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Chile

Return of the Penguins!

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The penguins came back, and their march turned into an all out anti-neoliberal stampede. The powerful movement of Chilean students (nicknamed “the penguins” after their dark-blue and white uniforms), which first rocked the presidency of Socialist Michelle Bachelet in 2006, returned with a vengeance last year. It grew in numbers, allies and intensity, and had the rightwing businessman president Sebastián Piñera on the ropes. And although the movement and government have entered a sort of stalemate, the struggle to democratize Chile’s educational system has, for the first time since the country’s return to democracy in 1990, challenged the very foundations of its neoliberal model.

Still, after eight months of mass mobilizations and broadening support, none of the radical reforms students demanded had been achieved, and Piñera, for the time being, has ridden out the storm. A newly elected leadership of the university federations has announced giant demonstrations to kick off the academic year in March, but for the moment the movement is on summer pause. Meanwhile, as students address lingering internal differences and suspicions, party elites have initiated reforms intended to restore the regime’s legitimacy. Now that the movement appears to be entering a new phase, it is important to take stock of its lessons and examine possible implications for Chilean politics.

Even against the backdrop of the Arab Spring, the Occupy Wall Street upsurge and European resistance to austerity, the Penguin rebellion stood out for its magnitude and diversity. It’s been estimated that in the course of eight months there were no fewer than 40 massive demonstrations, some reaching 500,000 participants (in a country of 17 million – 3% of the country’s population!), and over 150 total actions, more than one every other day. Nothing even approaching such continual mobilization had been seen since the mid-1980s, when Chileans participated in the historic days of protest which precipitated the end of the military regime, in power since the 1973 coup that overthrew Socialist Salvador Allende.

Further, students employed a range of creative methods including – besides the conventional means of mass disruption like marches, occupations and cacerolazos (pot banging demos) – marathon kiss-ins, a thousands-strong flash Thriller re-enactment on the lawn of the national palace, and an 1800-hour relay around the historic site of Allende’s death. The diversity of the protests promoted the involvement of a range of students, beyond experienced and politicized activists.

Finally, the movement distinguished itself by quickly moving from sectoral grievances to class demands for systemic and radical reforms. By July, students were mobilizing broad support for re-nationalization of the copper industry, a radical overhaul of the tax code, and a transformation of the country’s restrictive electoral rules.

The first protests erupted in May 2011, drawing thousands of students onto the street. By August, hundreds of thousands were disrupting business and governance as usual on thoroughfares, on campuses and in public offices. Hundreds of high schools were being occupied alongside the country’s main university campuses, and dozens of secondary students had initiated hunger strikes. In many instances, teachers walked out in solidarity with the pingüinos’ calls for a drastic overhaul of the school system.

By then, the state’s response had turned to repression and a vain attempt at vilification. In late July and early August, at the height of the mobilizations, hundreds of students were being beaten and arrested at every march. Yet while the government was able to strike at the students – 16 year-old Manuel Gutiérrez was shot dead by the police on August 26 – it was unable to intimidate them or to drive a wedge between them and the sympathies of “ordinary

law-abiding" citizens.

Instead, as the students escalated the movement, responding to each carrot or stick from the government with larger and more militant mobilizations, support for the penguins " and their tactics " kept growing and reaching, according to some polls, up to 85% of the population. By contrast, the movement proved costly for the president whose approval ratings sank to 25% " a huge reversal from honeymoon he'd enjoyed after the drama of 33 trapped miners a year ago!

The rising tide of the movement culminated in an unprecedented 48-hour general strike, widely backed and observed by public sector unions and neighborhood associations, at the end of August. Even the now opposition Socialist and Christian Democrat parties that make up the "center-left" Concertación alliance were forced to come out in support of the national stoppage. Their hypocrisy and opportunism was lost on no one: the Concertación spent the previous 20 years faithfully implementing the very policies that are now being protested and systematically repressing any popular demonstration against them. [1]

By December the movement had slowed through the combined effects of exhaustion, tactical adaptations to opportunities for negotiation, and the threat of losing a school year's worth of credit. Yet the penguins continued to demonstrate the capacity to disrupt centers of power. On October 20, dozens of students and parents "occupied" a senate subcommittee session where education minister Felipe Bulnes was defending the government's education budget proposal.

