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Chile:

# **"We are part of the different trenches emerging in every corner of the country"**

- IV Online magazine - 2012 - IV452 - September 2012 -

Publication date: Thursday 27 September 2012

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**An interview with Marco Alvarez Vergara, an activist in Chile's ["Libres del Sur"](#) movement, conducted by Franck Gaudichaud of France's Nouveau Parti Anti-capitaliste.**

**First of all we would like you to present the current situation of social struggles in Chile. Latin America has seen many social movements emerge in the last decade, and over the past year, Chile has seen big social mobilizations, particularly among students. What, according to your assessment, is the state and the current dynamic of the Chilean social movement?**

To understand the Chilean social political process, we have to take a little look at what has happened in Latin America in the last 15 years. The Hugo Chávez victory in the presidential elections of 1998 in Venezuela opened a new historic stage in the Latin American context characterized by two things. One is the advance of the broad progressive left across the continent that has led to different Presidents coming to power, which generates an almost absolute majority, changing the relationship of forces from the institutional political viewpoint. On the other hand, we should stress the emergence of new social movements, which have assumed an important role in the current stage through their radicalization and sustained advance.

These two features have predominated in Latin America. If we had to carry out a comparative analysis with what has happened in Chile, over a year ago we talked about a great mismatch in terms of what was happening with the rest of the countries of the continent, but this has changed, at least in terms of the social movement, with the emergence of the Chilean student movement in April 2011. It is important to emphasize that the students aren't the only ones struggling, since there are different movements such as the ecologist and housing debtor movements, which unfortunately do not have the same visibility. But, staying with the student movement of 2011, different factors have triggered its appearance with the intensity and force we have seen, it being understood that this particular movement has existed inside the popular struggles for decades.

The first, in my view, is a political-structural factor generated through the imposition of neo-liberalism in Chile with blood and fire by the military dictatorship of Pinochet at the end of the 1970s and the subsequent legitimacy that gave the Concertación de Partidos por la Democracia for more than 20 years in government through a negotiated democracy, carrying out a process of deepening this economic, political, social and cultural system. Thus, what happens in Chile is an endemic problem that recurs in the life of neo-liberalism, expressed by a radical critique by students and a large part of society against the market in education and its huge profits that have the character of usury. This political-structural factor can only be overcome with a radical transformation of the prevailing model.

The second factor behind the development and explosion of the Chilean student movement is of a political-conjunctural character; in 2009 there were elections in the country, bringing Sebastián Piñera to the presidency, embodying the two worst features of the capitalist system. On the one hand the face of economic power and on the other the face of the traditional political class, which created better conditions in order to have greater levels of criticism and mobilization in the country. In the first year of his government, these mobilizations did not happen due to the earthquake and the tragedy of the 33 miners trapped by poor working conditions, which generated a sense of national unity and a mood of "no confrontation".

The third factor is age. The majority of Chilean students are between 14 and 25 years old, very few were born during the military dictatorship and if they were born they do not remember, most were born in the periods of governments of the Concertación. The military dictatorship did not just exterminate the revolutionary organizations and truncate a historical process, but generated a process of subjective process among people of a fear of reorganizing, these

young people do not have that fear, and they are not part of that generation, which means that their politics are more rebellious and fearless. They are the new generation Chile needed.

The fourth factor is international, it has to do with the "indignation" which has spread to every corner of the world, this is not mere coincidence, what has happened with the "Arab spring", the indignados in Spain, Occupy Wall Street, the student movements in Puerto Rico and Colombia and so on. This has to do with a general crisis of the capitalist system at the global level, and at the same time its antipode, which is the constant mobilization of the oppressed in every corner of the world.

The student movement in Chile is long-standing: If we only look at the secondary student movement in the last 10 years, we have two examples of significant mobilization. In 2001, the students were mobilized by the reduction of school capacity and this movement was called the "mochilazo", a short but more or less radicalized mobilization and in 2006 there was the "penguin" revolution which was a movement of political character, but was curtailed by its leadership and coerced by the Coalition through a Presidential Advisory body led by former President Michelle Bachelet.

