

CHILE - A new workers' movement is born

Permanent Revolution

Friday 14 August 2009, by [Ariel Zúñiga](#)

Tue 11, August 2009 - [Permanent Revolution](#) - As required by the law, in the run up to May Day, a delegation from the Movimiento de los Pueblos y los Trabajadores (People and Workers' Movement - MPT) went to the police station to ask permission for a march and a rally to launch the new left movement.



The police officer in charge said that permission could not be granted as Arturo Martinez, the president of the Chilean trade union movement (TUC) would not be pleased to find a another rally was going to be organised on May Day. So we decided to join the march of the TUC, and then have our own rally anyway in Parque Almagro.

As MPT supporters gathered before the start of the march, more than 100 police suddenly appeared and without any explanation decided to arrest all the members of the MPT. Forty comrades were thrown into police buses and the police confiscated some of our banners and 1000 newspapers. Undeterred, we regrouped, marched and rallied as planned in Parque Almagro, to launch the MPT. About 1000 people were with us.

Since that "incident", there have been a few more provocations, so proving the truth of Don Quixote's remark: "If dogs bark it is a signal that we are moving forward." [1]

A month earlier over the weekend of 4-5 April a new anticapitalist movement had been founded in Chile - the MPT. The origins of this new political formation date back to 31 January this year, when "a group of organizations decided to convene a conference, against capitalism and all its expressions, and dedicated to bring down all forms of capitalist domination", as the call for the conference declared.

The new movement refused to countenance an agreement with either the rightwing opposition or the Concertación (Socialist and Christian Democrat coalition in office). The new movement promotes the independence of the working class from the capitalist state and the bosses' organisations. The MPT will be a federal party and an alliance of struggle for social transformation. The goal is to conquer political power and establish a classless society, one based upon solidarity, equality, a vision both libertarian and liberating. The MPT rules out any electoral support to all the establishment parties that underpin

capitalist domination, and all parties that have electoral agreements with the Concertación. [2]

The MPT believes that in the context of the current global capitalist crisis, a coming together of fighting forces is crucial in the fight for the emancipation of the workers and their allies. The MPT has agreed a long list of demands which can be summed up under the slogan: "Make the rich pay for the capitalist crisis". Some of these demands are transitional and others immediate, varying according to the local and needs of workers and popular classes. Supporters of Proletarian Revolution at the conference succeeded in getting most of the transitional demands for fighting capitalism included in the agreed platform.

Opposition to neoliberalism in Chile

Chile is no longer the same country it was a few years ago. Today, leftist parties and popular social movements are becoming more confident and prominent in political life and have opened up great possibilities for challenging the hegemony of the capitalists and their state.

The government led by Bachelet applies essentially the same neoliberal policies as its predecessors, even if embroidered with some minor, Keynesian measures to mollify some businesses and workers. Indeed, successive Concertación governments have consolidated and strengthened neoliberalism. Most of our basic natural resources and state-owned companies were privatised to local capitalists or put into the hands of transnational companies. As a result the government has no levers it can pull to protect Chileans from the impact of the credit crunch and subsequent collapse of world trade.

Unemployment has shot up while government revenues have plummeted. As a passionate advocate of corporate globalisation and a convinced defender of free trade agreements with the United States and almost half of the world's capitalist states, successive governments have made Chileans acutely vulnerable to global capitalism's crisis. This is especially the case for the country's exports and domestic producers, which have been hit hard by the recent fall in the demand for commodities.

This revival of opposition to neo-liberalism predates the onset of the credit crunch. After decades of neoliberal policies in Chile a new political situation erupted with the "Uprising of the Penguins" in May 2006, when 1,300,000 secondary school students took to the streets and occupied their schools for more than a month against the neoliberal education "reforms". The most important aspect of this struggle, it is that directly challenged the entire neoliberal programme of this and previous Chilean governments.

The school students' movement has been followed since by several workers' struggles and other social mobilizations. These struggles have fractured the unity of the Concertación, led by President Michelle Bachelet. In the presidential election later this year, there will be four presidential candidates, two of whom belong to the Concertación and two others that have left the coalition in recent years.

People are not happy with the Concertación's "route map" for the transition from the Pinochet dictatorship to bourgeois democracy. For example, the present binominal electoral system excludes from Congress all those forces that are not part of the two major coalitions which support the present system. People are demanding an end to this electoral system and install a democratic, proportional voting electoral system.

Campaigns are gathering momentum for workers' rights and against the legal restrictions embedded in the Labour Law, which were inherited from the dictatorship. These laws were designed by Piñera, the brother of the presidential candidate of the right wing in this year's elections. It is draconian law that limits the right to strike, sanctions layoffs and wage cuts, and promote divisions by weakening and atomising trade union organisations.

