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Chile

# The October 2019 uprising

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**The situation in Chile is evolving rapidly. This statement was issued on Sunday 20 October, the day before the general strike.**

The secondary students lit the fuse by fare evasion in the Santiago metro. That was a week ago, as a reaction to the rising price of fares that exceeded the equivalent of one dollar per trip in a country where the minimum wage is just US\$437 per month. The acts of evasion multiplied rapidly, joined by employees travelling to their workplaces. The government, deaf to protest, occupied the subway stations with militarized police (special forces) that were quickly overcome. The subway network is the backbone of transport in this city of 6 million inhabitants, with a total of 136 stations.

A call was made for a day of protest on Friday 18 October on social media. And people took to the streets massively in Santiago, with barricades, street closures and violence. That night the metro fires began. First four stations. Now 41 stations have been burned out in different lines of the subway network.

The situation is getting tenser minute by minute. The government decreed a state of emergency (a state of constitutional exception that allows restriction of democratic freedoms). After 30 years, the city of Santiago saw the military again in the street. But people were not intimidated. They did not back down but advanced. Yesterday we were thousands in the streets shouting, "soldiers out". The military authority hardened its hand, decreeing a curfew after 10 pm. The curfew was not respected. We were in the streets until after midnight. We withdrew to rest because the fight continues.

The government has run out of any ability to give a political response. Yesterday it announced the cancellation of the fare rise, without understanding that the problem of fares is the symptom of a much more structural and deep problem.

We are a people which 40 years ago was subjected to the most extreme neoliberalism known on the planet. They privatized education. To study you have to borrow from the banks. During the governments of the *Concertación* and *Nueva Mayoría* and as a result of enormous student uprisings (2006 and 2011), some fee exemptions were established that are completely insufficient. Young people live in poverty. To retake a course is very expensive. They commit suicide in the face of so much pressure.

They privatized health. We have health for the poor and for the rich. The rich have very expensive, luxurious private clinics. The poor can die waiting for medical care. A couple of days ago the "Van Buren hospital" in Valparaíso collapsed, for lack of state budgeting. The families in our neighbourhoods support each other when someone gets sick by selling things, organizing dinners and exercising solidarity. And the ministers make fun of us. They say it is good to queue at surgeries because we can "interact socially".

They privatized water. This vital element is in the hands of a minority of employers dedicated to mining, agribusiness, forestry and avocado production for export. They own the water and have caused a disaster of unimaginable scope. Ancestral peasant communities (indigenous and Chilean) see their animals die due to lack of water and fodder. And those animals are their livelihood. They draw from them milk; they make cheeses and generate a sustainable economy of self-subsistence. These communities are dying in the sight of indifferent governments and political authorities.

For the benefit of mining they are destroying the glaciers that constitute our freshwater reserves. Seawater desalination has begun, but in private hands and it is projected as a new business. And today, 20 October 2019, as a result of this social upsurge the thieves released the waters of several rivers that until yesterday were dry while today water runs through them! It was not drought it was looting! They privatized social security. They established a model of forced saving of 13% of wages to pay pensions, the money managed by corporations called AFP (administrators of pension funds). For the generation that started working in the 1980s, it was time to retire and the amount of pensions is equivalent to a third of the minimum wage, about US\$141. That means dying in poverty after a lifetime of work.

They implemented employment legislation that keeps the workers atomized. The companies are fragmented through a chain of contractors and subcontractors, external and in-house, obliged to negotiate separately. The right to strike has been severely limited. The result is a social disaster. More than half of the population earns less than US\$563. People who have worked for years have turned to working more hours to increase their income. Overwork and indebtedness are two chains that squeeze the necks of our fellow citizens.

The social upsurge that started in October 2019 in Chile expresses rejection, hate and deep rage in a people that has endured silently for too long. The “democratic” regime inaugurated in 1990 and headed by the Concertación de Partidos por la Democracia (Christian Democracy, Socialist Party, Radical Party, Party for Democracy), did not mean the improvement of the living conditions of the popular masses. This is the “democracy of the rich”. This democracy did not end the privatizations carried out under the dictatorship and has refused for years to question the fundamental pillars of the economic, social and political regime designed and established under the dictatorship. What is at stake is the survival of extreme neoliberalism that only serves world capitalism and a minority group within Chilean society.

In contrast to what has been described we highlight that in a few years the existence has been consolidated of a few economic groups allied to transnational capital. They are listed among the richest in the world. They own Chile. They own the political parties of Chile. They own the Parliament. Few parties and parliamentarians escape the pressure, by blackmail and corruption, generated by these mega powers.

The government and big business face this upsurge with serious concern. It is not what they saw coming. They have been surprised and know they have no valid interlocutor to silence the protest. They will try to raise the dead to play the role of “representatives of the people”. Among them we visualize Communist, Socialist, CUT, and even Frente Amplio personalities.

Yesterday, 19 October 2019, the *Coordinadora feminista 8 de marzo* (8 March Feminist Coordination) convened, together with secondary students grouped in the *Asamblea Coordinadora de Estudiantes Secundarios* (ACES - Secondary Student Coordinating Assembly) and the *Movimiento Ecologista Agua y Territorios* (MAT – Land and Water Ecological Movement), a press conference that was held today. Many student, resident, feminist and environmentalist organisations participated as well as some workers’ organizations. The CUT did not participate. The *Movimiento No Mas AFP* does not participate either. Surely these last two movements are waiting quietly in their homes for a government call so that they can emerge as valid interlocutors.

The press conference was held today. The first thing is that we call a general strike for tomorrow, Monday 21 October. The second is that we demand the end of the state of emergency. The end of the curfew. We call for organization of the territories to provide them with a policy of class independence and distrust of those who have betrayed us again and again.

Then we met as the 8 March Coordination, to plan our action tomorrow in what will be our first general strike under “democracy”. The city is restless, with the transport service interrupted, with water cuts, with shopping centres ransacked, and subway stations on fire. And the outbreak is spreading to the regions which are rising against

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neoliberalism, the looting of water, the high cost of living and the privatization of roads and tracks.

The state of emergency was originally decreed for Santiago and Puente Alto. Then it was extended to Valparaíso, O'Higgins, Bio Bio and Coquimbo. We do not know how this situation will develop. We already have dead, wounded and prisoners. We do not know how many. We will inform when possible.

This social uprising in Chile, an “exemplary” country subjected to the dictates of transnational capital, is one more within Latin America. This expresses the deterioration of world capitalism. We call on all international organizations to have a common understanding of this moment and to join revolutionary forces to end the bloodthirsty capitalism that subjects us to misery and death.

*Tendencia Socialista Revolucionaria*

*20 October 2019*

*Santiago de Chile*

PS:

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