On November 10, 30,000 students marched through the streets of Valparaíso, the site of Chile's Congress. Most importantly, they have placed an inescapable demand for wholesale educational reform on the national agenda, and, in the process, have laid the groundwork for a potential realignment of forces that may decisively undermine the legitimacy of the heretofore most stable neoliberal project in the region.

Students raise a simple and basic demand: free, renationalized and quality education for all. Though there have been some improvements since the military regime gutted the school system, they have been minor and in fact reveal the very source of the educational crisis: While education spending has grown from 3.9% to 6.9% of GDP, public funding has only grown from 1.5% to 2.7% of GDP. The difference (over four GDP percentage points or 350% of the state's share!) is accounted for by private and household expenditures, stretching working families to the breaking point.

Primary and secondary students demand that the profit motive be removed from schools entirely. They are asking for a complete annulment of the privatizing and deregulating legislation that Pinochet passed on the eve of giving up power, formalizing the de facto changes he imposed throughout his regime. This program established a tiered school system which bolstered quality private education for the children of elites, while defunding and segmenting public schools via "municipalization," and creating a new category of low-quality private schools through a voucher system.

Today, the private sector has deeply penetrated the school system. Fewer than half of Chile's high school students attend fully state-funded schools; the rest go to private schools (7%), or subsidized schools (48%) where costs are split between the state and parents. Significantly, students are demanding a full reform " beyond the cosmetic modifications enacted by Bachelet following the previous bout of student protests " that abolishes the voucher system, recentralizes state funding, and generates more revenue for schools through higher taxes on the wealthy and corporations (which in Chile enjoy the most generous rates of Latin America).

University students are demanding nothing short of free tuition along with an alternative and fairer admission policy for all students, as the deterioration of the public school system has erected a veritable apartheid barrier to higher education for working class families. They too are fighting for more state funding for public universities, as well as

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more democracy in the administration and academic life of these institutions. Further, they insist that curricula and research reflect the country's pressing social needs rather than the corporate priorities that permeate higher education.

Chile's university system is one of the most privatized in the world. Three-quarters of Chile's universities are privately owned, and the country's colleges charge about as much as in the world's richest countries. According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), nearly 40% of all higher education spending, more than in any other OECD country, comes from Chilean household income in the form of tuition fees. Families pay 85% of tuition costs out of their own pockets!

On average, OECD countries publically fund 70% of university education outlays; in Chile, only 16% of higher education spending comes from the state. The United States is the only OECD country that has a higher share of total private post-secondary spending – which means, given the state of the American university system, that Chile is not in good company. And as in the U.S. system, student debt has emerged as a key issue. As students are realizing that they will be repaying their loans until retirement, debt forgiveness has become another important demand.

The government's response, led by the incompetent Bulnes since his replacement of Joaquín Lavín [\[2\]](#) in mid-July, has been threatening, deceitful and thus far largely ineffective. After realizing that teargas, truncheons and water-tanks were backfiring and that the majority of Chileans continued to support student demands and reject his unilateral palliative schemes, Piñera invited the heads of CONFECH, the university student federations coordinating council, to the presidential palace for negotiations.

Initially, student leaders, principally Communist Youth leader Camila Vallejo, president of the national university student federation (FECH), and Socialist Giorgio Jackson who heads the Catholic University students, under pressure from the street, smaller regional student federations and more radical, mostly high school local assemblies, refused to enter talks.

