

Chile: Resisting under Martial Law

A Report, Interview, and Call to Action

CrimethInc.

October 21, 2019

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Since the revolt in Ecuador spread to Chile, the conflict has escalated rapidly. The government has called in the military and declared martial law, but people refuse to leave the streets, continuing to create an ungovernable situation. Despite the swift cancellation of the metro fare increase that first triggered the protests, their anger runs much deeper; many throughout the country are enraged by the dramatic disparities in wealth and power that capitalism has created and infuriated by the president's decision to attempt to crush protest by means of the military—a strategy that recalls the military dictatorship of 1973–1990. Strikes and protests are taking place around the country today—in Punta Arenas, Concepción, Valparaíso, Valdivia, and Temuco as well as Santiago.

The Chilean government admits to eight deaths in the course of the unrest, seven in fires and one murdered by military gunfire during demonstrations. However, there are reports circulating of 11 deaths, and many people have been shot by police, soldiers, and right-wing vigilantes. See below for more details.

In the following text, we offer our own brief report from the streets of Chile, an interview with a Chilean anarchist from within the movement, and a call to action from other participants in the movement.

Saturday

On Saturday, the protests started before noon. Throughout all of the city and the neighborhoods you could hear a steady drone of pots and pans, cars honking, all to the rhythm of popular chants: “Evadir, no pagar, otra forma de luchar” (“Dodge the fare, don’t pay, another form of struggle”) and “El pueblo unido jamás será vencido” (“the people, united, will never be defeated”).

After the declaration of the state of emergency Friday night, it was guaranteed that Saturday would see more protest. All day long, various forms of rebellion erupted throughout the city. Big bands played protest music and led chants, many people built barricades and set them aflame. People smashed the windows of many key government buildings and banks, then removed the furniture to build barricades and destroyed bank records. Many stores were looted of items both for fun and for necessity. More busses were burned as people clashed with police. The military was out in force with long guns, adding to the atmosphere of anxiety and revolt.

A curfew was declared for 10 pm Saturday night in Santiago as well as other cities that were participating in protest—Concepción and Valparaíso. As the sun set, some people began to go home out of fear that the military would begin to employ their weapons with deadly force. Many other people chose to stay out past the curfew and into the night. Clashes continued to decentralize, spreading further into the peripheries of Santiago, filling the whole city. Some of the most severe police and military violence occurred in the peripheries: Maipú, Pudahuel Sur, and San Bernardo, a semi-rural suburb on outskirts of the city.

Demonstrators torched tollbooths on the freeway north of Santiago.

In Valparaíso, protesters burned a building belonging to the right-wing/fascist press, a newspaper called “Mercury.” Valparaíso experienced heavy military repression, with soldiers running through the streets and attacking protesters. A few hours after the curfew, it was announced on the radio that the military presence would be doubled starting Sunday in Santiago. A new hashtag began to circulate: #chiledesperto (“Chile awakened”).

Sunday

News reports early Sunday announced that 240 people had been detained on Saturday night for curfew violations, more than 600 had been arrested around the country, and 62 cops injured. The total number of arrests and injuries throughout the week is much higher. Walmart Chile announced that “due to acts of vandalism, it has suffered looting in more than 60 locations in the Metropolitan Region and in the regions of Valparaíso, Antofagasta, Calama, Concepción, San Antonio, and Temuco.” Footage circulated of police openly using cocaine in the middle of the demonstrations to pump themselves up before attacking demonstrators. [This footage has since been removed from Instagram, but we saw it and consider it damning.]

Reportedly, six trains had been damaged, three of which were completely destroyed. It will take months to return the newest line in the metro to service.

On Sunday evening, Chilean President Sebastián Piñera made a televised address to the country from the headquarters of the army in Santiago:

“Democracy not only has the right, it has the obligation to defend itself using all the instruments that democracy itself provides, and the rule of law to combat those who want to destroy it... We are at war against a powerful, implacable enemy, who does not respect anything or anyone and who is willing to use violence and crime without any limit.”