Under the impact of the current crisis, a trade union based united front -Frente Amplio de Trabajadores FAT (Broad Front of Workers) - has been formed, in which Revolución Proletaria (RP) has participated from day one. One of its key demands is for the abolition of the current social security system (Asociación de Fondos Previsionales - AFP), which followed the privatisation of the state pension funds by General Pinochet.

Today, the AFP is in the hands of powerful, Chilean and foreign economic groups such as US-based Citibank which charge extremely high commissions to employees, while employers contribute nothing to workers' social security. As a result, workers retire with miserly pensions to live on.

The FAT has drawn in the national trade union leaders and rank and file workers of the two main sectors hit by the economic crisis: construction and the banks. These sectors are also now part of the MPT, and have fully backed the inclusion of transitional demands in the MPT programme, such as the call for the expropriation and nationalisation of the pension schemes, the banks, finance houses; for the sliding scale of wages, an end to commercial secrets, the opening of the accounts of businesses to the scrutiny of employees, a sliding scale of hours, and the creation of public works under the control of the workers.

In mid-May, thousands of university and secondary school students took to the streets demanding an end to the present education system, which has weakened and damaged the provision of free, public education, by permanently cutting-back resources and favouring the proliferation of private companies which profit from education. This privatised system naturally has become a fundamental element in the reproduction of the neoliberal ideology and laws. Also, on 18 May, a national strike of the Teachers Union members in primary and secondary schools got underway, demanding the payment of the bonuses agreed in previous negotiations with the municipalities.

What kind of movement is the MPT?

The MPT is both a product of these struggles and channels them into something new. The MPT includes human rights' organisations that are still struggling to uncover the complete truth about past human rights violations and get justice for the victims of those in power. It includes the Mapuche people and other ethnic groups who demand full recognition of the rights of native peoples. It includes environmental groups, fighting for the defence and respect of the biodiversity and against climate change. It includes urban groups fighting against repossession of their homes by banks that have inflicted punitive interest rates upon them. [3] All of these ongoing struggles and their leaders are to be found in the ranks of the MPT.

For this reason the emergence of the MPT is an extremely positive development. It represents an opportunity to mobilize workers and social organizations under a united and principled banner against the capitalist crisis. Moreover, the alliance is both broader and more solid than has prevailed in the past.

Yet this step forward generates its own problems. The organizations within the MPT come from different political traditions. Among them are three Trotsky's groups - the Izquierda Comunista (official section of the Morenoite Fourth International), the Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores (sympathising section of the Morenoites), RP - as well as other groups that sympathise with Trotskyism but have no finished, rounded political profile.

Also, there are anarchist collectives, the Movimiento Popular Manuel Rodriguez, which used to be the armed wing of the Communist Party but are now undertaking a serious examination of Trotsky's Marxism. Among other sectors of the MPT are fragments of the Communist Party, ecologist groups, Marxist student collectives, tenant associations, trade unions, and gay and lesbian groups.

While the MPT is a movement that fights for the revolutionary transformation of society, it is not a mass, revolutionary combat party with a clear scientific programme. But it is a step towards it. The MPT's intervention in the class struggle is helping to shape it and tests its demands and programme. The MPT is different in important ways to experiments in Europe, like Respect in Britain or the NPA in France. For start, there is no caudillo like George Galloway whose idiosyncratic and even reactionary positions have to be accommodated and who is not subject to any accountability. Nor there is a dominant centrist group like the Socialist Workers Party (in the UK) which effectively pulls the strings of the larger formation. Nor have Trotskyist currents dissolved themselves inside the MPT, like the LCR has done in France.

Of course, different problems exist in the MPT. For example, groups with a guerrillaist past may have broken with foquismo but they still have residues of the "Popular Power" strategy in their makeup, or

others retain petit-bourgeois methods in the fight against the effects of climate change. And of course, the centrist groups within the Trotskyist tradition have different methods and programmes.

Yet the MPT is proving attractive to a diverse set of people, groups, campaigns, and trade unions, and those who are unhappy with the Concertación and the establishment parties. Groups of young members of the Communist Party, for example, have abandoned their organisation due its obsession with remaining part the Concertación at all costs. Another example: before May Day, and RP activist in the Federation of Bank Workers intervened in a conference of the union and as a result of his appeal all 68 delegates agreed to march under the banner of the MPT.

Also that day, various leftwing student collectives held meetings with the students of the Trotskyist groups and subsequently agreed to call for the formation of a youth movement of the MPT and to begin an energetic campaign of recruitment and political education. [4]

he aims of Revolución Proletaria

Revolución Proletaria is committed to working inside the MPT in a constructive and non-sectarian way. But, one historical lesson that we seek to bring to bear is the need to build a “vanguard party”. Why is this essential? In the first place because the working class is politically and socially heterogeneous; the working class includes men and women, young and old, employed and unemployed, trade-unionists and unorganized, immigrant and native-born, native majorities and ethnic minorities.

