

Chile: Third police murder in five days and the fraudulent campaign to reform the Carabineros

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In the first nine days of February 2021, Chile's paramilitary Carabineros police force was responsible for the deaths of three young working-class men. While the institution is notorious for its brutality, the three deaths mark an intensification of class war against the youth and the working class initiated by the ultra-right government of President Sebastian Piñera and supported by the parliamentary "left."

On February 9, Chile was convulsed by the news that two Carabineros agents Andres Navarro Pulgar and Ilton Zambrano Marin were caught assaulting and then discarding the body of a 23-year-old Bolivian, Jaime Veizaga Sánchez. Veizaga was barely alive when the cops from a checkpoint vehicle dumped him outside the Medical Legal Service in the mining town of Calama. He died before paramedics arrived at the scene.

The two cops were arrested after being charged with manslaughter and unlawful coercion. The autopsy pre-report failed to determine the exact cause of death of Jaime Veizaga, which restricted prosecutor Raúl Marabolí to indicating that "the officers did not provide adequate assistance to the victim and left him abandoned in the place where he died." The preliminary autopsy showed "signs of non-specific systemic shock that could have an infectious origin and should be ruled out through histology" and that there were "no traumatic dynamics in the findings of the head."

Based on these initial findings, on February 13 the Court of Guarantee (which in the Chilean judicial system examines the legality of the deprivation of liberty) ordered the two cops released and placed under nighttime house arrest and national arrest during the 200 days established for the investigation of the case.

The Bolivian foreign ministry has called on Chile to expedite investigation into the death of Veizaga and demanded concrete actions to repatriate the young man's remains.

Jaime Veizaga Sánchez is the third person to fall victim to police violence in five days. Earlier, on February 5, Francisco Martínez, a 27-year-old street performer, was shot dead by Sgt. Juan González Iturriaga over an altercation resulting from a preventive identification check. The event happened in broad daylight, in a busy thoroughfare and in view of dozens of

witnesses in Panguipulli, a lakeside town in Araucanía, the poorest region in Chile.

Martínez—the uncle of Anthony Araya, the youth who was pushed off a bridge by Carabineros during anti-police violence demonstrations in Santiago the previous October—was shot five times before falling to the ground in the middle of a busy intersection. As crowds descended to the scene chanting "Murderers! Murderers!" the cops drove off leaving the dying man abandoned on the street to only reappear en masse to violently suppress the protest.

While Sgt. González was detained and placed under house arrest, the Court of Appeals of Valdivia has subsequently released the cop, placing him under a national arrest warrant to report fortnightly for the next four months while the investigation is underway.

Then, on the evening of February 7, 27-year-old Camilo Miyaki was found hanging in a cell of the Pedro Aguirre Cerda commune police station—a station known for its role in having tortured and sexually abused at least two people detained during the mass youth and working-class demonstrations at the end of 2019.

Miyaki and his girlfriend had been arrested that morning for not carrying a COVID-19 safe conduct pass. She was released during the day. The young man, however, was removed from his original cell and placed in another that "had a blind spot, which did not allow one to see what was happening to the detainee." Breaking protocol, he was also given a blanket. Police later claimed that he had committed suicide, a claim strenuously denied by his family. An investigation is ongoing.

These and other recent police crimes reveal the stepping up of a police-state agenda following the social revolt that shook Chile in late 2019 after student civil disobedience triggered by a hike in public transport morphed almost overnight into massive protests. A mass movement arose against decades of extreme social inequality, police violence, and in opposition to a deeply hated political elite that emerged in the transition from military dictatorship to civilian rule.

Over the last two years and amid the deepening economic crisis exacerbated by the global pandemic, the working class

has borne the cost with its lives and livelihoods. The main cause for the deaths of tens of thousands from COVID-19 is not the disease alone, but the multi-generational poverty, insufficient and overcrowded housing and densely populated communes, lack of utilities and potable water, and underfunded and under-resourced public hospitals. The victims have come predominantly from the working class.

During these two years, workers and youth facing mass layoffs, price hikes, increased indebtedness, evictions and homelessness have time and again come forward, despite the pandemic, to protest the assault on their social and democratic rights, only to be met with repression. The Piñera government has utilized police-state and quasi-dictatorial measures and deployed the armed forces on Chile's streets for the first time in decades, killing or disappearing dozens of protesters, causing severe injuries and mutilations to hundreds and inflicting human rights abuses against thousands.

The linchpin in the government's ability to implement these measures has been the parliamentary opposition, which, while publicly criticizing Piñera, has rammed through his major policies and entered into a national unity agenda with the aim of redirecting the growing anti-capitalist sentiment into the safe parameters of parliamentary politics.

In response to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, Piñera's first significant undertaking was to decree a state of emergency and a curfew, which remains in place to this day. With the explicit approval of the Congress, the state of emergency allowed Piñera to place the chiefs of National Defense in charge of the respective 16 regions of the country. Also approved by Congress was the use of the armed forces for the defense of "critical infrastructure," without having to declare a state of emergency.

Piñera's increased budget expenditure on law enforcement and his deepening the militarization of Carabineros and the PDI over the last two years—equipping them with military-grade armored vehicles, bulletproof body armor, weapons and sophisticated surveillance devices—again was also approved by Congress.

Until recently the most significant manifestation of the national unity campaign was a referendum called in favor of a new constitution to replace the charter imposed by means of a rigged plebiscite in 1980 under the hated military dictatorship of Gen. Augusto Pinochet. The year-long operation by the country's "left" political establishment, the trade union apparatus and pseudo-left groups to dissipate a revolutionary situation amid the real danger of authoritarian rule and dictatorship, proved momentarily successful.

The latest police murders threaten to rekindle the widespread struggles that exploded to the surface in 2019 and resurfaced in 2020. That is the meaning of the comments made by deputy René Saffirio, an ex-Christian Democrat and veteran political operator going back to the 1970s.

Following Francisco Martínez' death, Saffirio said: "[A]

circumstance as painful as this can generate a state of major political convulsion, which could perfectly put at risk our constituent process."

He recalled that the whole political establishment was caught unawares by the seething mass movement that erupted in 2019 and warned that they could not be placed in the same position again: "Now we do see it, consequently, we have to act promptly, with celerity, with responsibility and with great seriousness."

The appeals to reform or re-found the Carabineros have to be placed in this context. It is a fraudulent campaign with the same ends as the Constitutional Convention. The Stalinist Communist Party (PCCh), the Frente Amplio and the Socialist Party are all complicit in this promotion of national exceptionalism regarding Chile's supposed "democratic traditions." While the counterrevolutionary and anti-working-class nature of the capitalist state is again exposed for all to see, these political forces collectively attempt to hoodwink the masses with this century-old chimera and in that way perform their specific service to capitalism.

"We demand the total re-foundation of the Carabineros institution, which is increasingly delegitimized due to the corruption cases involving it and its autonomous police action, without any civilian control. The only possibility of advancing in a healthy democracy for our country requires this re-foundation and not minor reforms, incapable of modifying the repressive police force we know," the PCCh declared in a communiqué that was echoed by the rest of the parliamentary "left."

To go forward, Chilean workers and youth must first work through and reject the long-standing political and ideological conceptions advanced by the fake left and fake socialist parties, which have permitted Chilean capitalism to remain in power despite the many courageous battles for socialism launched by the working class. The struggle to clarify these and other critical questions is decisive in preparing a revolutionary internationalist leadership in the working class. This requires the building of a Chilean section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, the party of world socialist revolution.



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