Not only this statement, but the context from which it was presented, shows clearly enough how intertwined democracy is with the same military force that ruled under the military dictatorship. Anyone who has much experience on the receiving end of state violence knows that the authorities always accuse us of whatever they plan to do to us, in order to legitimize their aggression in advance. From this statement, it is clear enough that President Piñera and the mercenaries who serve him are attempting to create a discourse in which they can legitimize killing large numbers of people to return Chile to their control.

People all around the world should be inspired by the courage shown by ordinary people in Chile and do our best to make it impossible for the military to slaughter the people in the streets. Below follows an interview with an anarchist participant in the uprising and a call to action from other participants.

Interview

How often does the State of Emergency or Curfew law get used in Chile? When was the last time the state employed them?

The emergency powers that the Chilean state has implemented were passed down from the Pinochet (or Pinoshit, as we like to call him here) dictatorship. The Domestic Security Law (Ley de Seguridad Interior del Estado, or LSE) has existed since 1958, before the military’s 1973 coup, but in 1975, the dictatorship greatly expanded its powers, especially regarding crimes of “public disorder.” The law raises the penalties and sentencing for a variety of violations and crimes during times when the “functioning of the country” is altered. For example, in 2002, the government (headed by socialists!) used the LSE against a bus drivers’ strike. In general, it serves more as a deterrent and a threat than an actual tool for taking anyone in particular to trial.

Then there's the State of Emergency currently in effect, which was written into the dictatorship's 1980 constitution, the same constitution we have today.

The State of Emergency has previously only been used during natural disasters (like the 2010 earthquake in Concepción and during other earthquakes and floods). During those disasters, we've seen the army in the streets, allegedly to "help" people and clear rubble, but in reality, the armed forces use these cases as military exercises—practicing how to take over cities and defend the private property of multinational corporations. While States of Emergency have been declared in recent memory, this is the first time since the dictatorship (specifically since 1987) that a curfew (*toque de queda*) has been utilized. It is also the first time that the state has deployed the armed forces *specifically* for the task of repression. For people in Chile, it is shocking to see the streets full of military vehicles, tanks, and jeeps full of armed troops. However, the younger generations seem to be less afraid of them than those that remember the dictatorship.

How does this fit into the last few years of social movements and clashes with authority in Chile? Did anyone see this coming?

No one saw this coming, nor that it would spread so far. People in Santiago did feel like tension was building, but not in the sense of social revolt. Rather, it was seen more in the aggressions between people—people having to commute for hours after their work or school day, fed up with having to squeeze tightly into a packed train or bus, overwhelmed with exhaustion. This anger and exhaustion manifested itself in conflicts between the exploited. For example, blaming and fighting other people on the train or bus, or scapegoating immigrants and the like, creating a daily experience of hostility, but no political group or organization was prepared for this kind of widespread revolt.

Since last week, there have been calls for fare-dodging (*evasión*) and sabotaging public transportation in response to the 30-peso fare hike. That wasn't anything new. Whenever there are fare hikes, you see this kind of call for action. What's different this time is we're in spring, whereas past fare increases have been implemented in the middle of the summer without much of a response.

Beginning on Monday, October 14, organized and combative high school students began collective fare-dodging actions after they got out of school. These were massive and very effective. The Metro's security guards weren't ready for it, so the kids were able to freely hop the turnstiles and also hold open the gates for other commuters. On Tuesday, October 15, the collective *evasiones* grew even larger and included even more high schools. By Wednesday, October 16, it wasn't only the schools with a militant reputation that were involved. Lots of schools in poorer neighborhoods outside the city center got in on the action too, and that's where Metro security guards began clubbing students. This was truly the spark, and it made the high schoolers even more resolute in their struggle. They organized mass fare-dodging *evasiones* for later that afternoon (in Santiago, students get out of school a couple of hours before the workday is over) and more and more people joined in—if only because most people needed to get home and didn't mind saving a little bit of money on their commute. On Thursday, October 17, the response from the authorities and the Metro was to close certain stations, inhibiting people from being able to get home. Squadrons of police also began to occupy Metro stations, contributing to even more conflict and, through it, the destruction of metro infrastructure. In some cases, by sheer numbers alone, people were able to expel police from the metro stations.

