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Chile

After Bachelet's election

- IV Online magazine - 2014 - IV470 - March 2014 -

Publication date: Saturday 29 March 2014

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Interview with Marco Alvarez, an activist with Libres del Sur. The interview was conducted by Franck Gaudichaud

Can you tell us something about Libres del Sur and its history?

Libres del Sur is a revolutionary organisation which appeared publicly in the first week of April 2012. It is an anti-capitalist tool in construction with a horizon of socialist revolution. In its short existence it has participated in the ecosocialist, feminist and internationalist struggle. It is located within the fight for popular power, working for “the other education” to forge another society from below. In less than two years Libres del Sur has grown at the national level to be present in most regions of the country. Today it is preparing its first national congress.

What is the significance of the rate of electoral abstention?

The high rates of abstention in the elections of 2012 and 2013 are yet another expression of the crisis of legitimacy of the current model of society and its neoliberal democracy. More than 56% of Chileans did not participate, this being in part a passive and silent abstention which is very difficult to interpret beyond the obvious discontent of society with our discredited national political class.

In this context, I have spoken of “turbulent abstention” on two occasions, just before the primary elections of June 30, 2013 and during the second round of the presidential elections on December 15, 2013. The common denominator of these two elections was the exclusive participation of the two faces of the Chilean political tandem: the right and the New Majority (ex-Concertacion).

Abstention in itself is a simple reflection of the current crisis in Chile which finally becomes one statistic among others. However the call for a “turbulent abstention” at elections where there are only candidates who support the neoliberal model is a political act of proposal-protest. It is about not waiting for the results at home, and using this moment to increase the levels of illegitimacy of our “democracy” through turbulent direct actions with a high media profile.

How do you analyse the integration of the CP in the New Majority and its long and short term political effects?

The integration of the oldest political organization in Chile in “the new majority” can be analyzed from three viewpoints. A historic viewpoint: at different moments in history the Chilean Communists have participated in broad coalitions cohabiting

with sectors outside of the left. That corresponded to their classical "bourgeois democratic revolution" and "stagiest" policy. Another viewpoint is that of the "pragmatic solution" given the institutional political ostracism they have suffered for 36 years. For the Communists parliamentary action is fundamental and they have relied on the negotiation with the Concertation and the New Majority in 2013 to ensure they had seats in Parliament. Now they have six deputies. The third viewpoint is the real affinity they have with the programmatic progressivism of the new Bachelet government, which fits in quite well with their left conservative style.

In the short term, the effect has been to abandon a space in the left at the last elections. Another effect has been a loss of prestige in the social world, with as main example the fact that the Communist Youth have lost nearly all the federations they had in 2011. The most significant effect in my opinion is that the integration of the CP in the new government has removed its monopoly of the left and we are beginning to see anti-capitalist alternatives more clearly.

Its long term effects will depend on its action inside the Bachelet government. What is certain is that its turn to the right will bring it negative consequences in the sectors it claims to represent.

What are the perspectives for the reorganization of a broad anti-capitalist left in Chile?

The reconstruction of the popular movement and the construction of serious anti-capitalist alternatives is the big challenge for the left committed to radical transformations for Chile. This challenge is not easy given the level of atomization inside the Chilean left. In the specific case of the anti-capitalist left, that is increased by the transmission of "resentments" from generation to generation.

The perspectives should consist in finding points of convergence to articulate the multi-sectoral struggles. The more there is organization of anti-capitalist left activists, the more there is a possibility of going beyond the current atomization of our sector. This unity should be forged outside of the electoral period from concrete struggles.

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Another big task inside the anti-capitalist left is to revive theoretical debate between the organizations and their activists. A fraternal debate around strategic questions. A debate of ideas which has been lacking over the past two decades. A debate which in the future opens the possibility of collective deliberation.

Fragmentation and political marginality are the heritage of the left of the 20th century. The big task is the construction of an anti-capitalist left for the 21st century with the aim of unity in diversity, building a majority and exercising real power, not only in words, but in an intelligent and committed way to bring down capitalism and its underpinnings.