

Chile's "opposition" outflanks the right from the right: The bipartisan consolidation of a police state

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The removal of Trinidad Steinert as Minister of Public Security on May 19, 2026, just 69 days into the Kast administration, and her replacement by Republican Party loyalist Martín Arrau was the fastest cabinet reshuffle since Chile's return to civilian rule in 1990. The episode has been widely presented as a story of governmental incompetence: a minister with no political experience, a government that campaigned on security but had no plan, a president forced to sacrifice his first security chief to save his own credibility.

But this framing obscures the far more significant political reality that the reshuffle exposed. The repressive apparatus that Kast is now wielding was not built by the far right. It was designed by Sebastián Piñera, enacted into law by Gabriel Boric, and handed to Kast as a fully operational instrument of state coercion. Arrau's appointment and his first public statements amount to a political confession of this continuity.

To understand what was at stake in Steinert's removal and Arrau's installation, one must first understand the institutional framework they inherited. Law 21.730, published in the *Diario Oficial* on February 5, 2025, created the Ministry of Public Security as a new Secretariat of State. It placed the Carabineros and the Investigations Police (PDI), the two principal forces of internal repression, under the authority of this new ministry rather than the Ministry of the Interior.

Law 21.730 established an Integrated Police Coordination Center (CICPOL), an advisory body led by a senior police officer designated by the minister, to coordinate complex operations and facilitate intelligence-sharing between public and private entities. It created a National Public Security Council integrating the Ministers of the Interior, Defense, Finance, and Justice alongside the heads of the Carabineros, the PDI, and the Gendarmerie. And it empowered the new ministry to file criminal complaints when acts had "disrupted public order, seriously impeded essential public services, or affected public security generating fear in the population," a prosecutorial tool aimed squarely at mass social protest.

The law's parentage is politically devastating for anyone who maintains the fiction that the Chilean pseudo-left represented a genuine alternative to the right. Law 21.730 originated as an initiative during Sebastian Piñera's second term in 2021. It was promulgated by Boric on January 27, 2025. The law retained much of the spirit of the original proposal, with additions made during parliamentary proceedings that only strengthened its centralizing logic. As the *World Socialist Web Site* documented at the time, Boric's pseudo-left government rammed through 15 pieces of security legislation in record time, including the Naín-Retamal law granting the police and military a license to kill, an intelligence law broadening spying powers, and a revamped anti-terrorist law.

This is the fundamental point that the entire political establishment has an interest in obscuring. The Ministry of Public Security is not a Kast creation. It is not a Republican Party project. It is the institutional

expression of a bipartisan consensus, developed under a right-wing government and enacted under a pseudo-left one, that the Chilean state required a more centralized, more coordinated, and more legally insulated apparatus of repression. The working class that rose up in October 2019 confronted the Carabineros in the streets. The political class that contained that uprising responded not by demilitarizing the police but by giving them their own ministry.

Trinidad Steinert arrived at the Ministry of Public Security as a former Regional Prosecutor of Tarapacá, recruited precisely because she embodied a certain prosecutorial credibility. She had led the prosecution of Tren de Aragua members and narcotrafficking investigations inside the Armed Forces. She had been recognized nationally for the "Clan Chen" operation, a major organized crime bust carried out in January 2026. She was supposed to give the Kast security project a competent face. Her tenure lasted 69 days.

Steinert's first act was to dissolve the Strategic Unit, a specialized team of computer engineers and data analysts providing long-term planning and integrated data management. The Integrated Crime Information System head was dismissed. The Department of Strategic Management simply disappeared from the organizational chart. Behind these administrative maneuvers lay a political operation. During the parliamentary debate on Law 21.730, the Republicans were the only ones to systematically oppose the institutional architecture that Steinert proceeded to dismantle.

On July 1, 2026, Comptroller Dorothy Pérez found that Steinert had exceeded her authority. Pérez found that the Strategic Unit Steinert had dissolved could not be eliminated, as its existence was mandated by law.

The new security minister

Martín Arrau had served as Kast's campaign manager during the presidential runoff and then as Minister of Public Works for two months. A political operative, his principal qualification is his loyalty to Kast and his membership in the Republican Party. He oversaw the construction of trenches along the northern border and pushed for the building of 10-12 new prisons.

Upon taking office, Arrau sought the blessing of the architects of the pseudo-left's security apparatus, meeting with Luis Cordero, the former minister of security in Boric's administration. He met with Socialist Congressman Raúl Leiva, a member of the Chamber's security committee. He met with former Senator Felipe Harboe, former undersecretary of the carabineros and the interior under the Socialist administrations of Ricardo Lagos and Michelle Bachelet.

Following his meeting with Cordero, Arrau announced that the National Public Security Policy (PNSP) for the 2025–2031 period, enacted by the Boric administration “is sufficient ... comprehensive and provides room for certain policies, plans, and programs that can be implemented in the future.” This is an admission of what the entire political establishment seeks to conceal: in matters of public order, internal security and social discipline, there is no break between the outgoing and incoming governments.