On Friday, October 18 there was confrontation from the beginning of the workday on. Metro stations opened with more security guards and more police than usual, but people still staged

mass *evasiones*, and in many cases were successful in getting onto the platforms. The day went on as usual until the end of the school day. Once school was out, the whole thing got out of anyone's control. There was confrontation and combat all over the city. Metro stations were closed. Students occupied the tracks and destroyed Metro and bus infrastructure such as turnstiles. Three entire Metro lines were shut down. People began to do battle with the police, and a variety of conflict zones between people and police sprung up around the city.

Buses were burnt and used as barricades on major thoroughfares. Bus stops were torched. Even more fuel (proverbial and literal) was put on the fire as people began getting out of work for the weekend. Thanks to the almost complete halt of metro and bus travel within the city, masses and masses of people were out on foot—voluntarily and involuntarily adding to the numbers in the street conflicts. The police were losing ground and, as night fell, they began to attack with tear gas and water cannons. In retreat, the police fell back to the higher class neighborhoods to ensure the revolt didn't threaten the centers of wealth. The people, however, did not fall back, and went even further: looting and burning banks, supermarkets, corporate chain stores, pharmacies, metro stations, privatized health care offices, and government offices.

Ever since the *evasiones* started, everyone has been excited to support it, since it's a tactic that anyone can use. There's still a sense among the people that this has been a historic moment, at least in the social consciousness, and for the majority of people the revolt has put a smile on their face (not something you see often in Santiago). Although many haven't agreed with some of the forms of struggle, the sound of *cacerolazos* rang out throughout the city late into the night.

All this led the government to declare, at 2 am Saturday morning, a State of Exception in the province of Santiago, which included mobilization of the armed forces and preparation for their deployment on the streets. The night went on with more burning and looting. The government made a mistake thinking that the announcement of troops on the streets would calm things down.

At noon on Saturday, October 19, more *cacerolazos* were called for, as well as protests in the main plazas of various neighborhoods, in protest of the military presence and repression (rather than just the fare hike). The soldiers escalated things by pointing their guns, loaded with live ammunition, at people, leading to more rioting. Masses of people took to the streets in cities where a State of Exception had not been called, for example Valparaíso, Concepción, Coquimbo, and Puerto Montt. This led to even more looting and, in response, more States of Emergency and curfews declared, to begin at 10 pm Saturday night. In large part, the curfew was ignored and people stayed in the streets late into the night. Looting and burning continued.

At least three people have been found dead in the ashes of one looted supermarket, and there is news of many protesters injured by police. There are so many videos of police and military violence circulating. It's difficult to say with certainty how many protesters have been injured because the news is flooded with police press releases about how many *police* were injured, without even mentioning the demonstrators they have hurt, hiding the true level of their repression. However, the number of injured demonstrators is definitely in the hundreds, including people hit by clubs, tear gas canisters shot at people's bodies and heads, people hit at close range by rubber bullets, people run over by police vehicles, and so on.

This is still going on as I write and neither the police nor the armed forces seem to have taken control. They moved the curfew up tonight [Sunday, October 20], to 7 pm and fake news is circulating about shortages of food and basic goods in order to frighten the population.

I believe that since the beginning of this revolt, the students have been filled with a spirit of liberation and confrontation, which, thanks to *compañeros* who have combatted police in

the past and destroyed the symbols of capital, has generated a collective unconsciousness in which, during moments like this, people know to attack authority. This has been demonstrated by the fact that the majority of the businesses targeted have been large multinational chains like Walmart, which itself has had around 80 stores looted and 10 burnt throughout the country. It is also seen in the widespread use of the anarchist symbol on walls, especially amongst the combative youth.

