

The dashed hopes of the new Chilean left

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Two months after his election, Gabriel Boric seems to be the president of a world that no longer exists. Buoyed by hopes of renovating the political system with the constituent process, he is the result of a quid pro quo between democratic demands and the echo of the social explosion of October 2018.

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Today, inflation is devouring the meagre incomes of the majority of Chileans, the violence caused by growing poverty, the repression of social struggles, the return of the far right via the transport strikes are all problems that underline the limits of his electoral programme. With a popularity rating of between 18% (Cadem, Datainfluye, Criteria) and 33% (Pulso Ciudadano), the left in power is under pressure.



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A stubborn social reality and new tensions

The global return of inflation is not sparing Chile. The CPI, the government's price measurement index, estimates that in April 2022 it will rise by 10.5%, bringing the increase in prices to levels not seen for 30 years. Vegetable oil has risen by 24.7% in one month (62% in one year), petrol by 30%, and double-digit increases for most basic necessities. This price shock is hitting the working classes hard. The official figures for poverty (10.8%) in 2021 are contradicted by the estimates of independent research institutes (such as the SOL foundation), which put it at 39.9%, with 55% of women raising their families alone below the poverty line. The statements of the Minister of the Economy, Nicolas Grau - a socialist, we are told, but a former real director of the Central Bank - make forecasts that sound like promises, talk about direct aid that is overdue, and evacuate the central demand for an increase in wages.

The May Day demonstrations illustrated the political and social tensions that are building up. On the one hand, a rally in support of the government around the CUT and the coalition parties, on the other, a left-wing opposition with a dissident class struggle trade union pole and social movements. The latter was the target of repression. Nothing surprising so far: the high school and student

movement had the right to the truncheons and tear gas of the left a few weeks ago for simply asking the government to keep its promises. The novelty comes from a serious incident that sets the tone for the period to come. The carabinieri were voluntarily demobilised and were absent from this rally. The procession was attacked by the extreme right, in the form of gangs, on the pretext of protecting shopkeepers.

The attack was premeditated, with video evidence of precise gunfire, resulting in the shooting of four people, including three independent journalists (among the victims Francisca Sandoval was hit in the head). What has deeply shocked the working class, and not only the militants, is the complacency of the government that is supposed to mark a real break with the old world. Many discussions revolve around the question: did the government let the situation fester? In any case, the government is playing with double standards, as in the case of the transporters' strike (with strong links to the extreme right and demanding more repression against the actions of the Mapuche collectives), which is active, violent but not hindered by the police, and social demands are repressed... as before.

The constituent process in crisis

Social promises were not the strong point of the Chilean left; it had staked everything on democratic renewal and the end of the Constitution resulting from the Pinochet dictatorship. The law 21-200 decreeing the modalities of a constituent assembly, the designation of deputies and the final validation of the new constitution contained ambiguities, like Boric's election. The new president relied on a limited electorate of 25% and on two coalitions: one from the new left and the other from the governing left of the former Concertation (coalition of Christian Democrats, Socialists).

The same applies to the fate of the Constituent Assembly, because there is a profound contradiction between the mechanisms for opening up the constituent process (elections, agenda, scope of changes) and a system of validation that does not work by simple majority. So many things have been discussed, from the plurinational character of Chile to new rights (civil, education, gender, end of water privatisation, etc.), but conservative circles have a de facto blocking minority. Social discontent and the fear of the petty bourgeoisie - which the right-wing press dramatises with the explosion of delinquency (homicides have doubled in one year), associated with migrants - could put a stop to the only tangible promise of this supposedly renewed left and open up an unprecedented political crisis.

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P.S.

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