

Trump blames mass uprising in Chile on “foreign efforts”

By Bill Van Auken
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US President Donald Trump blamed the historic mass protests that have gripped Chile for the past two weeks on “foreign efforts” and declared his support for the right-wing government of Chilean President Sebastián Piñera’s attempts to “restore order” in the South American country.

The White House press secretary reported that Trump made the statements in a phone conversation with Piñera on Wednesday after the right-wing Chilean president announced the cancelation of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit that had been scheduled for November 16-17. Piñera also called off the United Nations Climate Change Conference, known as COP25, which was set for early December.

The cancellation of such summits because of an uncontrollable social upheaval is unprecedented. The principal reason for the Chilean government’s decision was precisely its difficulties in “restoring order”, despite the unleashing of savage repression, including the declaration of a state of emergency and curfew and the deployment of combat-equipped troops in the streets for the first time since the end of the Pinochet dictatorship.

While Trump praised the Chilean regime for attempting to “peacefully restore national order”, at least 20 people have died, several hundred have been wounded, including by live fire, and there have been reports of “disappearances”, rape and torture at the hands of the army, the paramilitary Carabineros and other elements of Chile’s security forces. The repression has only swelled the ranks of the demonstrators.

Attempts by the Piñera government to appease the mass protests by rescinding the state of emergency and curfew, offering insignificant economic concessions and dismissing cabinet members have fallen on deaf

ears, with strikes and mass demonstrations continuing.

As late as last Thursday, Chile’s foreign minister, Teodoro Ribera, announced, “We’re going ahead with the planning of both summits, logically adjusting ourselves to the circumstances, but there is nothing that could justify not having APEC.”

The next day, however, the government’s position shifted in the face of a protest that brought over one million people into the streets of Santiago, with hundreds of thousands more participating in demonstrations in cities across the country. The protests, the largest in the country’s history, have been accompanied by a continuous wave of strikes by truckers, teachers, miners, dockworkers, public employees and virtually every section of the Chilean working class.

What began as spontaneous protests against a hike in public transit fares escalated into a generalized uprising against conditions of stark social inequality. This was combined with demands for a reckoning with the crimes carried out by the Chilean bourgeoisie, both under the blood-soaked dictatorship that ruled for 17 years after a CIA-backed coup in 1973, and in the systematic looting of the country by foreign and domestic capital ever since.

In addition to concerns that the government could not assure the security of the some 21 heads of state who were set to descend upon Santiago amid the popular upheavals, the Chilean government also feared that their presence—and particularly that of Trump—would only provoke further unrest. It was also reported that some of the participants were beginning to back out, including Japan and Russia. Chile’s government feared that more would follow suit, having no desire to witness the masses in the streets in protest against the same conditions of social inequality that prevail in their

countries.

The cancellation has disrupted Washington's plans for Trump and China's Xi Jinping to sign what the US administration had described as a "substantial phase one deal" on trade. While the deal was partial and very limited, the Trump White House had hoped to use its signing in Santiago to claim an economic victory and distract from the growing political crisis surrounding the impeachment inquiry.

US and Chinese officials were left scrambling to find another venue for a bilateral meeting between Trump and Xi for signing the deal. According to Reuters, US officials were suggesting either Alaska or Hawaii, while Beijing was proposing Macau.

The cancellation of the COP25 climate summit took the UN agency organizing it completely by surprise. Officials said they learned of the decision only when Piñera announced it Wednesday in his speech from the La Moneda presidential palace.

This will mark the second time that the climate gathering has been moved. In November of last year, the Brazilian government rescinded its hosting of the summit claiming financial reasons. That decision came one month before the inauguration of the fascist President Jair Bolsonaro, whose foreign minister has dismissed climate change as a "cultural Marxist" conspiracy aimed at weakening the West.

Trump's attempt to attribute the mass movement of millions of Chilean workers and youth to "foreign efforts" reflects the absurd propaganda of the most fascist layers of the Chilean and Latin American ruling classes, who have claimed that Cuban and Venezuelan "saboteurs" had been sent into Chile. It is also an indication of the police state response with which not only he, but the US ruling establishment and both its political parties, will respond to the inevitable outbreak of similar social explosions within the United States itself.

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