

# Chilean military deployed against protests for the first time since Pinochet

By Andrea Lobo  
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For the first time since the fascist military dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet, tanks rolled into downtown Santiago, Chile, this weekend, deployed against protesters demonstrating against a drastic fare hike of the Santiago metro, from the equivalent of USD \$1.12 to \$1.16. Military personnel in plainclothes and uniform were filmed shooting machine guns and pointing them at crowds of demonstrators.

On Saturday, the right-wing government of billionaire Sebastián Piñera invoked the still-standing 1980 Constitution established by Pinochet to declare a state of emergency across the country and to impose curfews in Santiago, Valparaíso and Concepción, enforced by 9,441 soldiers and thousands of *Carabineros*, the infamous militarized police. The main border crossing with Argentina was also blocked throughout the weekend.

The seamless imposition of these dictatorial measures by the Chilean ruling class, with the backing of US and European imperialism, exposes the sham of a “transition to democracy” in which the basic political and military set-up under Pinochet remain untouched under the “Concertación” governments led by the Social Democrats and Stalinists that ruled the country for 25 of the last 30 years.

The international character of this process, reflected concurrently in the fascistic repression against the Catalan nationalists by a Social Democratic government in Spain and the military crackdown in Ecuador, demonstrates that the ruling class everywhere is responding to the crisis of capitalism and the resurgence of the class struggle with a return to dictatorship to impose the economic diktats of finance capital.

The metro rate hike, which was announced in early October, led youth and workers via social media to call for rallies last Monday. Users jumped over turnstiles en masse, meeting brutal police repression. On Friday, these demonstrations sparked mass social anger against growing inequality and triggered protests for broader social demands.

Expressing these sentiments, Alejandra Ibáñez, a 38-year-old demonstrator, told AFP: “I don’t like the

violence or that some people break things, but all of a sudden these things have to happen so that they stop mocking us and stuffing their fingers in our mouths, raising everything but salaries, and all of this to make the rich in the country richer.”

On Friday, demonstrations grew and shut down all 136 stations of the Santiago metro system. Dozens of stations were lit on fire, as was the headquarters of Enel, a private Italian firm that controls 40 percent of energy distribution in Chile, and the offices of the pro-Pinochet *El Mercurio* newspaper in Valparaíso.

On Saturday and Sunday, the curfews were defied by thousands of demonstrators and, in Santiago, protesters holding pictures of victims under the Pinochet dictatorship temporarily surrounded the tanks.

At 10 p.m. Saturday, hours after invoking the state of exception and calling demonstrators “true delinquents who do not respect anything,” Piñera said he had “heard with humbleness the voice of my compatriots” and announced the repeal of the most recent fare hike of 30 pesos for the Santiago Metro. (Metro prices in rush hour had already increased 100 pesos, or nearly 15 percent, since February 2018.)

The state of emergency, however, will continue indefinitely, and the curfew was also invoked on Sunday night. According to a statement Sunday by the Ministry of Interior, 1,462 people have been arrested and 15 civilians hurt.

Five civilians died when a supermarket in Santiago caught fire amid the demonstrations and repression. At the same time, entire sections of Santiago remained without electricity Sunday, while school classes were suspended today.

The main trade-union confederation, Workers United Center (CUT), which is controlled by the Stalinist Communist Party (CP), has worked to suppress any industrial action beyond ordering metro workers to skip work due to “unsafe conditions.” Instead, the trade union officials marched in a stunt to the Moneda Presidential Palace to appeal to the conscience of Piñera to end the state

of emergency.

The CP and the pseudo-left Broad Front made the token decision to refuse joining a meeting convoked by Piñera this weekend. However, their interventions have focused on similar appeals to Piñera and openly justifying the repression.

The Broad Front's leader, Beatriz Sánchez, tweeted, "With much pain, I see a just and majority-backed demonstration captured by unacceptable and unjustifiable vandalism." Its legislator Giorgio Jackson wrote, "Like many others, my stomach hurts and I feel frustrated and impotent seeing images of unjustifiable looting and fires in the cities."

For his part, Daniel Jadue, the CP mayor of Recoleta, a town in northern Santiago, stated: "Legitimate mobilizations cannot end in vandalism and inexplicable looting. That only confirms the views of a Sebastián Piñera administration that seeks to justify his ineptitude with violence against citizens."

These statements justifying the crackdown expose the sentiments of broad layers of the upper middle class represented by these parties and unions, who view with hostility the mass protests against inequality. These statements, moreover, expose the reactionary character of their universal calls to window-dress the military through minor budget cuts and "democratization."

The response by the official "left" has emboldened outright fascist elements in Chile to seek to make calls to mobilize against workers and youth. In a not-so-subtle reference to the Pinochet dictatorship, the Association of Retired Navy Officials published a statement Sunday claiming "we have preparation and vast experience organizing and running a country in a convulsive moment" and called for action that would "support the Armed Forces and Police to recover the rule of law in Chile."

The resurgence of the class struggle demands the development of a revolutionary working class leadership armed with a socialist program based on the historical lessons learned from the deadly betrayals by bourgeois and petit-bourgeois nationalism in Chile. This history demonstrates that workers cannot advance their independent class interests on a national basis since they face a global enemy: imperialism and global finance.

When the left bourgeois-nationalist Salvador Allende was elected in September 1970, the Richard Nixon administration plotted his overthrow immediately. Jotted notes by then-CIA Director Richard Helms from orders given by Nixon 10 days after Allende's election read, "Not concerned risks involved. No involvement of embassy. \$10,000,000 available, more if necessary. Full-time job—best men we have... Make the economy scream. 48 hours for plan

of *Kissinger: A Biography*, Walter Isaacson, p. 290)

Despite evident efforts to undermine the Chilean economy and government by Washington, Allende kowtowed incessantly to win the approval of Nixon. On February 1971, Allende invited the US aircraft carrier USS Enterprise to stop at Valparaíso, which was ultimately rejected by Nixon. Chile "will never provide a military base that might be used against the United States," responded Allende.

The refusal to fight US imperialism derived from both the economic dependence on global finance capital by the Chilean ruling class represented by Allende and the post-war conciliation between imperialism and the Stalinist bureaucracy in Moscow, represented in Chile's ruling popular front by the Chilean Communist Party. Meanwhile, strikes, factory and land occupations faced repression by the Chilean police, military and Stalinist thugs. Workers militias were disarmed, even as popular front leaders were certain the military, Chilean fascists and Washington were planning a coup.

Civil war was left in the hands of the capitalist ruling class by the Stalinists, their Pabloite allies in the United Secretariat, the Guevarist Revolutionary Left Movement (MIR) and other petit-bourgeois nationalist forces that channeled the pre-revolutionary upheavals against Eduardo Frei's pro-corporate policies during the 1960s and the revolutionary uprisings during 1972-73 behind open or "critical" support for sectors of the national bourgeoisie.

These pseudo-left forces are again working to politically disarm workers facing the threat of fascism by channeling opposition behind the ruling class through appeals to the bankrupt trade unions, the CP and the Broad Front.

On September 20-21, 1973, the International Committee of the Fourth International released a statement explaining that, "like Hitler and Franco, General Pinochet won by default, because of the treachery of Stalinism." The ICFI then made an appeal to Chilean workers that is even more urgent today: "place no confidence in Stalinism, social democracy, centrism, revisionism or the liberal bourgeoisie, but build a revolutionary party of the Fourth International whose program will be the revolution in permanence."

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