On his end, Piñera categorically rejected full re-nationalization and free tuition. Instead, he insisted on offers of full rides for the poorest of students and the vague promise to increase national education revenues by keeping the corporate tax rate at 20%, a temporary hike established to assist reconstruction efforts after last year's earthquake and set to revert to 17%.

Moreover, repeating the World Bank mantra, Piñera maintained that free university education amounted to a subsidy for the rich by the poor. Students, their families and workers retorted that higher mining royalties, which would recover some of the windfalls from Chile's copper bonanza, was the most effective way of redistributing the country's surplus to the poor.

By early October, when the movement had exerted sufficient leverage over the government, students were ready to sit and talk. They insisted, however, on a number of guarantees. Chief among these were an end to threats of loss of the academic year (a threat to which working class students are particularly vulnerable), an end to repression and legal persecution, broadcasting the talks live over national TV, and perhaps most significantly, the freezing of national budget proposals for the duration of negotiations.

None of the guarantees were met. Worst of all, the government submitted a budget to Congress, one that Piñera falsely claimed offered the largest expansion of education funding since redemocratization. [\[3\]](#) In response to such dishonesty and strong-arm tactics, CONFECH broke off talks. By then, Vallejo, the rising star of the communist youth, spoke of consolidating the nascent movement and transforming it into a political instrument that "transcends

the Concertación” and could redraw the constitution and dispute state power “for the people.”

High school leader Andrés Vielma put it in more strategic terms: “Our bases need to build a more political movement, and I don’t mean the politics of the parties we know so well... We are in a period of popular power construction, that is, we are building and strengthening in all the provinces and linking up with social movements. This is the moment to connect our cause to workers’ struggles. The idea that we alone as students could abolish the Chilean educational system is an illusion. This system depends on something more complex, and that is neoliberalism. For it to fall, different sectors must unite and get involved.”

Critical Strategic Questions

As the students withdrew from talks, they faced critical decisions. Clearly, the six-month wave of mobilizations has ebbed. Further, as students debate next steps, there are signs of declining public support — down to 65% according to some polls. Finally, the promising links established with workers and the poor have failed to translate into a well-structured, independent and coherent movement for systemic reform.

The student movement, along with the broader challenge to Chile’s neoliberal model, finds itself in a crucial juncture. As we wait to see in which direction things move, it is worth making five observations about the “penguin revolution:”

1) For the first time since 1990, a sectoral movement has transformed into a national and explicit rebuke of neoliberalism and the low-intensity democracy that has managed it. Indeed, the dynamic which propelled the movement so forcefully — the synergistic relationship between mobilized students and generalized public frustration — has its roots in the growing rejection of the elite-driven “democratic” institutions which govern in favor of corporations and their political brokers.

Over the past 20 years, a number of important movements have emerged — most notably the ongoing indigenous Mapuche campaign for lands, the student movement of 2006, the subcontracted miners’ insurgency of 2007, mortgage debtors revolts, and various environmental campaigns — and all have elicited high levels of public sympathy. But this was the first time that broad sectors, particularly labor and poor urban dwellers, not only sympathized but claimed the movement as their own precisely because they agreed with the target — the neoliberal state.

Recent mobilizations were not provoked by a rightward turn in Piñera’s social and economic policies, even if the global recession has produced the first increment in national poverty since 1990. All the fears (or Concertación fear tactics) invoked around the unmediated ascension to power of Chile’s new “billionaire class” have proved unfounded. In many ways, Piñera extended the timid reforms of his center-left predecessors. Besides preserving a higher corporate tax rate, the new president, for instance, actually broadened Bachelet’s much touted “solidarity” mini-pensions. [\[4\]](#)

In spite of such continuity, in the past year and a half, there has been a steady upsurge in protest. Before the student movement erupted, Chile had experienced a widespread rebellion in the polar south following the sharp reduction in heating-gas subsidies, militant middle-class street protests in Santiago over the destructive HidroAysén multi-dam project in Patagonia, and a wave of miners’ strikes, some wildcats, during the latest round of sector bargaining.