These different factors, which for me are the most important, joined together, led to the appearance of the Chilean student movement and a new generation of fighters and social activists for future struggles, already committed to a different Chile.

**This social movement for education is outstanding, it has been maintained for months, it has a clearly political, and radical approach questioning the model inherited from the dictatorship and the neo-liberal system and was able to resume its demonstrations recently, after the summer break. All this with a very rich and varied repertoire of action: assemblies, occupations of schools and universities, big marches, popular and festive activities, and so on. What is your analysis of the current situation of these youth struggles in terms of their demands, difficulties and achievements, prospects?**

If we were to characterize the Chilean student movement, we would have to start from its primary feature which is its temporary nature. Starting in April 2011 and until today it has remained mobilised independent of the inevitable processes of ebb and flow in the struggle. At the beginning of the 2012 there was a low intensity in the mobilizations, it was taken for dead, but a couple of days ago a wave of actions and demonstrations involving tens of thousands of students across the country took place. Temporality is a very important feature, which is based on the experience of past struggles. Promises of any kind will be accepted. The student movement knows that the only way to change the educational model in Chile is keeping the mobilizations steady and not immersing forces in the future promises of the political class. There is a crisis of legitimacy in the Chilean model, which is expressed in a radical criticism of the political parties and representatives. What means the students will not rest until they achieve the demands raised, because they are confident that the future of Chilean education cannot be in the hands of those who sold it. Temporality is a very important feature especially in knowing that this is not going to be done overnight. And also the mobilizations are already planning for the future, for example some sectors have called for a boycott of the upcoming municipal elections.

Temporality is not the only feature, but also the mainstreaming of the legitimacy of the demands. Bourgeois surveys show 89% approval among citizens for the student demands. What are these demands? Free, quality education, better access, de-municipalisation in education and so on. The students have driven this platform of struggle and the majority of society supports them in the path of the recovery of education.

If we spoke of free education a year ago, the few that raised this demand were called crazy, voluntarist and utopian. The student movement raised the call for free education. I focus on this, because the ideas of the revolutionaries, at some point become reality and become those of the majority.

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There are more features that animate the student movement and one of the most important is creativity in the sense of reaching the majorities. When we want to carry out radical transformation processes in society, we need to do so with majorities. Creativity has to assume a fundamental strategic position, through the most diverse activities that bring the people together. The student movement has a very good record on this feature, which we should learn from and understand in order to be able to build a new society.

Another feature is the massive size. 150,000 people marching in the streets of Santiago alone, without forgetting the other regions, and in addition occupations in school campuses and universities. Transformations are made with majorities from the same social movement. There was a lot of echo in the streets of Chile for the slogan of the 99% vs. the 1%.

Another feature is the autonomy of the student movement and respect for its internal democracy. The student movement depends on itself and no one else, and every time that an organization has tried to meddle or lower the mobilizations, this has been sanctioned. The best example is what happened with the Communist Party of Chile, which at the beginning of the 2011 held many of the university federations and today in 2012 has lost almost all university elections, including that of the University of Chile. And this happened because of the role played by the Communist Party, which did not understand the dynamics or links with the social movement, which the student body punished by not re-electing their militants as their representatives.

One of the great contributions of the student movement, beyond coordination with other sectors in struggle, is to have incorporated its platform of demands into the struggles in other sectors, because it understands that for the student movement to achieve its demands a radical transformation of Chilean society is needed. Therefore the rest of the demands that are on the table today are also part of the movement. They include the claim for a constituent Assembly in Chile, a new political system, for the renationalization of copper, a tax reform, and so on.

**Now, to talk a little bit about the left, in particular the space of the Chilean anti-capitalist left, a political space that is still very fragmented and limited, when a part of the left and "progressivism" has already joined - totally or partially - the system and become institutionalized. You, from Libres del Sur, identify with anti-capitalism and ecosocialism: how are you positioned within this field of the Chilean left?**

The first thing that we propose is that to make another world possible, another left is necessary, that is our founding motto, to be able to carry out a process of construction of an anti-capitalist, revolutionary organization. In Chile, the oldest organization of the left is the Communist Party of Chile, founded in 1922, which is the reformist party par excellence, which mainly has a policy of alliances with sectors of which we have a radical critique, the neo-liberal left, which was involved in the process of transition to a negotiated democracy, which was part of the process of deepening of the neo-liberal system. These two lefts today have an electoral pact which is expressed in their programmatic agreement. On the one hand we have the neo-liberal left seeking refuge in some parties of the Concertación, and on the other the traditional left, represented by the Communist Party.