Those engaged in feminist struggles, student and youth struggles, Mapuche rights’ struggles, those who fight against mortgage debts and home repossessions, and so forth, tend to see only one, albeit vital, part of the larger picture of the struggle against capitalism and its state. It is not enough for everyone to engage in their separate activities, even simultaneously. It is necessary to have an organization, a vanguard party, that centralizes the knowledge and experience of all these struggles.

A vanguard party is made necessary not only by the heterogeneity of the working class but also by the unevenness of class activity and class consciousness among workers. The working class engages in spontaneous self-activity, fighting the capitalists for better conditions, but this struggle has its upsurges and periods of quiescence, as victories raise morale and fighting spirit and defeats bring a need for recuperation. The members of a vanguard party, however, are committed socialists devoted to political activity at all times.

The sense of acting as a class, moreover, does not automatically lead to a realization of the need for doing away with capitalist society. A vanguard party welds the most class conscious elements into a party that sets its goal the destruction of the capitalist state which underpins and oversees exploitation and oppression. [5]

The party combines in its activity agitation, organization, and education in a manner appropriate to particular times and circumstances. It integrates socialist education with its participation in the struggles of the day, showing the relationship between the socialist goal and the day-to-day events.

An organization becomes a vanguard party only when it becomes recognized as such by the advanced sections of those engaged in struggle. Only when militants in the trade unions, leaders of strikes, and organizers of demonstrations and mass struggles enter a socialist party or follow it in action, does a party become a vanguard party. Until then it is only possible to lay claim to being a nucleus of a vanguard party, one that seeks to become a genuine vanguard party. It aims to teach the masses to develop their self-activity and to broaden their struggle. Such struggle not only serves to beat back capitalist offensives and preserve and extend working-class gains but trains workers for the eventual taking of state power.

For all these political reasons, Revolución Proletaria could never agree to dissolving itself. We enter the MPT as Revolución Proletaria; our organisational ties remain the same, our papers, journals and leaflets continue to appear as usual. At the same time we are strongly committed to building the MPT as our central project. [6] RP exists both as a component of the MPT and as a public, independent organisation,

with its own programme, political line and publications, but which conducts as much of its political work as possible through it.

The MPT is the most important initiative towards building a broad, revolutionary party in Chile we have seen since the fall of Pinochet. It is the only organisation on the far left with significant roots in the trade unions and embraces a significant number of young and enthusiastic people. The MPT is a new organisation and its long-term existence has not yet been secured. Its major tests are in the future. A long process of testing its programme and demands in the class struggle lies ahead as does a democratic process of political discussion, forging agreements and arriving at programmatic homogenization. [7]

The current capitalist crisis is undermining the foundations of the reformist consensus. Cracks are appearing everywhere in the hegemony of the Concertación, which is leading sectors of social movements to look for more radical and lasting solutions to their problems. Helping to turn the MPT into a clear anticapitalist and socialist revolutionary project is the most important contribution Revolucion Proletaria can make today in Chile.

<http://www.permanentrevolution.net/entry/2796>

Footnotes

[1] In addition to the May Day march and launch rally in the capital there were smaller marches and rallies in the cities of La Serena, Valparaiso, Concepcion and Valdivia. Individual members and small groups of MPT supporters are found in many other towns as well.

[2] This applies to the Communist and Humanist parties that are in negotiations with the Concertacion.

[3] See PR website article....

[4] This coming Saturday will be an aggregate of the FAT, where RP has contribute with a document to develop the trade union work and to organise new unions where are needed and to build a class current inside the trade unions and the TUC. Also, yesterday was agreed to develop its artistic, poetry, theatre and cultural activities, so the MPT can develop its own political line along its own mysticism and culture, as part of a new political organisation base on fraternal comradeship and frank and open political discussions and polemics, method that were denied or twisted by the Stalinist and socialist party bosses. These are just a few examples of enthusiastic initiatives, at the moment the creativity it limited only by the lack of material resources, that we hope we shall overcome as well, at least partially. But still, we have to recognize that there political issues we cannot ignore, and it will take some time to be resolved.

[5] The same is true on an international scale, necessitating an international organization built along the same lines.

[6] At public events, demonstrations, solidarity action with workers in struggle, strikes, etc, led by the MPT, we give a high priority to the profile of MPT

[7] A programmatic conference of the MPT in June will debate what kind of socialism we envisage given the deep discredit of Stalinism.