2) This rising insurgency was not fueled by austerity measures; cushioned by rising revenues from copper exports, public funding has expanded in recent years. Something else is behind this popular rebellion. Simply put, the

institutions of the neoliberal regime that emerged from the democratic transition have undergone a wide and deep crisis of legitimacy. The widespread popular discontent that had been building for years among Chile's popular sectors required an opportunity to burst forth. The needed fissure was opened by shifts in elite alignments.

Coming out of the dictatorship and up to the current juncture, the center-left coalition of Christian Democrats and Socialists had efficaciously managed the free-market economy and social order through a combination of anti-authoritarian credentials, sustained growth, targeted welfare services and elite-run electoral competition and passivity of non-elite constituents. [5]

A pact with economic elites and the military whereby the "center-left" would not alter the basic rules of neoliberal accumulation has been strictly observed by the Concertación. This included foremost a promise never again to facilitate the levels of popular organization encouraged by Chile's historic left parties and unions leading up to and during Salvador Allende's radical Popular Unity 1970-1973 government. Their commitment to the model was bolstered by the role that many of its cadre began playing as privileged brokers and managers of business interests, most notably in privatized utilities and infamous infrastructure, mining and hydroelectric/hydrothermal mega-projects.

Until now this formula for oligarchic decision-making achieved a form of consent based on low levels of class contestation and minimal civic engagement. The election of Piñera's rightwing government has disrupted the delicate elite-driven political arrangements that undergirded the stability of post-Pinochet neoliberalism. The frustrations and grievances festering in what has been turned into one of the world's most unequal societies exploded irrepressibly when the elite's trusted center-left managers lost power.

3) The movement has raised key questions about the political logic of both the "left" within the Concertación, represented by factions within the Socialist Party and the marginalized Communist Party, calculations that could impact the alignments that hold up Chile's neoliberal order. During the past 20 years, the Socialists, who co-governed with the Communists under Allende, have been faithful followers of deregulation, privatization, docile and flexible labor, and repression of dissent. They have profited from the bipartisan system that harmoniously shares congressional power with their rightwing rivals.

The Communists meanwhile, though continuing to organize at the grassroots "mainly in unions, campuses and shanties, have continually exhorted their former partners to make common cause and change the electoral rules in favor of proportional representation. While such a strategy would deliver the numbers necessary for less restricted rule by a genuinely reformist center-left, it would also breach the Concertación's commitments and potentially empower subordinate sectors "the very groups that the rigged voting system is designed to exclude.

Cautious of the Socialists' fear of independent organization from below and wanting to present as attractive a deal as possible, the Communists have always been prepared to use their influence in student and worker struggles to temper protests in exchange for a deal and access to the state. [6]

Significantly, the current student and popular revolt has split the Socialists on this question. Indeed, the Concertación had already alienated rebellious figures such as Senator Alejandro Navarro and, facing defeat in 2010, had been forced to cut a deal with the Communists, whereby the latter were ceded three safe districts in return for their meager (and ultimately unhelpful) votes in the presidential election. Today, polls show that were elections to be held, the Concertación would garner as little as 15% of the national vote!

While the oligarchs of the Socialist Party remain committed to their strategy and will do everything possible to resurrect the coalition, an important faction of the party favors a looser embrace of the Christian Democrats and an opening to the left that would give birth to an alliance with the Communists and Socialist splinters. [7]

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In short, the party is divided between those wishing to bring the Communists into the Concertación, leaving everything else unchanged, and those who view the alliance as a spent force, and wish to build a renovated center-left without Christian Democracy, modeled on the Uruguayan Frente Amplio (Broad Front) which includes Communists, former urban guerrillas, and Social Democrats. Thus far, this last option has been received with widespread skepticism. After all, the Frente Amplio has always sworn by the neoliberal Concertación as its shining example!

