half of Chileans again abstained, although participation was still higher than the historical average. The first round had been won by the fascist Kast, who ran largely as an opponent of the constituent process. Boric vowed since his acceptance speech to “build bridges” to the fascists. This is the only campaign promise he has faithfully maintained.

Like his predecessor, Boric has maintained a vaccine-only approach to

the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, placing profits over lives. He increased the security budget and backed the US-NATO sanctions and war against Russia. He deployed troops in the south against the Mapuches, and in the north against migrants, while responding to protests against the cost-of-living crisis, plant closures and layoffs by deploying anti-riot police to attack and arrest workers.

Meanwhile, the Constitutional Convention controlled by the pseudo-left drafted a proposal that turned a blind eye to all the main concerns that animated the social upsurge in 2019. It maintained the state repressive forces and their authoritarian powers, while using toothless environmental protections, a proposed indigenous bureaucracy tied to the state and gender parity as fig leaves to conceal its reactionary character. The proposal was rejected in September 2022 by a massive 63 percent of voters in a plebiscite that saw 85 percent participation.

Meanwhile, the Boric administration’s approval rating has fallen below 30 percent, and the pseudo-left suffered a major debacle at the hands of the fascists in the elections last month.

The victory of the far right in Chile’s “Constituent Council” election, like recent electoral defeats of Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain, demonstrates that the nominal “left,” including the trade union bureaucracy and its pseudo-left hangers-on, has been deeply discredited by its commitment to social austerity, war, and attacks on living standards and democratic rights.

One third of Chilean voters either abstained or cast blank or invalid votes, while the votes for the fascistic Republicans largely reflected the lack of an alternative to register opposition, not a sign of active support. Internationally, these results herald social convulsions of a revolutionary and international scope in the coming period.

Jacobin advocates further adaptations to far right

Jacobin has failed to draw any lessons from the electoral debacle, acquitting Boric of any responsibility, while advocating further adaptations to the far right, which includes promoting illusions in the prospect of a new constitution drafted by the fascists.

The DSA mouthpiece had fervently backed the Boric campaign and celebrated his election as “the best way to secure the aims of the social rebellion of October 2019.” At the time, the magazine appealed to all “single-issue groups alongside all social movements and willing political currents to set up a Popular Front for an Anti-Neoliberal Constitution.”

This course of action, which meant subordinating social opposition to the ruling coalition under Boric and the Stalinists, was the same one

followed by Allende's Popular Unity coalition, which sought above all to prevent the development of a genuine revolutionary and socialist alternative.

While 50 years ago, the Communist and Socialist parties were able to promote illusions in the Allende government within the Chilean working class, these parties and the pseudo-left backers of Boric enjoy nowhere near the same influence today.

Last month, *Jacobin* published an article titled "Chile has entered its Thermidorian Period." Its author, Marcelo Casals, argues for a policy of passivity and retreat.

Referring to the laws signed by Boric giving the police and military the right to shoot and ask questions later and his attacks on migrants, Casals writes that the "left" can only stand by and see "how effective Boric's attempt at political adaptation will be." Security and migration "have now become priority issues," and Boric supposedly has no option but to adapt to the far right.

On June 1, *Jacobin* published an interview with one of its writers, Aldo Maradiaga, who concludes that "we all know that we live in a capitalist system," but "there is too much willingness to see a particular process as the single defining cause that will change everything." In other words, capitalism, whose dictatorship over economic and political life will be guaranteed by any capitalist constitution, should not be challenged.

For his part, Casals denounces any criticism of the fact that the first Constitutional Convention was dominated by identity politics as being "out of step with the changes the Chilean left has undergone in recent decades."

The WSWS has designated these political tendencies as the "pseudo-left," explaining that they represent layers of the upper-middle class that employ identity politics and populist and nationalist demagoguery to pit workers against each other, isolating and betraying their struggles. In exchange for their services to the ruling elite, they demand a more favorable distribution of wealth and political positions for themselves.

Casals confirms this definition by describing a "left" milieu where "popular, working class aspirations" are ignored, and "simplistic and sometimes unfounded criticisms of republican egalitarianism" have attained an "outsized role."

Casals concludes by calling on these same layers to emulate Allende. Remember Allende's "patience and long-term vision," he pleads, pointing to "advances and setbacks taking place over several decades," "the slow accumulation of forces and the construction of a lasting hegemony."

Astoundingly, Casals, a Chilean historian, fails to make any analysis of the actual fate of Allende and his Popular Unity coalition, which was led by the Socialist and Communist Parties that now belong to the Boric government.

Allende's Popular unity government paved way to the 1973 coup

Jacobin's mythologizing of Allende is aimed at justifying its own support for both the Boric and Biden administrations. It deliberately covers up the role of the Popular Unity government in paving the way for the 1973 coup.

Under the slogan "The Chilean peaceful road to socialism," Allende worked to disarm, both politically and physically, the impoverished Chilean working class and peasant masses. With the Stalinist Communist Party playing the leading role, Popular Unity worked to contain a pre-revolutionary movement, involving widespread expropriations of factories, mines and land that were initially administrated and defended by democratic rank-and-file organizations of workers and peasants.

