



Chile: Critical electoral support for Boric!

Markus Lehner Thu, 16/12/2021 - 09:26

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On 19 December, the hard-fought and highly polarised run-off election for the presidency in Chile will take place. In the first round of voting, the far-right Antonio Kast was ahead of the candidate of the left-wing alliance "Apruebo Dignidad", Gabriel Boric, with 27.9% and 25.8% of the vote.

As we reported before the first round in the article "The end of the Chilean model?", these elections are taking place in a situation that has been marked by protests for two years. Since October 2019, the "Chilean model", long considered an Eldorado of neoliberal economic and social policies, has been under attack by an ever-growing protest movement of the large number of losers from this model. Young people, women, workers, indigenous people, migrants have taken the lead in action and also ousted the previous leadership of the opposition, the social-liberal "Concertación" (social and Christian democrats), which had been integrated into the post-Pinochet era.

Instead, the alliances around the Communist Party of Chile, especially the "Frente Amplio", have come to the fore. Gabriel Boric, a former spokesperson for the student protests and a representative of this front, has worked with trade union leaders and CP officials to channel the protest movement into the constitutional redrafting process. Of course, with the referendum on the constitutional process and the election to the Constituent Assembly this May, this reformist path is now showing its expected limits. Fewer and fewer protestors now believe that this parliamentary-institutional path could fundamentally attack the pillars of the social injustices of the "Chile Model". This was expressed not only in the extremely low turnout for the Constituent Assembly, but also in the vehement resurgence of the protest movement since September 2021. Despite this burgeoning discontent, the mass of the movement and the oppressed classes are hoping for Boric in the elections, and even more so in the face of the alternative: an electoral victory for the right-wing Pinochet admirer, Kast.

The right unites the bourgeoisie

With confidence in the constitutional process waning, the right also feels strong enough again to mobilise its forces. There are quite a few in the middle classes and in the countryside who have benefited from Chile's high exploitation rates and its position on the world market. The protests and the electoral promises of the left have therefore been used by the right to raise the spectre of economic decline precisely amongst these strata. In addition, in Kast, they have found a candidate who can mobilise far beyond the usual conservatives with all the elements of right-wing populism. In particular, Chile has become a magnet for migrants from all over Latin America, for example, from Haiti. These have been increasingly marginalised in recent years and are the target of strong racist discrimination. For Kast, agitation against migrants and indigenous people (especially the Mapuche) as "hotbeds of crime" and "parasites" are as much a core element of his propaganda as climate change denial, agitation against homosexuals and the invocation of the "dangers of feminism".

Despite these disgusting features of an Andean Bolsonaro (with whom he also likes to show himself in photos), Kast has the complete support of the Chilean establishment. Fear of the electoral victory even of the reformist left, makes the Chilean bourgeoisie bet on Kast to have not only a puppet of neoliberalism sitting in the presidential palace, but also an arch-reactionary, backed by the state apparatus and a petty-bourgeois reactionary following, and ready to put an end to the leftist threat.

In the last polls (although there has been a poll moratorium in Chile since last week) Boric was narrowly ahead of Kast.

The progressive mass movement, but also most voters of centrist parties, tend to vote for Boric. He is also ahead by a ratio of 40:20, especially among women, youth and workers. Women's organisations in particular have rightly mobilised against Kast's reactionary, misogynist programme and are calling in large numbers for the election of Boric. The same applies to all the important trade union leaderships. Boric promises above all to reverse privatisation policies in areas such as health and pensions. This also leads to strong support in the polls among older voters.

The presidential election represents an important confrontation not simply between two candidates, but between the main social classes, between wage labour and capital, given the political crisis and intensification of social polarisation in recent years. Despite the reformist limits of Boric's policy and programme, the working class cannot and must not remain neutral here. All left revolutionary forces must help with their vote to defeat Kast at the ballot box. His victory would be a defeat for the whole working class, the youth, the women, indigenous people, the poor peasants in Chile and all Latin America.

Limits of reformism

At the same time, we must not close our eyes to the fact that Boric, the CP and the "Frente Amplio" are not the necessary revolutionary answer to the problems of social inequality and oppression in Chile. Their manoeuvre to steer the protest movement into the dead end of the constitutional process stifled the possibility of a revolutionary escalation of the 2019 protests, allowing reaction to regain the initiative. In the end, it is no wonder that with the disappointment in the actual goals of the protest, the counterrevolution is now rearing its head all the more. Hence the polarisation in the current election, between a candidate of the reformist left representing the wage-earners and oppressed, and the extreme right supported by the bourgeoisie.

Even though elections and parliamentarism cannot ultimately change the real questions of power (that is, the underlying property relations), it is precisely in such a polarised election that the balance of power between the classes is reflected. The outcome itself will enter into this relationship.

The working class cannot be indifferent to who wins such an election. An electoral victory for Kast would certainly be an encouragement to the ruling class for further attacks and would also give a "democratic" mandate to the counterrevolution. For the socially oppressed and the protesters of the last few years, this would be a severe setback and not an encouragement for further struggle. It would more probably have a discouraging effect.

Even an electoral victory by Boric is of course no guarantee for better conditions of struggle or actual change. In any case, only the struggle in workplaces and training centres, on the streets and in social protests is the real lever against the resurgence of the right and for drastic social change. Above all, we have to recognise that a large part of the workers, women, indigenous people, etc. currently believe that a Boric election victory would advance their struggle. This is abundantly clear from both the polls and the support from trade unions and social movements. Revolutionaries must of course caution against illusions in Boric (such as his actions in the agreement to "pacify the protests") and call on the organisations supporting him to mobilise independently in the struggle against the right, to nationalise the health system, to introduce a state pension, etc.

