

Haitians charged in Chile with people smuggling: The historical context of a right-wing frameup

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An offensive against immigrants in Chile is unfolding within a broader crisis gripping Latin America, where political establishments across the continent are lurching to the right in alignment with the strategic requirements of the Trump administration in Washington. Chile's new rightist regime headed by President José Antonio Kast is closely following in the footsteps of the fascist government in the United States, deploying racialized dog whistles in an attempt to drive a wedge between "foreign" and "native-born" sections of the working class. In both countries, the aim is to divert public attention from the savage assault being waged against the social and economic position of the entire working population.

This is the context in which for more than ten days, the Kast government and its parliamentary wing—backed by the entire corporate media—manufactured a scandal following a June 15 leaked preliminary report from the Comptroller General's Office claiming that 64 of 105 Haitian children who had entered Chile between January and October 2025 under family reunification programs could not be located at their registered addresses.

Within hours, the entire state machinery lurched into action while right and extreme right deputies speculated about trafficking networks and even organ harvesting. The corporate media amplified every lurid claim. By June 23, the Investigative Police (PDI) had located all 64 children: 63 were in Chile with their families, in good health, enrolled in school and registered in the healthcare system, and the last, a teenage girl, was in Mexico.

Then on June 25 the PDI arrested Ezechiel Rome (34) and Jean Chery Dormeus (33) two Haitians with permanent residency in Chile. The arrests were seized upon by the government and media as vindication of the trafficking narrative in a case that is riddled with contradictions, and which exposes the state's own complicity.

Rome and Dormeus have been charged by the PDI with migrant trafficking, money laundering and illicit association for operating a network that facilitated the entry of Haitian children on family reunification visas, charging approximately three million Chilean pesos (CLP) per child and generating over CLP\$800 million (approx. US\$850,000) in total proceeds.

The defense has already signaled an appeal on the grounds that Chile's migrant trafficking statute—requires illegal entry as a constituent element, and every child transported by the network entered Chile on valid visas issued by the Chilean Migration Service (SERMIG) itself. This legal fragility is compounded by a further contradiction. The prosecution itself acknowledged during the formalization hearing that the Rome-Dormeus case is a separate and parallel investigation to the Comptroller's inquiry into the 64 children—the children abandoned in the Dominican Republic are not the same children whose whereabouts the Comptroller was tracking.

What is most damning is the timeline of state inaction. The PDI had been aware of Rome and Dormeus since at least 2024 and had filed formal complaints with the Public Prosecutor's Office in April and October of that year. Dominican police arrested network operatives at Santo Domingo airport on October 1, 2024, as part of an Interpol operation, intercepting 11 Haitian citizens, six of them minors aged between 4 and 16, who were being transported without legal entry records or notarized parental authorization. The PDI's human trafficking unit formally wrote to SERMIG on October 14 requesting information about the detained operative. SERMIG responded a week later, confirming only his residency status. And then... nothing.

For 20 months, the Public Prosecutor's Office authorized no investigative measures against Rome and Dormeus, even as the network continued operating, more families paid millions of pesos, and children were abandoned in Dominican Republic shelters. Some of those children, including a seven-year-old boy whose father in Chile had paid 2.7 million pesos, spent eight months in a Santo Domingo shelter before being deported back to Haiti, a country suffering an imperialist-generated collapse, ravaged by gang violence and state disintegration. The Chilean state, which had absorbed the labor of these children's parents for years, took no action to locate, claim or reunify them. The raids and arrests on June 25 were authorized not because the investigation had matured, but because the attempt to mount a political scandal around the Comptroller report was failing and fresh provocations were needed.

The corporatist media has served as the transmission belt for this deeply reactionary agenda. The June 25-26 headlines across the major outlets screamed about "millions in payments," "abandoned children," "transnational criminal organizations" and "lucrative migrant trafficking rings." *El Mercurio* led with the claim that the network had earned more than CLP\$800 million from "migrant smuggling, particularly of Haitian children," while emphasizing that one of the accused also ran an NGO that received government funding—a detail calculated to delegitimize migrant community organizations as fronts for criminality.

The media has systematically conflated the Rome-Dormeus criminal case with the Comptroller's administrative findings, presenting the two as a single narrative of Haitian criminality threatening Chilean children, when in fact the prosecution itself has formally distinguished them. This yellow journalism is in service of a government whose agenda requires the Haitian community to be seen as a threat.