Appendix: Call for Solidarity from Chile

The Revolt Is Growing Despite Brutal State Repression: This Monday, October 21, We Move on to the General Strike for Everything

One week ago, when the subway fare in Santiago reached the stratospheric price of 830 Chilean pesos (USD 1.20), the unbridled student youth proletariat—which has the virtue of denying this world in practice, refusing any kind of dialogue with power—launched an offensive calling for the “mass fare-dodging,” self-organizing a gigantic movement of disobedience that instantly earned a tremendous backing among our class, since this means of public transport is used by at least 3 million people daily. The State responded by sending hundreds of riot police to protect the stations, provoking severe confrontations in the subway system, which left hundreds of people wounded and detained.

On Friday, October 18, the rupture occurred: during a new day of protests against the fare hike, Santiago’s subway lines began to close completely, one by one, starting at 3 pm. This caused an unprecedented collapse in the metropolitan urban transport system. That day, the spark was ignited and the proletarian class demonstrated its power, as thousands of people threw took to the streets, overwhelming the repressive forces and staging major riots in downtown Santiago that surpassed any forecast. The corporate building of ENEL (an electrical company operating in Chile) burned in flames and several subway stations suffered the same fate. The Capitalist State showed its true face to the population, decreeing a “state of emergency”, which meant that the military was brought out for the first time since the end of the Dictatorship as a result of a social conflict. From that night on, nothing will ever be the same.

On noon Saturday, a call to meet at Plaza Italia, in downtown Santiago, quickly led to a general revolt with insurrectional features that reached every corner of the city, despite the strong military presence on the streets. And literally, the uprising moved on to all of the cities in the Chilean region. Like an oil stain, it began to spread with *cacerolazos* (pot-banging), barricades, attacks on government buildings, sabotage of infrastructure strategic to the circulation of capital (toll plazas and fare meters on highways, 80 subway stations partially destroyed and 11 totally reduced to ashes, dozens of buses burned, etc.), 130 bank branches damaged, 250 ATMs destroyed, some attacks on police stations and a military facility in Iquique, and what has most irritated the ruling class: the looting of supermarket chains and large malls.

In this scenario, which for us has been a party, in which the proletariat is self-organizing and facing its conditions of extreme precariousness, the “state of emergency” has been extended to approximately a dozen cities that have joined the fight, which have also faced a relentless “curfew” controlled at gunpoint by the military and police vermin that currently stand at 10,500 troops who have the green light to shoot to kill.

Looting and the Immediate Satisfaction of Human Needs

The sacrosanct status of private property was radically questioned by tens of thousands of proletarians who supplied themselves with everything they could at most supermarkets and large stores, which have been thoroughly plundered, and in many cases burned, as a terrified bourgeoisie looks on and constantly calls on its representatives to crush without reservation what they call “a small group of violent elements and vandals.” However, the reality is far from this, since, although they deny it continuously, this is not the action of a minority, but a massive phenomenon that has been expressing itself with irrepressible force.

Those of us who have been stripped of everything and survive as we can, indebted, without being able to make ends meet, have affirmed in practice that we have no reason to pay to access what we need to meet our needs. The reproduction of the commercialized daily survival in this way of life imposed upon us is, at all times, subordinated to the accumulation of capital by the bourgeoisie, at the expense of wage laborers and the life of misery that we must endure day in and day out. We have done nothing more than expropriate what belongs to us and what has robbed us our entire lives, and this they cannot bear. In short, widespread revolt means claiming ourselves as human beings and denying ourselves as merchandise.

The Press: Spokespersons for Capital and Defenders of Merchandise

The press has played a crucial role in the defense of “common sense” and channeling what is called “public opinion,” that is, the dominant logic of the capitalist system, according to which material things and the production of goods matter more than human lives, emphasizing time and again the defense of “public order,” “individual rights,” “private property,” and “social peace” to justify the massacre being promoted by the capitalists and the most reactionary sectors of society.