Boric will rather try to reach an agreement with the bourgeoisie and its parties in parliament to maintain the old order. This can already be seen in his recent "promises" that unfortunately some of those imprisoned in the protest movement cannot be amnestied.

Critical support for Boric in the elections must denounce such concessions and demand that he and the mass organisation break with this policy. Revolutionaries must be aware that Boric and the leaderships of the bureaucratized trade unions and reformist parties and organisations on which he relies do not want to take this step. However, if we want to push forward the mobilisation and sharpen the struggle, we must combine support for Boric with helping his supporters to go beyond the limitations of his policies. In doing so, it is necessary to follow up on the quite significant promises of the candidate, such as a unified and public health system for all, a solidarity pension scheme, tax increases for the rich and corporations and recognition of, and dialogue with, indigenous peoples, as well as shutting down all coal-fired power plants by the end of his term in office.

We therefore call for critical electoral support for Boric without illusions and link this to the need to continue the protest movement and to advance an organised opposition to the existing order. We call on him, the CP and the Frente Amplio to break with the bourgeoisie and form a government of workers and peasants, based on the mobilisation of the masses, on district and factory committees and their development into councils in the cities and countryside; on a mobilisation that disarms the counter-revolution and arms the workers and peasants, that calls on the rank and file soldiers to break with the officers and form soldiers' councils. Such a government would at the same time have to take drastic measures to implement its electoral promises and expropriate Chilean and foreign big business and establish a democratic planned economy.

Even if Boric, the CP and the Frente do not want to take these radical, anti-capitalist steps towards a socialist, revolutionary upheaval, these demands can and should help convince the workers and peasants to do so. But this will only be possible if revolutionaries are prepared to support them in the struggle against Kast.

Absenteeism is not revolutionary!

In this context, we need to look at the responses of other leftists in Chile. Certainly, it is understandable that many of the most active participants in the resumed protests have no hope in Boric and see him as a "traitor" because of his participation in the "pacification agreement". However, revolutionary politics cannot be guided by understandable dislikes. It must be guided by the necessities of the given situation; in this decisive, polarised situation there is precisely no candidate from the protest movement with a programme for a revolutionary solution to the crisis standing for election.

There is, however, a candidate who is strongly anchored in the workers' and social movement and is receiving a great deal of support precisely from this side. We may declare this an illusion and warn against his likely future policies, but this cannot be an argument for not taking a clear stand in the current class confrontation, which the election also represents.

Those who are not even prepared to support Boric and the mass movement at the ballot box are in effect refusing to support the working class in this confrontation. This can only contribute to improving Kast's chances. Those who contribute to a Kast victory by abstaining from voting will rightly not find a very good hearing among the disillusioned workers, women, youth, indigenous people and peasants who voted for Boric for the necessary continuation of the struggle against the right and for social change. On the contrary, the danger of demoralisation is great if the reformist left then gathers its supporters around popular front projects "against the right", as in Brazil.

Therefore, we consider the electoral position of the "Partido dos Trabajadores Revolucionario" (PTR, Chilean section of the Fracción Trotskista) to be wrong. In several declarations on the run-off election, they give as their slogan for the election: "Defeat Kast and the right, but without illusions in Boric and his project" (e.g.: <https://www.laizquierdadiario.cl/A-derrotar-a-Kast-y-la-derecha-sin-conf...> [1]). They do not combine the justified criticism of Boric and his role in the "pacification agreement" as well as his half-hearted programme with the tactic of critical electoral support - as we have developed based on the method of Lenin and Trotsky.

While they correctly stress that only independent mobilisations of the class can advance the struggle against the right and for social change, they pretend that the outcome of the election and the fact of mass illusions in Boric are completely irrelevant to this. They then try to save themselves with the contradictory and vague formula: "We organise this struggle with the comrades who, aware of what Boric represents, will critically vote for him, as well as with those who want to confront the right and will not vote because they think that Boric does not represent the demands of October". In other words, they themselves do not call for the election of Boric (so presumably they advocate abstention), but "tolerate" the election of Boric, provided it is done critically "in awareness of what Boric represents".

If Boric is supposed to be such a traitor that critical electoral support is forbidden, why are they working precisely with those who know exactly what Boric represents and not, for example, with the thousands who do have illusions in Boric, but actually want to see the correct demands, which he also has, implemented?

In future mobilisations, will the PTR check that only people who know what Boric and his political current really represent participate? Workers who expect Boric, the trade union leaderships, the CP, etc. to introduce a state health and pension system on a social basis and to abolish the anti-union labour laws will not learn in large numbers simply through education or training or "totally independent mobilisation" that this is not a leadership suitable for this.

We must help workers in struggle to recognise the barriers of reformist leadership. This means not only warning against these politics, but also sharpening the mobilisation and confrontation to enable workers in an organised way to go beyond Boric's politics and build from it an alternative, revolutionary leadership with roots in the masses. To stand aside in the electoral confrontation, above all to warn against illusions in the reformist candidate Boric and to call on the small, radical minority to fight independently against the danger from the right "beyond the electoral spectacle", this is pseudo-revolutionary posturing.

In reality, it amounts to abstention from the real confrontation in the elections, a refusal to fight against reaction. Those who use the "criticism" of reformism and the invocation of the "independent mobilisation of the class" as a justification for abstaining from the elections are only refusing to support the workers and oppressed against the candidate of the united bourgeoisie and reaction. Overcoming the leadership crisis of the working class is impossible on this basis.

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Links:

[1] <https://www.laizquierdadiario.cl/A-derrotar-a-Kast-y-la-derecha-sin-confiar-en-Boric-ni-en-su-proyecto>