The Communists wish to seize on this enticing opening to the centers of national power. Indeed they, including student leaders like Vallejo, tacitly backed an effort by Concertación legislators to bargain for limited reforms in Congress, a resolution that the movement has explicitly and repeatedly rejected. For the Communists, “transcending the Concertación” and “disputing state power” may very well mean entering a center-left alliance and governing as the Socialists’ junior partners.

Such a strategy would likely imply a significant cost for the movement: negotiating at the top echelons of power could result in demobilizing and de-prioritizing base building or “popular power construction,” despite the party’s vows to keep the heat on in the streets. Moreover, it would undermine student demands by coating the regime with a veneer of legitimacy. But abandoning the radical demands and compromising the independence of the students has already cost the Communists dearly on campuses and the streets. In short, the opportunity generated by the student rebellion is simultaneously rife with dangers.

4) Regime elites have already taken the initiative to restore the viability of Chilean democratic neoliberalism by preemptively proposing reforms. The first order of the day was to address the immediate student demands by passing Piñera’s “generous” budget in Congress. In spite of the condemnation from below and the Concertación’s façade opposition in the lower chamber, the budget passed thanks to the abstentions of the center-left senators. More significant for long-term stability, partisan elites are considering limited institutional modifications designed to secure “governability” and the reproduction of Chile’s neoliberal model.

The powerful “center” parties of the dominant electoral coalitions, Renovación Nacional (RN) and Christian Democracy, have responded to the threat of continued and unpredictable disruption on one hand and Concertación defections or reconfigurations on the other, by announcing talks to review the country’s electoral rules. [8] Though the movement deserves credit for forcing democratic reform onto the national agenda, the aim of partisan and business elites is to make the minimal changes required to preserve the very neoliberal policies that the movement has taken aim at.

The central proposal involves a tightly regulated step in the direction of proportional representation, a plan that would open up minor institutional channels to capture and diffuse popular discontent while bolstering in practice the dominant electoral blocs and their shared power. Regime elites hope a remodeled Concertación will win the next presidential elections with Michelle Bachelet at its head. The intended result would be a limited incorporation of the country’s marginalized though increasingly potent forces into the fringes of the political regime. Thus far, the RN-CD pre-emptive scheme has the Socialists in disarray and the Communists in impotent silence.

5) The risks of the moment are presently playing themselves out inside the movement. Just as left currents at the state-partisan level are debating future moves, serious disagreements have crystallized within the student movement, disagreements which have already impacted its future perspectives.

Broadly speaking there are two rival strategies. In dispute with the tendency led by the Communist Youth, which, reflecting their parent organization’s orientation, turns to high level state institutions and advocates for formal, partisan accords, is Chile’s new New Left. These fragmented student groupings look to build and mobilize their bases while prioritizing the expansion of social power through horizontal alliances with workers’ and poor people’s

struggles.

Composed of autonomist, local and radical left organizations, they remain deeply suspicious of Communist and Concertación partisan maneuvering and, having participated in the more fleeting 2006 mobilizations as high school students, keenly remember Bachelet's seductive invitations to dialogue and join official and ineffectual "task forces."

While the student mobilizations were on the upswing, Communist leaders, fearful of losing credibility and influence, were pushed to keep the heat on in the streets. Early on, however, the more radical, grassroots forces expressed a distrust of Communist-Socialist willingness to open talks with the government and reach an institutional settlement. [9] While both camps insisted throughout that mobilization alone was neither sufficient nor permanently sustainable, high school assemblies, students from smaller regional universities, dubbed the "ultras," along with left dissenters within the central federations, initiated outreach campaigns and fortified their organizations and incipient structures of resistance.

When the stalemate with the state began to set in, the Communists inevitably adapted their behavior to the logic of compromise. In the end, the Communists have paid a hefty price for their decisions. By January 2012, the formerly dominant Communist Youth had lost leadership of three major university federations, and therefore of the CONFECH. In the December FECH elections, Vallejo lost the presidency to an alternative left slate [10]; in January, an "ultra" displaced her comrades in the historically militant University of Concepción.