Through the misrepresentation and/or concealment of information, the spreading of lies and false stories, the criminalization of social subversion, the entire press has shown itself to be an accomplice to State terrorism: they must assume the consequences for all this. Some examples of this include the following:

- Hiding the number and cases of assassinations by the repressive forces, and not reporting repeated allegations of “excessive use of force in arrests, child abuse, mistreatment, blows to faces and thighs, torture, undressing of women and men and sexual abuse,” as indicated by the National Institute of Human Rights (NHRI).
- Communicating that there has been looting of “farmer’s markets” in some municipalities such as La Pintana, Puente Alto, among others, which is totally false. People have reported on social and alternative media that these have been plainclothes police who have tried to provoke infighting within our class.
- Promoting fear among the population by emphasizing that looting will also affect private homes and small businesses, when there have been just a few completely isolated events of this, which our class must firmly reject.
- Differentiating between “citizens” and “criminals,” between “peaceful” and “violent” protesters, betting on the division and isolation of the most radicalized elements that are

part of the movement and that are trying to promote an anti-capitalist orientation in the development of the revolt.

- Remaining in complicit silence regarding the water supply cuts that have directly affected several municipalities in the southern sector of Santiago, which are “suspiciously” also the places where the combat against the state and capital have developed in the most direct manner against their institutions and where authority is most flatly despised.

The Government Recognizes 8 Dead, but We Know There Are Many More

As President Piñera declares that “we are at war against a powerful enemy that respects nothing and nobody,” the despicable Andres Chadwick, Minister of the Interior, made a brief statement on television claiming that 7 people had “died”—and not been killed at the hands of the state—without offering any further details. We who have been present in the struggle and coordinating with comrades in different parts of the country know that the number of the dead is much larger. Videos and photographs have been shared on social media and counter-information websites, which are being systematically removed from the internet, showing people killed by soldiers and cops in various places where they are resisting. At least by our count—which we are still unable to confirm due to the deliberate campaign of concealment and misinformation of the capitalist state—this figure is 16 people: 1 person in Quinta Normal, 2 in San Bernardo, 5 in Renca and 2 in La Pintana, who died as a result of fires during the looting, 1 person killed in Lampa after being deliberately run over by the police, 1 by military bullets in Colina, 3 in La Serena, and 1 in Pedro Aguirre Cerda who died as a result of police repression. We know that this partial assessment might grow even further, since as we are quickly writing this text, severe confrontations continue under the curfew with the military, cops, and undercover police in several places within the Chilean region.

The General Strike on Monday, October 21—and Some Perspectives

Tomorrow, Monday, October 21, a diverse grouping of mass organizations have called for a general strike, the first one that may be highly effective, directly affecting production, due to the collapse of the transportation system, at least in the city of Santiago. The state is doing everything possible to ensure that “people go to work”: they have partially enabled Line 1 of the subway system, they are trying to reinforce the bus service, and they have called on the population to show “solidarity” by helping their neighborhoods reach their jobs. The capitalist class is only interested in producing for themselves; we are only useful to them for producing and moving their merchandise and increasing their accumulation of capital. For this reason, we are calling on people to not go to work and to actively participate in the strike, as the subway workers’ union has, due to the “police and military repression.” In addition, we believe it is important to spread the following perspectives:

- Do not fall into the dynamic of fighting amongst ourselves over food, water, and the satisfaction of our needs: that is the state’s game, to divide and conquer. To solve our problems, we must organize ourselves in our communities, there is no other solution.

- Do not allow the political parties and social democracy to present themselves as our “representatives,” to appropriate the struggle and sit down to negotiate with the state to extinguish the fire of the revolt, attempting to steer the resolution of the conflict towards cosmetic, superficial reforms that do not aim to eradicate the root of the problems that afflict our class.
- Occupy all educational facilities and turn them into places of resistance, debate, meeting, and self-organization, places to gather food and medicine, and spaces to assist our wounded.
- Organize grassroots assemblies in the territories where the struggle is developing, in order to collectively decide the direction of the ongoing revolt.
- Demand the freedom of the nearly 1,700 detainees who are being prosecuted for their participation in the revolt.

TOWARDS THE GENERAL STRIKE FOR EVERYTHING!

LET'S MOVE TOWARDS LIFE!

-Some communist/anarchist proletarians participating in the revolt

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Retrieved on 17th June 2021 from crimethinc.com

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