

Right-wing wins Chile election as “left” Broad Front joins the establishment

By Andrea Lobo
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After the billionaire ex-president of Chile, Sebastián Piñera (2010-2014), won the second round of presidential elections on December 17, the bourgeois press internationally has applauded the victory over Alejandro Guillier of the ruling Social-Democrat and Stalinist coalition, New Majority, as a much needed sign of stability for bourgeois rule.

The local stock market index, IPSA, heavily weighted by the private pension funds (AFPs), jumped 7 percent after the December vote and has rallied to its all-time high, indicating high expectations that an even greater share of national income will flow into the pockets of the financial elite.

The results, however, with only one-fourth of the eligible electorate voting for Piñera, reflect overwhelming hostility to the entire bourgeois establishment and herald a new stage in the political crisis.

Piñera’s right-wing Chile Vamos coalition takes power on March 11 and is planning new attacks on workers’ living standards as dictated by the global market. The ruling class is depending on its repressive apparatus and the official “opposition” blocs, the bourgeois New Majority and the Broad Front, to block social opposition and ram through its program.

Some sections of the ruling class are issuing warnings about the limits of this configuration. After the second round, Ricardo Lagos, ex-president of the New Majority, told *El País* that “democracy is on the line around the world. There are problems between rulers and ruled. Yesterday’s fluidity is gone.” He then added nervously that workers “feel society is not hearing their new demands. The result is that the new demands correspond to a very deep transformation of society.”

An intensification of the class struggle

Economic inequality in Chile is already approaching levels unseen since the end of the 19th century, in 1882, when the Edwards family of oligarchs controlled an equivalent of 7 percent of the country’s GDP. Today, about 5.5 percent of GDP corresponds to assets owned by the Luksic family. In general, 20 economic groups control 52.6 percent of the country’s production. These levels of inequality are incompatible with any genuine forms of democracy.

During his campaign, Piñera had announced plans to overhaul “a lot” of social programs as part of a \$14 billion pro-growth program of business incentives, half of which he plans to finance with the Chile’s “growth capacities,” namely the ongoing rebound in the price of copper, which accounts for more than half of the country’s exports. The rest will come from “greater austerity and reallocations of expenditures.” However, in his concession speech, Guillier immediately fed illusions in Piñera, declaring: “I must admit that my rival knew better in adopting a lot of our banners.”

Piñera’s Chile Vamos has declared itself against some of the most popular pledges of the New Majority administration under incumbent President Michelle Bachelet, including replacing the Pinochet-era constitution, reforming the AFPs and, with some discrepancies within the

electoral coalition, a gender-identity registration law. The Piñera team in turn plans to intensify Bachelet’s pro-business labor “reform” by expanding the “essential services” not allowed to strike and by reinstating nonunion collective bargaining.

Another one of the New Majority pledges that the coalition actually implemented—its electoral legislation—ended up greatly benefiting Chile Vamos, which lost 10 percent of the popular votes for senators and only increased 1.28 percent in its votes for deputies compared to 2013, but received five new Senate seats and 23 new deputies, obtaining larger proportions in both chambers than before.

The “center-left” Concertación and New Majority governments (1990-2010 and 2014-2018), which dominated after the transition from the 17-year-long dictatorship of Gen. Augusto Pinochet, have promised to fight inequality while receiving salaries from and serving the largest economic groups, with the most publicized case being that of the conglomerate SQM. Even the US State Department gave \$1 million to the 1988 “No” campaign against the reelection of Pinochet, which boosted Concertación and paved the way for its rise to power.

Such deals secured the Concertación’s loyal defense of Wall Street and the City of London’s tight control of the country’s economic and social life that had been brutally enforced under Pinochet. The Concertación even allowed the criminal sale of public utilities in 1988 and 1989, amounting to at least \$2.3 billion in losses for public finances.

The preservation of the brutal capitalist framework has led to mounting popular hatred and mobilizations against the New Majority—the Concertación’s political progeny—expressed in the fact that 25 percent of voters who supported the Broad Front in the first round voted for Piñera in the second. Moreover, a London School of Economics 2017 study tracked the gradual fall of New Majority’s approval rating from 84 percent in 2010 to 21 percent in August 2017.

The Bachelet administration has been rocked by corruption scandals surrounding corporate financing, and faced mass protests against the AFPs as well as growing frustration on the universities given the miserable scholarships it approved when promising “free education.” There have been widespread strikes, which have been sold out by the CUT, the Stalinist-controlled trade union central, including a national strike of public employees in November. Earlier this year, a single 44-day strike in the Escondida copper mine, the largest in the world, was in part responsible for bringing GDP down 14 percent in the first trimester, but was halted by the trade union without workers’ demands being met.

These mobilizations are set to intensify under Piñera. Citi Group reports that 30 labor contracts in the mining sector expire in 2018, three times the yearly average of contract renewals since 2011. Moreover, the current stagnation of wages and insulting pensions, which average \$350 a month, are making personal debt increasingly unbearable. According to the University of Chile researcher, Marco Kremerman, there are 8.3 million people employed; but 11.3 million have debts, 4.4 million of them in default.

The Broad Front joins the establishment

The discrediting of the New Majority allowed the Broad Front to reach 20 percent of the presidential vote in the first round and elect 20 deputies and one senator, breaking the political monopoly of the two ruling coalitions since 1990. However, as shown by its backing of Guillier in the second round and the conciliatory declarations by its top leaders, the Broad Front is now consolidating its integration into the political establishment as a “left” prop.