In order to safeguard the "hegemony" of the capitalist state, Allende and the Popular Unity leaders insisted on disbanding armed groups of workers and peasants, who faced brutal reprisals by fascist gangs. Right up until the coup itself, the leaders of Popular Unity proclaimed incessantly that the military and police would defend democracy and the will of the people. Meanwhile, Allende told workers to make "sacrifices," including working unpaid hours, for the sake of appeasing the far right and defending his "Chilean way."

Amid a mounting offensive orchestrated by the Nixon administration to destabilize the Allende government, including a goods and credit embargo, purges of the military, employer lockouts and other forms of sabotage and fascist provocations, workers responded time and again by expanding and consolidating their own organizations and control over the economy.

Despite implementing nationalizations in mining, banking and other sectors, as well as wage increases matching or even exceeding the rate of inflation, Allende made one wave of concessions after another to the far right in response to pressure from imperialism, the employers, the military and the Church.

At one of several key inflection points, a June 29, 1973 coup attempt by a tank regiment was beaten back mainly by the networks of rank-and-file workers' organizations called *Cordones Industriales*, which immediately began to take over thousands of plants and workplaces. Hundreds of thousands marched to the La Moneda Presidential Palace demanding "workers' power."

Allende responded that fateful day by pleading to workers to keep their trust in the military and Carabineros police. "Worker comrades: let's organize. Let's create, create popular power, but not against or independent of the government," he said in a speech following the coup attempt.

Allende and his partners deliberately demobilized such revolutionary counteroffensives by the working class, as the government pursued backroom talks with the Nixon administration, the military and the right-wing parties.

On September 11, 1973, the heads of all military branches, under the direction of General Pinochet, whom Allende himself had named as commander-in-chief, launched a coup meticulously prepared by the CIA and US military intelligence. Pinochet abolished democratic freedoms, banned all parties and workers' and peasants' organizations, and jailed and tortured their leaders and tens of thousands of rank-and-file militants, killing more than 3,000 people. Hundreds of thousands of Chileans were forced to flee into exile.

The chief responsibility for the absence of a genuinely revolutionary leadership in the working class in Chile lies with the Pabloite leadership of the United Secretariat.

For decades after its founding as the Chilean section of the Fourth International in 1938, the Workers Revolutionary Party (POR) established an important presence among key sectors of the working class in the country. In 1963, however, the POR joined the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) in a reunification with the Pabloites, who had abandoned Trotskyism and its perspective for the independent revolutionary mobilization of the working class in favor of adaptation to Stalinist, Castroite and other petty-bourgeois nationalist leaderships, which supposedly offered a new road to socialism. Soon after, the POR liquidated itself into the Left Revolutionary Movement (MIR), an amalgam of Maoist and Castro-Guevarist tendencies glorifying guerrilla warfare. The MIR then provided a crucial left prop for Popular Unity, disguised as "critical support."

Allende and the Democratic Party

By glorifying Allende, *Jacobin* and the DSA seek to provide a cover for the right-wing policies of Boric and for their own subservience to the Biden administration in the US, while working to prepare the same kind of criminal betrayals as Popular Unity.

Jacobin and the DSA have consistently apologized for Biden's agreements with the Republican Party to dismantle social programs, outlaw strikes, deport migrants and approve record military budgets as part of reckless war drives against Russia and China.

The American Republican Party, like its Chilean counterpart, is led by fascists. On January 6, 2021, former president Donald Trump, the Republican leadership and sections of the military and intelligence apparatus attempted to use the invasion of Congress by a fascist mob to annul the electoral victory of Biden, overthrow the Constitution and establish a dictatorship.

Jacobin chief editor Bhaskar Sunkara responded by telling those who described this as a coup to "get a grip" and insisted on the "stability of US republican institutions."

Since Brazilian fascist followers of former President Jair Bolsonaro carried out a similar fascist coup attempt on January 8, 2023, assisted by sections of the military leadership, President Lula, endorsed by *Jacobin*, has showered the military with financing and done everything possible to protect it from investigations. *Jacobin* has written several articles minimizing the danger and claiming absurdly that the coup attempt "put Lula in a stronger position to shore up Brazil's democracy."

Meanwhile, the fascists continue their plots. Under Allende, it should be recalled, there were several abortive coup attempts before September 11, 1973. Elsewhere in Latin America, as recently as 2019 in Bolivia and 2022 in Peru, US-backed fascists and militaries successfully overthrew presidents Evo Morales and Pedro Castillo, respectively. Each coup was followed by mass protests that were brutally repressed.

By invoking the "patience" and "vision" of Allende, the DSA functions as a cynical servant of the ruling class. Its politics are aimed at lulling the working class in order to allow fascism and the capitalist state to prepare their attacks.

Fifty years after the overthrow of Allende, the lessons of the bloody defeat in Chile are as vital as ever for the Latin American and international working class. Workers can place not the slightest trust in "left" bourgeois governments led by the likes of Boric in Chile, Lula in Brazil or Petro in Colombia, but only in their own independent revolutionary struggle.

The decisive task remains today what it was in Chile five decades ago: resolving the crisis of revolutionary leadership in the working class. This means building sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International throughout Latin America and internationally.



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