Communist losses present a serious challenge. Since the movement had benefitted enormously from the organizational strength and discipline of the Communist Youth, its place has now been taken by more radical, yet also more dispersed, forces. Their emphasis on grassroots independence and on strengthening incipient structures of resistance is encouraging. Moreover, recent talks among new "ultra" leaders aim to establish a coherent and non-sectarian revolutionary left alternative to the Communists and check the impulses of the autonomists. But it remains to be seen whether they can coalesce into a coordinated force with the ability to reactivate the movement and whether they can adopt a fruitful approach with respect to rising workers' fightback.

The decisive factor may still be the Communists. Students can only hope that given the rebuff it received from regime elites, the party will rethink its collaborationist strategy. Were it to regain some autonomy and lend its organizational capacity to a revamped movement, the challenge to Chile's democratic neoliberalism may grow yet. Vallejo's recent declaration that she would never vote for Bachelet is a positive sign.

Despite the uncertainty and the inherent risks of the moment, this remains a promising juncture in Chilean politics as it has activated entire sectors in independent and radical struggles. Even if a realignment fails to produce meaningful shifts in Chile's democratic neoliberal regime, the political landscape appears to have changed irreversibly. The choking grip that the Concertación regime had on popular collective action "through incorporation of party elites, passive consent and outright repression" has largely vanished.

Independent forces are rising from below. Their new-found power and autonomy should push the Communists away from debilitating deal-making. In any event, mirroring the impact of the historic emergence of the 1967 movement for university reform, Chile's radicalized students and youth will now have to be reckoned with on their own terms. After gaining invaluable experience and developing formidable capacity for action during its 2006 fight, today it aims to consolidate with proven organization and battle-hardened leader-activists.

It is no exaggeration to say that a tectonic shift has occurred. A whole generation is breaking through and entering active politics and struggle. Layers of formerly "apathetic" students, cut off from collective action after 17 years of a dictatorship and 20 years of marginalization of protest, have appeared on the scene in the tens of thousands.

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This fact alone, which challenges a fundamental tenet of Chilean neoliberalism, will have a destabilizing impact on Chilean politics as usual. Combined with the anti-capitalist and anti-Concertación strategic outlook of the new radical movements, the political dynamic is outright threatening to post-authoritarian neoliberalism. While the danger of a re-composition of the Concertación and a new lease on the regime's life is very real, putting this broken and spent coalition back together will not be easy.

Economic elites will surely pour resources and influence into this effort and specifically into a future Bachelet campaign, and their Socialist and Christian Democratic brokers will do all in their power to avoid a substantive shift in the national balance of forces. But the new reality is that this cycle of mobilizations will have an enduring impact, as it has forged a generation of radical activists and erected new, or solidified existing, infrastructures for independent class politics.

In sum, for the first time since the years of rising struggle that forced Pinochet to give up power and laid the groundwork for the historic and ignominious deal that gave birth to democratic neoliberalism in Chile, popular forces, students and workers together are back on the scene and will have an undeniable say in their country's future.

Notes

[1] Using lethal force against protesters does not represent a change in policy by the new "center-right" government. Responding to any and all demonstrations with paramilitary coercion has been a staple policy of all center-left governments since 1990. This approach has taken the lives of población (shanty-town) youth and especially Mapuche activists reclaiming community lands.

[2] Lavín is from the far right UDI party, the ally of Piñera's RN (National Renovation) party which has close historical ties to the military regime. He narrowly lost to Socialist Ricardo Lagos in the 2000 presidential run-off. Lavín has since been moved to the Planning and Social Development ministries. Bulnes switched from the Interior Ministry to the Education portfolio, the office most responsible for carrying out the repression of the movement.