The institutional continuity goes beyond the PNSP. Arrau must implement a series of laws passed by Congress during Boric’s term: the municipal security law, the transfer of the Gendarmerie from the Ministry of Justice to the Ministry of Security, the strengthening of the Public Prosecutor’s Office, regulations on private security, and the reform modernizing the State Intelligence System. The Naín-Retamal law, the intelligence law, the revamped anti-terrorist law, and the measures retroactively protecting state agents for the use of lethal force—all enacted under Boric with the votes of the Broad Front and the Communist Party—remain on the books. The Kast administration inherits them as operational tools, not as obstacles.

Carolina Tohá, Boric’s former Interior Minister, confirmed the continuity from the other side. “The National Public Security Policy does not belong to the previous government but to the State,” she explained. “Its development included input from all sectors and was widely valued.” President Boric, she added, had left the biennial strategy “almost ready.” All that remained was for the Kast government to add its priorities and make it public.

The pseudo-left attacks from the right

The most revealing dimension of the political crisis triggered by Steinert’s removal was the response of the pseudo-left parties. They did not denounce the expansion of the police state. They did not defend the social rights that Kast’s security agenda threatened. They attacked the government from the right, for its alleged inaction, its lack of a plan, its failure to deliver on the law-and-order promises that they themselves had spent four years legitimizing.

Camila Vallejo, the former spokesperson for Boric’s government and a Communist Party militant, titled her opinion column “The Great Scam.” Her argument was not that the Kast administration was building a repressive apparatus to crush social protest. It was that Kast had sidelined security in favor of his economic agenda. “The gap between those promises and the actual ability to translate them into results has become evident,” she wrote. She mocked Arrau’s acknowledgment that Boric’s security policy was sufficient: “It sounds like a joke, but it’s clear they never had a plan of their own.”

Álvaro Elizalde, the former Minister of the General Secretariat of the Presidency under Boric, emphasized that “President Kast ran three election campaigns with security as his central focus; however, once in office, it became clear that he lacked a real plan.” Senator Paulina Vodanovic, president of the Socialist Party, declared that “one person is being replaced, but the government still lacks a clear stance on security.”

The logic is perverse and deeply revealing. The pseudo-left presents itself as the true champion of security, the responsible architect of an order that the far right is too incompetent to administer. It boasts of having left behind a well-organized repressive framework. It demands that Kast deliver on the law-and-order promises that it spent four years legitimizing. In doing so, it positions itself not as an opposition to the authoritarian advance but as a more competent manager of it.

Vallejo’s trajectory encapsulates this political logic. In 2011, as

president of the University of Chile Student Federation and a militant of the Communist Youth, she was the most visible leader of the student rebellion that shook the foundations of Chile’s privatized education system. Hundreds of thousands marched under the slogan “Put an end to profit.” By 2026, the former student leader was attacking Kast from the right for failing to be sufficiently tough on crime.

This is not a story of individual betrayal. It is the structural function of the pseudo-left: to ensnare radicalized youth and workers with left-sounding phraseology, only to dissipate their struggles into the dead end of parliamentary reformism. At critical inflection points in the class struggle, organizations like the Broad Front and the Communist Party divert anti-capitalist sentiment back into the grip of the despised establishment parties, cultivating not only demoralization but also the most reactionary sentiments among the broader population.

The security architecture that Arrau has been tasked with administering is now being expanded through a battery of new legislation. A bill introduced by Congressman Tomás Kast (Evópoli), the president’s nephew, proposes amending the Penal Code to establish legal liability for those who organize, promote, or call for protests that result in property damage, with prison terms of up to five years. Organizers who provide information facilitating the identification of perpetrators may be exempted from liability, a provision that transforms protest organizers into informants for the state.

These are not measures against crime. They are mechanisms for the political policing of social protest. The category of “incivility” is deliberately elastic, lumping together behaviors of vastly different severity under a single administrative framework. By placing the student occupying a school, the worker blocking a road, the Mapuche community defending ancestral lands, and the poor youth pursued by police within the same semantic field of threat, the registry provides the legal infrastructure for generalized social control. Social rights, education, healthcare, housing, pensions, are transformed from entitlements into conditional rewards, with political compliance as the price of access.

The Chilean bourgeoisie, having weathered the 2019 uprising, has constructed a repressive apparatus designed to contain the next eruption of class struggle. The far right administers what the pseudo-left built. The pseudo-left demands that the far right administer it more competently. Both are committed to the defense of capitalist property relations and the suppression of any movement that threatens them.

The working class cannot look to the pseudo-left for defense against the authoritarian advance. The parties of the Broad Front, the Socialist Party and the Communist Party are not a bulwark against fascism. They are its enablers, and, when it suits their electoral interests, its critics from the right. The task facing the working class in Chile is to build an independent political movement, based on a revolutionary internationalist program, that breaks completely with the parties of bourgeois rule and their pseudo-left appendages.

The security of the working class will come from the conscious organization of the working class against capital, against its alternating governments, and against the repressive machinery that both blocs have jointly constructed to contain the struggles to come.



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