“The Broad Front political project needs to get nourished from other forces, it could be the Communist Party or others; I’ve always believed that is the road that the Broad Front must travel,” said the Broad Front’s deputy for Santiago, Pablo Vidal, to *UChile*. Meanwhile, Stalinist Communist Party (PCC) legislators, like Guillermo Teillier and Carmen Hertz, who currently belong to the New Majority coalition, have suggested forming a “bridge” of opposition against Piñera that goes from the Christian Democrats to the Frente Amplio, which Vidal also considers a possibility.

Founded primarily by leaders of the 2011 student protests, the Broad Front brought together a host of petty-bourgeois political tendencies whose common agenda ostensibly consists of an abstract humanism centered around the program professed by the New Majority, but critical of its failure to implement it.

In an interview with *Jacobin* magazine last month, the first Broad Front senator, Ignacio Latorre, argued that the main conclusion from the elections is that “the Chilean electorate wants to see Bachelet’s tentative reforms become a reality... in truth, these reforms mean dismantling Pinochet’s legacy.”

Their two main inspirations, as Latorre notes, are Podemos in Spain and the Broad Front that is currently ruling in Uruguay, both formations built to save bourgeois rule as it faced the collapse of traditional two-party systems in the respective countries. Last year, Podemos showed the true face of such a maneuver by providing a “left” cover to the ongoing turn to dictatorship of the Spanish and EU ruling elite, particularly by feeding illusions in the Socialist Party (PSOE) and the EU as they back Madrid’s repressive and authoritarian measures against the population in Catalonia.

Perceiving a still vast gap between their politics and the rapidly leftward moving demands of the Chilean working class, other sections of the Broad Front are advocating partnering with more radical-sounding organizations. For instance, Karina Oliva of Citizen Power calls for “rebuild[ing] a social and popular majority in the country ... by convoking transformative forces outside of the Broad Front.”

The pseudo-left prepares a dead end for the working class

The pseudo-left internationally has exulted in the emergence of the Broad Front, with Podemos leader Pablo Iglesias congratulating the party for the electoral results. *Jacobin* magazine, run by sectors of the US upper middle class organized around the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) and Democratic Party, celebrated in a December 6 article that the newfound “viability” of the Broad Front should incentivize sections of the Socialist Party and the Stalinist Communist Party (PCC), which they claim merely “failed to recognize that the Concertación was no vehicle for defeating neoliberalism,” to support the Broad Front as a means to regain power.

They base their position on the unfounded hope that the Broad Front can save capitalism by achieving a majority support and preventing a turn to authoritarian rule. “[Salvador Allende’s] inability to secure a majority opened the door for the center-right elite alliance that ushered in the devastating 1973 coup,” *Jacobin* writes, broadly mischaracterizing the fascist forces leading the US-backed military coup that installed Pinochet. This line is effectively a defense of Allende’s method of the democratic “Chilean road to socialism,” the bankruptcy of which was tragically

revealed during the coup of September 11.

For its part, the Workers Revolutionary Party (PTR), which is part of the Pabloite FT-CI and received 15,000 votes running in the Santiago and Antofagasta districts, write in their magazine *Ideas de Izquierda* that the Broad Front can be a vehicle to some concessions for workers, but that it “is missing a material class force as a base of support.”

While insisting on appealing to the working class, the PTR refers to the anti-Marxist Ernesto Laclau to validate the quest for “the plurality of demands around a significant vacuum without a social class base” and to Gramsci to insist that we are living through a non-revolutionary “organic crisis” open to such “new reformist” groups like the Broad Front.

Regardless of which formula of radical-sounding demagoguery is advanced, the PTR, the Broad Front and their pseudo-left partners internationally reflect the strivings of upper-middle class layers scrambling to get a greater share of the wealth at the top of society.

Official INE statistics show that 50 percent of Chilean workers make less than US\$550 (340,000 pesos) monthly, while the top 7 or 8 percent have incomes drastically larger than the rest of the population, with a marked cut-off around 1.2 million pesos or US\$2,000. The available figures show that the top 10 percent, composed almost exclusively of professionals and executives, control only a slightly lower share of national income than the bottom 70 percent.

The defeat of Allende and the struggle for political independence

As the postwar and dollar-led stabilization of capitalism began to crumble in the 1960s, there was an international and revolutionary resurgence of the class struggle, reflected most sharply in the May-June 1968 massive general strike in France, with hundreds of millions of workers and oppressed masses in the backward countries entering political and armed struggles against imperialism.

During this period, Chile underwent deep “stagflation”—inflation with economic stagnation—leading to a growth in working class militancy as a decade of slow and crisis-ridden agrarian reform fed larger peasant uprisings. In Chile, where a popular front coalition under Salvador Allende was elected in 1970, as well as internationally, capitalism’s survival was chiefly the result of the betrayals by Stalinism, social democracy and their Pabloite accomplices.

The Pabloites rejected the revolutionary role of the working class and the revolutionary implications of the global crisis of capitalism, claiming instead that petty-bourgeois and bourgeois nationalist tendencies could be compelled to implement socialism. This perspective was used to justify liquidating Trotskyism in Latin America into Castroism and its guerrillaist variants like MIR in Chile and turning them into pressure groups for bourgeois nationalist leaders like Perón in Argentina as well as Chile’s Allende.

The US Socialist Workers Party, after its “reunification” with the Pabloites in 1963, advised Allende in 1971 to confront the mounting revolutionary crisis—at a time when he was compelled to order miners to work “voluntary hours”—by applying a more radical-sounding “left” populism to convince workers to make sacrifices.

The result of these opportunist betrayals was the political disarming of the workers’ movement, paving the way for its deadly suppression by the Pinochet dictatorship.

Today, the pseudo-left is again desperately seeking a political means of preventing the working class from organizing independently and internationally under conditions in which the bourgeoisie and imperialism are preparing to crush whatever organized opposition emerges and step up their exploitation of workers and drive to dictatorship and war.

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