

Chilean students protest strip-searches as Kast government, media remain silent

Our reporter
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On Monday, August 24, students at the Rayen Mapu Lyceum in Quellón held a “Lápiz Caído” protest—a peaceful demonstration in which students down pens and suspend classes without occupying the school—to demand public apologies and accountability for the police strip-searches carried out against two of their classmates on August 17.

The protest took place against the backdrop of the fascistic Kast government’s “Protected Schools” law, rammed through Congress and enacted on August 13, just four days before the strip-searches.

The law is not about protecting students or school staff but a mechanism for the further militarization of the education system: its original bill contained a provision explicitly authorizing Carabineros to conduct warrantless body searches of students. As it stands, the law mandates the integration of police into school disciplinary protocols and empowers administrators to summon Carabineros for a broad range of infractions, and it creates the ideological and institutional framework for treating students as a criminal class.

Months of the saturation media coverage that accompanied the law’s passage presented schools as war zones infiltrated by “criminals,” providing the political justification for placing armed agents of the state inside classrooms and granting them disciplinary powers over children.

The protest had the backing of the school’s teachers and the Parents Council. Kendra Lemus, president of the Student Center, explained that at this stage, they had not called a strike or occupation: “We are here because we remain dissatisfied (with the school and police responses). We have not been given an apology or anything. The students of Second ‘A’ are completely unhappy with the school leadership. (The class) proposed bringing out the tables and coming out to demonstrate, and as the Student Council we are going to support them.” She added: “We are not going to stay quiet until we get the answers we want and the corresponding apologies.”

Tamara Martínez, president of the Parents’ Council, expressed her organization’s full support: “For us it is

important to be here defending something very basic, which has to do with respect. What happened last Monday must not be repeated in any classroom in Chile. I am proud of the work the Student Council is doing. ... They voted democratically and decided to hold this demonstration today.”

The protest follows the clarification, confirmed by a teacher interviewed on ChileVision, that it was not a classroom teacher who called Carabineros into the school, as initially reported, but the school’s own School Coexistence Officer (ECE).

“The School Coexistence Officer called Carabineros because a phone was supposedly lost inside a classroom. What happened is that the phone was found in the courtyard—it had not been stolen. Carabineros entered the class. ... They stripped one young person, another was also stripped, left in his underwear, and then made to do squats. We learned what happened the following morning,” he told reporters.

This detail further clarifies what occurred.

The ECE is a position created by the very law that established the protocol framework under which police were summoned, the School Violence law, enacted in 2011. On paper, the ECE’s function is pedagogical and protective: to coordinate school coexistence, to ensure disciplinary measures are proportional and respect due process, to mediate conflicts through dialogue and restorative practices and to act as a buffer between students and punitive institutional responses.

The fact that the ECE official summoned Carabineros into a classroom based on an unverified accusation, without evidence, over a phone that had not even been stolen, exposes the real framework. The ECE’s decision bypassed every mediation, proportionality and due process, revealing its true character.

How many similar instances have occurred across Chile in the 15 years since the School Violence law was enacted? We know from the government’s own records that 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.

How many of these 56,153 police interventions ended with human rights abuses by agents of the state? In Chile, this is not a rhetorical question. It points to the inevitable outcome of deploying the repressive institutions that never genuinely broke with the authoritarian traditions established under the dictatorship. The Quellón strip-searches are not an aberration.

Outside of local media in Chiloé, the protest received no national coverage. The corporate media conglomerates that spent months saturating the airwaves with manufactured panic over school violence, providing the ideological ground for the Kast government's "Protected Schools" law, have buried the story. The media's silence is not passive. It is an active signal that these methods, when directed against working class and indigenous youth are an acceptable price for the security emergency the media itself helped manufacture.

Nor has the president said a word. The silence of a fascistic government staffed with *Pinochetistas* is not an oversight. It is a declaration that Carabineros may act with impunity.

The political lessons and the way forward

The students of Rayen Mapu, their parents and their teachers have demonstrated courage and democratic conviction in the face of state violence. But the experience of the past week also contains serious political lessons that must be drawn if their struggle is to advance.

The first lesson is that the state and its institutions—the Carabineros, the school bureaucracy, the SLEP, the courts—will not deliver justice to the students of Quellón. The government's silence, the media blackout and the ongoing police investigation inside the school will bury the incident and whitewash the cops. The students cannot defend their rights by appealing to the very powers that are attacking them. The struggle for democratic rights is a political fight against the government and against bourgeois rule.

The second lesson concerns the role of the organizations that claim to represent students and teachers. The Teachers Association, headed by the Broad Front's Mario Aguilar, issued a statement calling the events "extremely grave"—and

nothing more. It has not called a strike. It will not call a strike. Its function is to absorb outrage and dissipate it into press releases. The student federations tied to the parties of the former Boric government, the Broad Front, the Communist Party, the Socialist Party—are politically and organizationally integrated into the very apparatus that built the police-state architecture now being extended by Kast. These organizations will not lead a fight against a system they helped construct.

The third and most critical lesson is this: students and youth cannot defeat the police state on their own. The Carabineros who stripped two adolescents in a Quellón classroom are the same force that has been deployed against the Mapuche people in the south, against workers in the salmon industry, against port workers, against pensioners, against every section of the working class that has risen up against the social catastrophe produced by Chilean capitalism. The struggle of the students is inseparable from the struggle of the working class as a whole.

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) has consistently advanced the perspective that students must turn to the working class—the only social force with the power to halt state repression and transform society. As the IYSSE has stated in struggles from Sri Lanka to the United States, Germany and Australia, the working class, organized independently and internationally, is the gravedigger of the capitalist system that produces poverty, dictatorship and war.

The protest held on Monday at Rayen Mapu was an act of dignity and defiance. It must now be developed into a political struggle that breaks from the bankrupt perspective of appealing to the state and orients instead to the independent mobilization of the working class. The students of Quellón have taken the first step. The task now is to transform their protest into a conscious fight against the system that produced August 17, and that can only be accomplished by joining the struggle for socialist revolution.



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