

Chile's Carabineros strip-search two adolescents in classroom days after enactment of “Protected Schools” law

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On Monday 17 August, inside a classroom at the Rayen Mapu Lyceum in Quellón, on the southern island of Chiloé, Carabinero officers ordered two secondary students to strip. One was made to remove his sweatshirt and shoes and have his shirt lifted before his classmates. The second was ordered to remove his trousers, sweatshirt, shirt and shoes, and then to perform squats in his underwear, in front of his classmates, school staff and the police themselves. The procedure was triggered by the reported theft of a mobile phone.

The methods belong to Chile’s former dictatorship. The forced stripping of the defenseless, the degradation staged as public spectacle, the message sent through the body of the victim to everyone watching. These methods have now been employed by agents of the state against two schoolchildren as a deliberate probe by the Carabineros amid the Kast government’s sweeping expansion of the powers of the repressive forces.

The student council at the school issued a communiqué which read in part:

We are particularly concerned that a situation that began with the loss of a cell phone ended with students being physically exposed in front of their classmates. No student should feel humiliated or defenseless within the institution that is supposed to protect them.

As the Student Council, we request that this situation be taken with the seriousness it deserves and that an investigation be conducted not only into what occurred during the police procedure but also into the decisions that led to these students being singled out and exposed as suspects.

It is significant that in the week since this gross abuse of authority, President José Antonio Kast has said not a word. Nor has any government minister issued a single statement condemning the actions. His government rammed through Congress the “Protected Schools” bill, which became law on August 13, four days before the incident.

Kast is the son of a former Nazi Wehrmacht officer. His family collaborated in the Pinochet dictatorship’s repression. He has never hidden his admiration for the junta. His government is staffed with *Pinochetistas*. The silence is not an oversight, but a signal that Carabineros may act with the impunity that the Chilean state has granted for the duration of the civilian restoration with one difference: The current occupant of La Moneda Palace will not pretend to eschew such methods.

The “Protected Schools” law—Ley 21.827—has never been about protecting students or school staff. It was, from its inception, a mechanism for further militarizing schools, placing armed agents of the state inside classrooms and granting them disciplinary powers over children. It is the

logical extension of a process that has been underway for two decades but took a sharp turn to the right during the 2019 social uprising, which was met with a level of police violence not seen since the dictatorship. More than three dozen were killed, hundreds blinded and mutilated, thousands tortured. Youth were at the forefront of the uprising and were the primary target of the crackdown; the criminalization of youth as a population was systematized.

The national corporate media, so closely aligned to the right and historically complicit with the dictatorship, took four days to report on the incident and then buried it. The message they are transmitting is that nothing of importance has occurred here and it is an acceptable price for the security emergency they helped create. For at least seven years, not a day passed without these same outlets saturating the airwaves with manufactured panic over crime and delinquency, deliberately cultivating within politically disoriented social sectors the demand for a strong hand against an enemy carefully constructed as internal. The entire political atmosphere created by the “Protected Schools” campaign was aided by months of saturation media coverage presenting schools as war zones and the government insisting that “criminals” had infiltrated the student population.

The government’s original bill contained a provision explicitly authorizing Carabineros to body-search students without a warrant. The Constitutional Court struck it down on 23 June. The law as promulgated explicitly states that in any search “there can be no nudity, body searches, physical contact, or unnecessary exposure.”

Four days after this law was enacted, Carabineros in Quellón did exactly that. This is not a case of rogue officers exceeding their instructions. It is the “Protected Schools” agenda being carried out in practice. The law created the political atmosphere, the ideological justification and the institutional framework for treating students as a criminal class.

The setting

The setting for this outrageous abuse of power is Quellón, which sits at the southern tip of the Chiloé Archipelago, some 1,270 kilometers from Santiago. The population of the region is predominantly Chilote—a mestizo people with deep Huilliche-Mapuche roots, shaped by centuries of Spanish colonialism and, more recently, by the violent extraction of the salmon industry, which has polluted the waters, depleted local fish stocks and confronted indigenous fishing communities with the same dispossession they faced under colonial rule.

In a similar incident eight years earlier, Carabineros in Ercilla, in the

Araucanía Region, forced four Mapuche minors aged 12 to 14 to remove their trousers and underwear at the exit of their school, under the pretext of an identity check. The children were interrogated about the whereabouts of a community leader. They were threatened with being “planted” with drugs and sent to the national children’s service which later emerged as a center of abuse and death for those consigned to it. No one was prosecuted. The case was closed without consequence. The children of Quellón are not the first; they are the latest in a pattern whose targets are consistently the same: indigenous, poor and young.

The targeting of indigenous and poor youth is part of a broader evisceration of the most basic rights of the whole working-class under “democratic governance.” For nearly five years, the southern macrozone has been treated as a laboratory for police-state measures—militarization of Mapuche territories under the state of emergency first decreed by Piñera, maintained and expanded by Boric, and now intensified under Kast.

This month, the fascistic president presented to Congress a bill that creates a fifth state of constitutional exception allowing the military to be deployed in working-class communes. We will be further analyzing the measure and the immense dangers it poses.

Schools as a testing ground for police state measures

Carabineros did not force their way into the school but were called in by the class teacher. According to the student council, the teacher in charge identified two students as suspects, without communicating any concrete evidence, and called the police directly. Before any investigation had been conducted, four students were detained and prevented from going to recess. The police entered the classroom and proceeded to conduct the strip-searches.