While the media whips up hysteria over non-missing children, the Kast administration is carrying out a real assault on the actual living conditions of children, adolescents and students across Chile.

The education sector has suffered a reduction of approximately US\$221 million, with at least 112 programs across Education, Health, Social Development, Justice and Culture marked for cuts or elimination. The

National Service for the Protection of Children and Adolescents faces the single largest cut, at CLP\$12.7 billion. The youth mental health program, the only state-run mental health support program for vulnerable young people, has been effectively eliminated, with the National Youth Institute losing 47 percent of its budget and 75 percent of its staff.

The School Feeding Program, which for hundreds of thousands of children provides the only meal of the day, was among the programs proposed for discontinuation. Even right-wing former presidential candidate Evelyn Matthei told Finance Minister Jorge Quiroz to “instruct his team, because you’re making everyone nervous. For many children, this is the only meal of the day. You don’t play around with that.” Matthei is not motivated by any sudden twinge of social conscience; her intervention reflects the fear within sections of the ruling class that cuts so brazen risk provoking a social explosion that the political establishment cannot contain.

Simultaneously, the Kast government has moved rapidly to introduce sweeping punitive legislation that builds on laws enacted under both Sebastián Piñera’s right-wing government and Gabriel Boric’s pseudo-left coalition. The Protected Schools Bill, which completed congressional passage in early June, empowers schools to conduct backpack inspections, prohibit face coverings, sanction students for disrupting classes or occupying facilities and strip students convicted of certain offences of their eligibility for state-funded university tuition. The Registry of Vandals and Incivilities Bill establishes a database tracking those who commit offences ranging from attacks on police to property damage during protests. The Criminal Liability of Adolescents Reform aims to double the maximum custodial sentence for offenders aged 14 to 16 from five to ten years for grave crimes.

Kast declared in his first State of the Nation address that “no one who burns a bus, no one who destroys public property deserves free education” revealing the elitist conviction that education is not a social right but a privilege that can be revoked as punishment. These are not measures against crime; they are mechanisms for the criminalization and targeting of young people as a population to be surveilled, disciplined and incarcerated.

The Chilean capitalist state’s criminal record

Kast is committing a social crime, and the Chilean state has long experience in such crimes. José Antonio Kast is the son of Michael Kast, a member of the Nazi Party in Germany before fleeing to Chile after the Second World War. The Kasts were directly implicated in the Paine massacre, in which military forces rounded up and executed 70 peasants in the commune of Paine over several months following Gen. Augusto Pinochet’s 1973 US-backed military coup. His brother Miguel Kast was one of the principal architects of the dictatorship’s economic policy, serving as Planning Minister and Labor Minister and as a central figure in the implementation of the “Chicago Boys” shock therapy that immiserated millions.

Kast has consistently defended the dictatorship and its criminals. He has visited the Punta Peuco prison, built specifically to house those convicted of dictatorship-era crimes in conditions far superior to ordinary Chilean prisons, and upon meeting Miguel Krassnoff Martchenko, the notorious secret police (DINA) brigadier serving over 1,000 years for crimes against humanity, declared: “I do not believe all the things said about him.” Krassnoff is the officer identified by a military helicopter mechanic as the man who personally threw three bound, blindfolded, and living prisoners into the sea from a Puma helicopter. Krassnoff is also linked to the disappearance of at least ten pregnant women detained by DINA,

including Michelle Marguerite Peña Herrerros, an engineering student eight and a half months pregnant when abducted, whose mother spent decades receiving messages that a boy had been born from her daughter but never received confirmation.

Of the many thousands detained and disappeared between 1973 and 1990, 150 were children and adolescents who were executed, 40 were forcibly disappeared and 956 suffered political imprisonment and torture. Kast has now restored Punta Peuco’s exclusive character as a facility for dictatorship criminals, transferred out the common prisoners placed there by the Boric government. He also has at least 29 formal pardon requests from convicted human rights violators sitting on his Justice Minister’s desk.

That Justice Minister is Fernando Rabat Celis, a figure whose biography encapsulates the continuity between the dictatorship’s political project and the current government. Rabat forms part of the law firm founded by Pablo Rodríguez Grez, the founder and head of the Patria y Libertad Nationalist Front, the fascist paramilitary organization that carried out terrorist acts against the government of Salvador Allende.