But also we have another type of left, of a more "delusional" character, which seeks to be the heir to the revolutionary left in Chile, which is not real. The revolutionary left in Chile, on its long journey, was a revolutionary political project and always tried to have an impact on national politics. Since the military dictatorship and until today, we do not consider the depth of the crisis of the Chilean left. What I can say is that the natural heir to the revolutionary left is not those small sectarian factions that are limited to a historical memory with a verbal radicalism, but with zero political impact, frozen in the slogans and leaflets of the 1960s. Another left that appears on the Chilean political map, is the "progressive" left, mainly composed of sectors that broke with the neo-liberal consensus and turned to the left. They are organizations that were born recently and are considered "progressive". Their political action is not yet defined clearly and their commitment to a transformation of the current Chile is still subject to evaluation.

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Also, we have a social left that would correspond to the majority of society, which is pushing in different trenches of struggle for the transformation of Chile. This social left is not usually involved in political organizations or left organisations and is critical of what they are. We also are part of this social left, we are part of the social movement, and we are part of the different trenches emerging in every corner of the country. We are partly represented in this sphere, but we also know that it is essential to promote an organic tool constituting a revolutionary contribution to the great socio-political alternative that should take shape inside the country. So we have decided to found our Organization, the "Libres del Sur" ["Free Movement of the South"], in April, 2012 through a process of reflection which lasted almost over one year and which is still going on.

Since we could not find a left alternative in Chile that met our minimum expectations as revolutionaries, we formed the Libres del Sur, but this is not an act of foundation, but rather the beginning of a long and complicated process of becoming a real alternative in future struggles, this will require "lots of water under the bridge", we know that the class struggle and the processes of formation of real alternatives are slow, but we have to move forward.

**And one last question, you are here at the Summer University of the NPA, you have also passed by Spain and met the comrades from Izquierda Anticapitalista and have seen a little of the European process: what is your view, from your experience in Chile (and Latin America), on what is happening here and also on the attempts to build the anti-capitalist movement?**

My presence in Europe came through an invitation to make comrades aware of the experiences that are being developed. I've been in Spain with the comrades of Izquierda Anticapitalista, learning about its internal processes, mainly with respect to its links with the movement of the indignant, as they have developed a revolutionary alternative adapted to the new times, since they come from a situation very similar to ours, in relation to the student movement, the mass movement, its relationship with workers.

Also we have done the same with the comrades of the New Anti-capitalist Party in France, which has also added to our thematic development around axes that have been worked on for a long time in Europe, like ecosocialism, LGBT work, feminism, the new internationalism. Also I have been discussing with comrades from different organisations such as Syriza from Greece, the Portuguese Bloco de Esquerda, and many others.

But if we were to do a comparative analysis between Latin America and Europe, they are wildly different things. What characterizes Latin America now is the advancement of its social movements, expressed at the institutional level in the electoral triumph of a broad left. In Europe today we have the example of Syriza, the coalition of the radical left, which obtained a high vote in Greek elections, giving certain hopes and dreams for the European anti-capitalist radical left to move forward. Also we have an objective issue, which has to do with the crisis in Europe: we find some countries like Spain with 25% general unemployment, the product of a crisis of capital and its political class, giving greater possibilities of making the enemies of the people visible. So these are quite different processes and customs, but we unite around the fact that today there is a crisis of global capitalism and therefore against that our response must be a revolutionary, anti-capitalist alternative at the global level, since it is not possible to see the fight from the local-national point of view, or even regional, in our case at the level of Latin American, but that our response has to be in all areas of society but from the global point of view. That is something that has also led me to my geographic trench of struggle, which is that "if the revolution is not global, it will not be".