President Gabriel Boric and the rightward shift of the Chilean pseudo-left

Part 1

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This is the first part of a two-part series. Part two can be read here.

President Gabriel Boric gave his fourth and final televised annual address to Chile's National Congress at the beginning of June and is set to hand over the reins of office in March of next year.

Much of the international media focused on Boric's attention-grabbing gestures he outlined in the so-called "Public Account" speech, such as a bill to close the luxury prison holding Pinochet-era military criminals, a proposal to ban imports from Israeli-occupied Palestinian territories and an abortion bill. More will be said about these measures; suffice it to say that they have been submitted by a lame duck president.

The liberal and progressive media aligned to Boric's *Apruebo Dignidad* coalition made much ado about the so-called great achievements he listed in his three-hour address, his pension reform, the raising of the minimum wage, emergency housing and health care reforms, etc. None of these measures even begin to address the dire conditions facing the working class.

What was truly striking about his speech is just how far to the right his pseudo-left coalition government has traveled over three years in office.

The right-ward trajectory of the ruling coalition, made up of the pseudo-left Broad Front alliance, the Stalinist Communist Party and the bourgeois Socialist Party-Party for Democracy, substantiates the International Committee of the Fourth International's characterization of pseudo-left organizations as political tendencies reflecting the aspirations of upper middle class layers for a more equitable wealth distribution only within the wealthiest 10 percent.

This political stratum decades ago renounced even the pretense of fighting for the revolutionary transformation of society. It accommodated itself to the financialization of the economy and the needs of the capitalist nation-state, with all that this implied—the return to colonialist wars and plunder, de-industrialization and impoverishment of the working class, and the ever-widening breach between rich and poor.

At critical inflection points during the reemergence of the class struggle over the last 15 years, they have mouthed left-sounding phraseology only to better ensnare radicalized youth, students and workers, to dissipate their struggles and divert them back into the safe channels of bourgeois parliamentarism and the grip of the despised establishment parties.

With each betrayal, they seek not only to promote demoralization and disorientation, but also to cultivate the most reactionary and backward sentiments among the broader population, which, in this period of profound global economic and socio-political instability, has resulted in strengthening ultra-nationalist, militarist, xenophobic and fascistic tendencies.

All this has played out almost according to script in the three years that the Chilean pseudo-left has exercised executive political power.

Boric's speech began with the following political assessment of Chilean capitalism during an acute crisis of bourgeois rule:

"We took office after one of the largest mobilizations in the recent history of Chile… The social outburst of 2019 was the expression of a legitimate malaise accumulated in the framework of an accelerated modernization process of our society that expressed in those months all its contradictions."

Boric proceeded to malign the unarmed population for "episodes of unacceptable violence that cannot be justified, such as the burning of the Metro, the destruction of public and private patrimony and aggression against the Carabineros [militarized police]," episodes where substantial evidence points to *los intramarchas* (infiltrated state agents) committing provocations to criminalize the protests and justify mass detentions.

He went out of his way to defend the military and riot police, claiming that they were only "responding" to civilian violence, albeit admitting that "serious and inexcusable human rights violations were committed even resulting in death and very serious injuries, many of which are still awaiting justice."

For the record, 11,925 complaints of institutional violence, including mutilations, torture, rape and other abuses, were filed after the protests. By September 2024, only 44 of those cases had resulted in convictions. More than 90 percent of the complaints have been closed, most without punishment or trial, due to a statute of limitations. During his election campaign, Boric promised to bring these criminals to justice and provide reparations and assistance to the victims. The record speaks for itself.

At the same time Boric claimed the 2019 upheaval expressed the "undeniable progress in the last decades since the recovery of democracy, both in the material dimension and in the exercise of freedoms that not so long ago were vetoed," and that his sector had "attempted to ignore both a collective and individual history of progress, which allowed Chilean families access to levels of wellbeing and freedom unimaginable only a short time ago."

Social inequality and social upheaval

These lines omit the single most important factor contributing to the unprecedented social outburst: extreme social inequality. They constitute an attempt to rewrite history in accordance with the "Chilean miracle" proclaimed by the parties of the civilian restoration, their imperialist backers and all the major financial institutions.

The World Inequality Report, published in 2022 by leading economists Lucas Chancel, Thomas Piketty, Emmanuel Saez, and Gabriel Zucmana, demonstrated extreme levels of social inequality on the rise globally.

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What is striking is its report card on Chile:

> (A)vailable estimates suggest that inequality in Chile has been extreme over the past 120 years, with a top 10% income share constantly around 55%-60% and a bottom 50% income share around 9-10%.

It bears repeating, inequality in Chile has been extreme over the past 120 years. The 2019 mass demonstrations, protests and strikes, involving millions of people, were in answer to this entrenched social inequality, made insufferable by a decade of economic stagnation, following the 2008 global financial crisis.

This mass mobilization, part of an eruption of struggles of the working class across the globe, was an expression of pent-up opposition to the extreme free-market policies imposed by the military junta and intensified by the center-left and right-wing administrations following the transition to "democratic rule". State institutions, the executive, legislature and judiciary, the army, and the police, and all the establishment political parties are viewed with contempt by the population.