The teacher was empowered by the school’s bylaws, which is itself mandated by the national framework established under the “School Violence” law—Ley 20.536—enacted in 2011 during the first presidency of the right-wing billionaire Sebastián Piñera. That law required every school in Chile to incorporate protocols for dealing with theft and other disciplinary matters, protocols that, across hundreds of Chilean schools, explicitly include the right to “call Carabineros” as a standard tool.

The framework that permitted this escalation was built into the system long before Kast arrived, and it has been maintained across 15 years and multiple governments, from Piñera through Bachelet through Piñera again through Boric.

In 2025, according to data from the government’s Center for Crime Study and Analysis (CEAD), 7,364 schools—54.6 percent of all schools in Chile—registered at least one police incident. The total number of police cases inside educational establishments during the 2025 school year was 56,153. At the extreme end, 116 schools recorded more than 38 police cases in the year, meaning that police were present at least once per week.

This is not a security response. This is a permanent police occupation of the school system. More than half of Chile’s schools are now sites of routine police intervention. The Carabineros have been integrated into the disciplinary apparatus of the education system as a matter of course.

The powder keg

The conditions that produced Quellón did not begin on 17 August. They have been building for years.

In March 2026, an 18-year-old student at the Obispo Silva Lezaeta

Institute in Calama stabbed a school inspector to death in a premeditated attack. The student, Hernán Meneses Leal, had been diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder, depression and anxiety disorders, and had a history of social isolation and bullying. In June, 12-year-old Alejandro Águila was killed in San Bernardo when an underage gang stole his family’s car with him still inside. In July, a 15-year-old first-year secondary student died after being stabbed outside the Polivalente Santiago de Compostela Lyceum also in San Bernardo. One attacker, aged 17, pushed toward the knife being held by another 15-year-old who drove it into the victim’s chest.

These are not isolated incidents but the human expression of a social catastrophe, children absorbing, in the most acute and sometimes lethal form, what reactionary Chilean capitalism has done to the class they come from. These tragedies were seized upon by the political establishment—including the “left”—to demand more repression: lower ages of criminal responsibility, military deployments, metal detectors in schools, the stripping of social benefits from “vandals.”

What the ruling class calls “school violence” is the organic expression of a social catastrophe decades in the making. A 2024 survey found that 33.9 percent of adolescent girls aged 14–18 and 19.5 percent of boys showed moderate or severe symptoms of depression or anxiety. Suicide mortality among 10–19-year-olds stands at 5.4 per 100,000. Conditions have only deteriorated.

Chile spends 2–3 percent of its health budget on mental health which is among the lowest in the OECD. The country has fewer psychiatrists per capita, fewer psychologists in the public system, and fewer child and adolescent mental health services than comparable nations.

The education system these students attend is the product of Pinochet’s free-market counterrevolution, preserved by every civilian government since. Between 2015 and 2023, 745 schools closed across Chile while only 193 new schools opened. The Ministry of Education reported an average of 43 daily incidents involving crimes, weapons, drugs or threats during 2025. Approximately 19,000 school-violence complaints were filed in 2024, with more than 133,000 over the preceding decade.

These are not problems of “school coexistence” that can be resolved by backpack searches and metal detectors. They are the symptoms of a society in which every social relation has been subordinated to the profit drive, in which the state has abdicated its most basic responsibilities to the young, in which decades of privatization, austerity and police violence have produced a generation subjected to levels of stress, insecurity and hopelessness without precedent.

The parliamentary “left” that made Quellón possible

No account of how Chile arrived at 17 August 2026 is complete without naming the political forces that paved the way.

The “Protected Schools” bill that Kast rushed through Congress was voted into law with the active support of significant sections of the Chilean “left.” In the Chamber of Deputies, the Party for Democracy (PPD) voted as a bloc in favor. The Socialist Party (PS) fractured, with Antonio Rivas voting yes. The Broad Front (FA) had two defections voting yes. In the Senate, the PS bench abstained en masse—not a single vote against. The PPD senators also abstained.

The Socialist Party abstentions were decisive. The government needed the PS to stay passive rather than organize opposition. The PS complied. This is the party that now postures as the democratic opposition to Kast. Behind all of this stands the Boric government. It was Boric who built the police-state architecture that Kast is now extending: the Naín-Retamal Law giving the police an impunity to kill, the permanent state of

emergency in the Mapuche south, the deployment of troops to the northern border. Kast did not invent the police state. He inherited it from the pseudo-left.

The Teachers Association, headed by the Broad Front's Mario Aguilar, issued a statement declaring the situation "extremely grave" and demanding that Kast "give a clear signal," that is, demand that a *Pinochetista* president whose government the Broad Front helped make possible, issue a statement disapproving of his own law.

Aguilar's union made only a timid call on members as individuals to join the June 2026 student protests and did not initiate strike action. It will not initiate strike action now. Its function is to absorb outrage and dissipate it into press releases. The Teachers Association under Aguilar's leadership has been an instrument for containing the struggles of educators in a system that has condemned them and the students they teach to decades of underfunding, privatization and managed decline. The situation in Chile's schools is an indictment of this federation. If the schools are a powder keg it is not despite the role of the Teachers Association, but partly because of it.

What happened in Quellón is a test run. Kast's silence is a declaration of intent. The working class must prepare its answer—not in the corridors of Congress, where the pseudo-left begs for amendments, but in the streets, the workplaces and the communities, through the mobilization of its collective power. The crisis of Chilean capitalism is deepening. The task is to ensure that the working class emerges from this crisis not as the victim of the violence being prepared for it, but as the gravedigger of the system that has produced it.



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