Patria y Libertad was involved in the 1970 assassination of General René Schneider, the commander-in-chief of the Chilean Army whose constitutionalist “Schneider Doctrine” was a principal obstacle to the CIA’s coup plotting. The group conducted a sustained campaign of bombings, sabotage of infrastructure and assassinations, including the sniper killing of Allende’s naval aide Captain Arturo Araya. It subsumed itself into the DINA after the coup, with former members receiving monthly payments from the dictatorship’s secret police for their operational work.

Rabat, as a member of Rodríguez Grez’s firm, was part of the legal team that defended Augusto Pinochet following his detention in London in 1998 and later defended the dictator in the Riggs case concerning his secret accounts and in criminal cases including Operación Colombo. Sixteen organizations of the families of the detained-disappeared issued a public declaration describing the rejection of his appointment as “an ethical and moral duty.”

Kast has not merely appointed a Pinochet defender to his cabinet. He has systematically dismantled the institutional memory infrastructure built since the transition. The National Search Plan for Truth and Justice, created by Boric in 2023 to locate the 1,469 disappeared persons whose whereabouts remain unknown, has had its budget cut and its strategic personnel dismissed, while museums and historical sites dealing with the dictatorship’s crimes have been denied funding.

The expropriation of 117 hectares of Colonia Dignidad, decreed by Boric to transform the enclave into a memory site and documentation center under a bilateral agreement with Germany, has been halted by Kast. The German Foreign Ministry expressed official concern over the decision.

Colonia Dignidad was not merely a detention center. Founded by Paul Schäfer, a fugitive Nazi pedophile who fled Germany in 1961, the 13,000-hectare enclave in the Maule region functioned as a torture camp, a weapons manufacturing facility, and a site of systematic child sexual abuse. Walter Rauff, the SS colonel who designed the mobile gas vans used to murder Jews and disabled people during the Holocaust, trained DINA agents in torture methods at Colonia Dignidad. DINA used the colony’s underground tunnels and medical facilities to torture and disappear political prisoners. The chemist Eugenio Berríos worked for DINA at Colonia Dignidad developing chemical weapons.

In 2005, excavations uncovered clandestine graves and weapons caches. Schäfer fled to Argentina in 1997 after being charged with the sexual abuse of 26 children who had been raised in the colony and was eventually convicted in Chile in 2006 on charges including the rape of minors and illegal possession of weapons. The colony’s history is the history of the dictatorship’s darkest operations—and Kast has now ensured

it will not become a site of public memory.

The stolen children's cases, centered during the dictatorship era but beginning before 1973 and continuing well into the 1990s, reveal that these crimes were not aberrations of an exceptional period but expressions of the capitalist state's treatment of the working class and poor. An estimated 20,000 Chilean children were taken from mothers—predominantly young, poor, living on the outskirts of Santiago or in rural areas, disproportionately Indigenous, who had been protagonists of the mobilizations during the Allende years—were told their babies had died at birth or were being held for “scientific research.”

Hospitals were run by the military; mayors were appointed by the regime; neighborhood councils were controlled. The policy was articulated through Pinochet's 1978 National Childhood Plan. The networks that carried out these adoptions were not external criminal elements but embedded within the state apparatus itself. A Chilean congressional committee investigating state involvement later described the stealing of children as a “lucrative business for real mafias” and concluded that “the state is responsible for what happened.” The mechanisms of this child theft did not end with the dictatorship; they persisted under civilian governments.

The Kast regime's sudden, theatrical concern for the welfare of Haitian children is obscene. This is a government headed by a man whose family helped build the dictatorship, whose Justice Minister defended Pinochet, whose Defense Minister calls convicted torturers “old gaga men,” and whose political project involves pardoning the perpetrators of crimes against humanity while cutting the budgets of the institutions that preserve their memory.

The same political parties that supported the military dictatorship, that facilitated the torture of pregnant women, the execution of children, the throwing of living prisoners into the sea, the theft of thousands of infants from poor mothers, would unhesitatingly deploy the same methods against the civilian population today. The witch hunt against immigrants is an indication of their readiness.

Kast has launched a multi-pronged offensive that combines xenophobia with manufactured security scares while he eviscerates whatever limited political, social and economic rights the working class gained in the post-dictatorship period. The attack on immigrants is not a diversion from the attack on the working class. It is the same attack that must be met with the same resistance: the international unity of the working class against the capitalist state and its fascistic government.



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