The sentiment of the millions involved was explicitly anti-capitalist and had been building up over decades in the form of significant social outbursts against the privatized education system, the two-tier health system, the miserable benefits provided by private pension funds and a multitude of other social grievances.

The explosive character of the movement was moreover a response to the violence meted out by a murderous and lawless state apparatus *never* held accountable for the wholesale murder, torture and repression carried out under Gen. Augusto Pinochet's 17-year dictatorship, not to mention the continuing crimes during civilian rule.

This is the flowering Chilean democracy about which Boric waxed lyrical in opening his final annual address.

Boric then outlined how the pseudo-left saved the beleaguered Chilean bourgeoisie.

"Despite all the tensions and rivalries, Chile managed to channel the process through the institutional route, following the best of its republican tradition, but the seed of reductionist interpretations was planted, and was clearly expressed in the two constituent processes we tried. The clear rejection of both proposals… (was) a reminder that Chile neither wants nor needs vanguards that escape the common sense of their own people, and a profound vindication that this country was built by all of us, without denying those who think differently."

Contrary to Boric's fantasy of a nation united, irreconcilable and irresolvable antagonisms are not a product of mistaken ideas. The political and social reality of Chile, like every other capitalist nation, is defined by material contradictions, above all between the socialized nature of the productive process and the private ownership of the means of production. Put another way, social inequality arises organically from the exploitation of the labor power of the proletariat, the sole source of profit that is appropriated exclusively by a parasitic oligarchic ruling class, and it is this that gives rise to class conflict.

The specific function of the Broad Front alliance, the Communist Party, and the corporatist trade unions they dominate was to disarticulate mass anti-capitalist opposition and render it harmless. Boric, the former student radical, stood out as the only member of his alliance to enter the pact announced by the right-wing government of the late billionaire, Sebastian Piñera (2018-2022) known as the "Agreement for Social Peace and a New Constitution." It was subsequently signed by all the parliamentary parties.

The Communist Party (PCCh), one of Chile's oldest and most experienced parties, played a critical role. While it claimed to oppose the pact, through the unions it controls, it stopped all industrial action, which in effect placed a wedge between the working class and the youth who were the predominant demographic in the anti-capitalist rallies.

At the same time, the parliamentary "left" worked overtime to assist Piñera in beefing up the state apparatus and erecting the framework of a police state.

A law-and-order campaign was unleashed, smearing the student protesters as delinquents and criminalizing all manifestations of social opposition. This was combined with a filthy xenophobic campaign blaming desperate, newly arrived migrants and the poverty stricken Indigenous Mapuche communities for a supposed crime wave gripping the country.

Bills were put before congress to have the military perform policing functions and to place the Mapuche regions under military jurisdiction. The political establishment also seized on the Covid-19 pandemic to declare a state of catastrophe, which meant deploying the military on the streets and placing the country under curfew. All this helped diffuse the protests.

More importantly, in the absence of a genuine socialist party providing a perspective, guidance and leadership, the working class alone is not able to counter the influence of political agendas that are inimical to its interests. This is how the pseudo-left and Stalinists, with the help of Morenoite groups, the Workers Revolutionary Party (PTR) and the International Workers' Movement (MIT), came to dominate.

They heavily promoted the debunked reformist shibboleth that it is possible to transform the nature of the state by changing the constitution and by being elected to office. All activity was now focused on promoting the constitutional convention and through the PCCh's social and community organizations directing the working class to supporting a coterie of aligned "progressive" academics and professionals, all scrambling for a seat in the assembly. The MIT and PTR ran their own candidates for the Constitutional Convention and thus provided it with "leftist" legitimacy.

Meanwhile, once Boric's Apruebo Dignidad secretly received the electoral support of the hated traditional center-left bloc in return for cabinet positions, an all-out scare campaign was mounted in the name of unity to keep out the fascist, José Antonio Kast, the preferred candidate of the Chilean ruling class. Not to downplay the real danger he represents, the fact is that Boric in power implemented the anti-immigrant, anti-working class and militarist agenda of Kast and the most extreme sectors of the right.

By September 2022, when the "world's most progressive" constitution was resoundingly defeated, Boric had been in power for six months. In that short period, the ruling Stalinist/pseudo-left coalition had shattered the illusions built up among workers, the middle class and the youth.

The social reforms he had promised in the election campaign dissipated into thin air. Mario Marcel, Boric's finance minister and darling of the corporate and financial world, slashed government spending and increased interest rates to their highest level in four decades, amid 8 to 9 percent official unemployment and a 12 percent annual inflation rate.

Never actually intending to satisfy the pressing needs of the population, the Boric administration implemented a swathe of police-state laws and showered the police with funds and equipment to demonstrate the government's commitment to law and order and a strong hand against crime. It instituted a permanent state of exception in the south to repress the indigenous Mapuche population and imprisoned community leaders involved in land seizures and militant actions on trumped-up terrorism charges. It used the military to stop refugees entering the country across the Bolivian and Peruvian borders and began expelling undocumented migrants.

Read part two

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