[3] Left economist Orlando Caputo has pointed out that there is nothing new in proposed levels of education funding. In fact, Piñera is offering a decrease in the growth in allocations for education. For next year, the government is proposing a 7.7% increase in the systems's budget, compared to a 13.8% growth this year, and 15.5% in 2010.

[4] Bachelet's "Solidarity" retirement program, designed to assist the hundreds of thousands of workers for whom the privatized pension system will offer nothing or close to nothing, paid out monthly sums of \$120. Under Piñera, these are slated to grow to \$400 per month — this in a country where the parity indexed GDPPC is \$14,000. Tellingly, the general welfare fund from which revenue for the new pension program as well as other targeted handouts come, amounts to a paltry 0.11% of GDP! By contrast, the Argentine and Venezuelan states spend 0.4% and 0.45% of GDP, still quite low percentages on most counts, of their GDP on a universal child allowance program alone and on social "missions," respectively.

[5] The binomial electoral scheme has been instrumental in keeping popular participation to a minimum. It grants inordinate veto power to the Right electoral bloc and thereby incentivizes cooperation within strict policy bounds. Moreover, by giving exclusive representation to parties that gain a third of the vote or above, it marginalizes smaller, non-corporate backed parties. Most importantly, it encourages dominant bloc partisan oligarchs to distribute seats via elite deal-making while strongly discouraging campaigns built on the expansion and activation of party bases.

[6] The fact that the Mapuche campaign has been the most sustained and militant struggle in recent Chilean history has much to do with the fact that the CP has lost most, if not all, influence among Chile's indigenous population and groups.

[7] To facilitate this controlled leftward extension, former Socialist president Ricardo Lagos has proposed the formation of a broad Left Party which could attract the Communists and also have the clout to bargain with the Christian Democratic kingmakers. Some Socialists have even raised the

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possibility of a tightly scripted constitutional convention. The other group they seek to enlist is the Progressive Party (PRO), an eclectic and demagogic force that broke away from the Socialists in 2009. The PRO was founded by Marco Enriquez Ominami, son of legendary MIR founder Miguel Enriquez, who managed to capitalize on widespread frustration with the Concertación and polled at 20% in the first round of the 2010 elections. In reality the PRO is a shell of a party that serves above all as a vehicle for the personalist aspirations of its founder.

[8] This is not the first time that RN has allied with the democratic “center-left” to guarantee the survival of neoliberal accumulation. In 1988, when the country was still feeling the impact of the days of action that fatally weakened the military regime, RN promoted the anti-Pinochet campaign in the plebiscite that would decide whether free elections would ensue, thus unavoidably ending military rule. At the time, having experienced the threat of mass mobilization, the representatives of the new business class understood that a deal with Christian Democrats and refashioned Social Democrats was the best means of ensuring neoliberal continuity.

[9] Though this division was no secret to organized youth, reflecting as it did a secular difference in secondary and university milieus, it became embarrassingly public during a press conference organized with a progressive Puerto Rican rapper during his visit to the occupied administrative building of the University of Chile. Flanked by Vallejo and Jackson, René Pérez AKA “Residente” was thrown off when, during what was intended as a feel-good show of hip, international support, a young woman called out the leadership for “acting without consent of the bases” (pasando a llevar las bases) and “selling out” the demands of the movement at the negotiating table. Her intervention was met with widespread applause. The episode, captured by a student’s camera, is posted here: [youtube.com/watch?v=GtEh2A6vfiQ&...](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GtEh2A6vfiQ&...)

[10] This is considered a double blow to the Communist approach. Firstly, it was an unequivocal indication that the party has lost some of the social strength that it uses as a bargaining chip in its negotiations with the Concertación. Secondly, its rising public face has suffered a humiliating defeat. In fact, the party had intended to run Vallejo in a highly visible campaign in the next round of national elections. When it became obvious that its prospects in the student federations were weakening, it quickly rethought its plans and asked her to compete again for the FECH leadership. Unfortunately, even her new-found stardom could not guarantee a win.