

Chile Demonstrations Continue Despite Declaration of a State of Emergency

Uprising highlights contradictions in neo-liberal policies

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A general strike and mass rebellion has erupted in Chile where the administration of President Sebastian Pinera has failed to quell the widespread discontent among the workers and youth.

The president announced in early November that his government would lift the curfew in certain areas, raise the minimum wage, reshuffle the cabinet and investigate those within the police and military accused of brutality. However, this has not resulted in the lessening of violence utilized by the state apparatus against working class and impoverished youth in their ineffective efforts to end the unrest.

Chilean society has suffered extreme inequality since the advent of neo-liberal policies emanating from the United States engineered coup of September 1973 when the-then President Salvadore Allende was overthrown and assassinated.

Military rule under General Augusto Pinochet ushered in extreme right-wing economic policies imposed by Washington and Wall Street. The so-called “Chicago Boys”, graduates from the University of Chicago, Department of Economics, drafted social plans which entrenched the priorities of the capitalist class both externally and domestically.

In recent weeks the degree of unrest has prompted the Pinera regime to cancel two international conferences, one on economic development and another on climate change, due to the inability of the state security forces to guarantee the well-being of the delegates. In addition, corporate interests have been severely impacted due to the rebellion.

The Chilean Football Federation called off a friendly match with Bolivia scheduled for November 15. In addition, the Copa Libertadores Club Championship Final for November 23 may not take place either unless there is a settlement between the government and the people.

President Pinera, a billionaire, has refused to resign despite calls for him to leave by broad sections of the population. The leader in a recent interview with the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) accepted some responsibility for the economic crisis. However, he noted that the problems inside the country were not of his making and has been growing over the last three decades. (See [this](#))

Pinera defended his decision to declare a state of emergency while at the same time saying he would investigate allegations of police brutality. Reportedly some 6,800 businesses were damaged due to property destruction and arson.

Since the beginning of the demonstrations over the Metro (subway) fare increases in mid-October, it has been reported that 20 people have died and more than 2,000 injured. So far some 800 allegations of abuse by the security forces are being investigated by human rights organizations. These victim and eyewitness accounts include crimes such as torture, sexual assault and beatings by the authorities.

In the early phase of the unrest the Metro stations became a target of disgruntled riders when dozens of them were damaged and firebombed. Demonstrators were responding to the rate increase of 3.7% in October. Overall the price of Metro fares has gone up by 100% over the last twelve years. (See [this](#))

These protests over fare increases illustrated the inherent inequality and class divisions within Chilean society. Soon other sectors of the working class and youth poured into the streets.

Accounts claims that 1.2 million people have participated in the demonstrations and rebellion. Nonetheless, the government seemed adamant that it will remain in power irrespective of broad dissatisfaction with its policies.

On November 4, tens of thousands of people rallied at the Plaza de Italia in the capital of Santiago, a center of resistance to the government. The workers and youth stated clearly that “this is not over.” Opponents of the government were determined to continue the demonstrations even though a state of emergency had been enacted.

When the protesters began to march towards the presidential palace, clashes erupted with the security forces. Police fired tear gas and used water cannon in an attempt to disburse the crowd.

Reports indicated that demonstrators engaged in further property damage and one police officer was struck by a Molotov cocktail. Demonstrations and rebellions spread to other cities such as Vina del Mar, Valparaiso and Concepcion.

A group of physicians and nurses have mobilized to provide medical care to those injured in the unrest. Calling themselves “Healthcare for the Streets”, the doctors and nurses are seen pushing shopping carts in areas around the Plaza de Italia providing assistance to those being attacked by the police and military units.

Neo-liberal Policy Entrenched in Chile After the 1973 Washington-backed Military Coup

When Allende came to power in Chile in 1970 with a popular mandate to initiate socialist-oriented reforms in the economy, the U.S. administration under the-then President Richard Nixon, sought to undermine the government. Many of the trade agreements between Chile and the U.S. were curtailed to explicitly prevent Allende from stabilizing the society.

The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) director Richard Helms met directly with Nixon to enact a policy that would “make the economy scream.” A drastic decline in the importation of energy resources and spare parts for industrial usage rendered large segments of the productive capacity of Chile inoperative.

After the military seizure of power on September 11, 1973, the dominant view promoted by the corporate media in the U.S. was that Chile underwent an “economic miracle” directed by

University of Chicago economist Milton Friedman. The monetarist policy of neo-liberalism reduced state spending, forced more workers into poverty and provided incentives for multinational corporations to continue their plunder of the country.

These policies were implemented through the dictatorial leadership style of Pinochet which crushed all opposition to the conservative economic programs. The period during 1973-1990 under Pinochet heightened the social contradictions in Chile by placing the interests of international finance capital ahead of the workers, farmers and youth.

Friedman authored a book entitled "Capitalism and Freedom" (1962) yet the most intensive adoption of his theories was carried out by a military regime which was installed at the aegis of the CIA through the violent overthrow of a democratically elected administration under Allende. The actual history of Chile provides a real life example of the origins and outcomes of neo-liberal thinking.

Regional Aspects of the Chilean Crisis

Throughout South America and the Caribbean there has been the proliferation of instability over the recent period. Ecuador experienced an uprising where many workers, youth, indigenous groups and farmers rejected the sharp turn to the right by the present government of Lenin Moreno.

Venezuela has been battling constant attempts by the administration of President Donald Trump to remove the Socialist Unity Party (PSUV) dominated government in Caracas. The imposition of draconian sanctions and a trade blockade is designed to starve the country into submission while simultaneously attempting to turn the masses against President Nicolas Maduro. So far this years-long policy perpetuated by successive administrations in Washington has failed to dislodge the revolutionary government of the Bolivarian Republic.

The recent elections in Argentina highlight the escalating class struggle and its international dimensions. Argentine voters elected a left of center government as a repudiation of the perennial economic crises inside the country for nearly two decades.

In Bolivia, the revolutionary government of President Evo Morales, won re-election in the first round, avoiding a run-off poll. Yet right-wing elements have sought to foment unrest aimed at the nullification of the choice made by the Bolivian masses.

A recently-held anti-imperialist conference in the Republic of Cuba from November 1-3 exposed the actual role of imperialism throughout the region and indeed internationally. Cuba has been under a U.S. blockade for nearly six decades. (See [this](#))

According to an article published by Granma International, the official newspaper of the Communist Party of Cuba (PPC), in describing the anti-imperialist gathering in Havana of well over a thousand delegates from throughout Latin America, the Caribbean and the world, it stated that:

"Fernando González Llort, President of the Cuban Institute of Friendship with the Peoples, welcomed participants and devoted his first remarks to Fidel, recalling that the Cuban people have not been defeated despite 60 years of hostility from the United States."

This same report went on to further quote the official by emphasizing:

“González said that it was a pleasure to share this space with left organizations at a time when the United States is attempting to distort Cuba’s altruistic mission and international health collaboration, and reaffirmed that Cuba will never betray its friends.”

There is no viable alternative in Chile and throughout the continent and the Caribbean which relies on U.S. imperialism for ideological and material support. The interests of the ruling class in Chile coincide with that of Wall Street and Pentagon.

In order for the social gains made by the masses of people within the region to continue there must be a concerted struggle waged against imperialism. These struggles over the economic deprivation brought about by world capitalism should be broadened into a united effort to eradicate the imperatives of U.S. foreign policy which seeks to dominate the people of the region.

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