

A Letter From Chile by Raoul Vaneigem

What's been happening has been so beautiful. Two weeks of uprising have already gone by which have allowed us to shake off the fear, the indolence and frustration of living under the dictatorship of money and meet as human beings, beyond all the identifications which had kept us separated.

From the beginning, the insurrection and its spontaneous generalization expressed its critique of the capitalist way of life by the deed, expropriating and destroying the symbols of capitalism and the State (supermarkets, pharmacies, banks, police stations, municipal buildings, etc.) There are loads of demands, so many that everybody knows that what's needed here is a structural change. In the streets is heard "now nothing will ever be the same again". Everyone's desire to live has been reborn in the adventure of the anti-system struggle.

The precarization which is experienced in this territory, and which this movement rises against, is not a product of austerity measures, here there was never such a thing as a welfare State, but it's the result of the looting by the hands of the State/Capital. Chile, as you know, is one of the cradles of neoliberalism. The dictator Pinochet sold everything: water, health, retirement, education, the streets, the sea, etc. And the democracy which came after consolidated that social and economic system.

But at the cost of having suffered continuous humiliations and abuses at the hands of the politicians and businessmen, everyone's consciousness has been sharpening. One of the slogans of the insurrection is "It's not 30 pesos [the increase in metro fare which unleashed the uprising was 30 pesos, meaning 4%], it's 30 years" in allusion to the era of the "transition to democracy" [1989 was the year of the first president in the democracy after the dictatorship]. This phrase -which the mapuches have made their own, saying "It's not 30 pesos, it's more than 500 years" - expresses the consciousness that the dictatorship of Pinochet and the democratic regime correspond to the two faces of the dictatorship of capital of which the State, and the politicians and specialists that teem around it, are no more than mere executors.

Hence, another characteristic of this movement is the total absence of political parties. Although the movement's detractors go so far as to say things so ridiculous as that Russia, Venezuela or Cuba are giving us orders through the leftist faction here, what's certain is that in the protests only Chilean flags, flags of indigenous peoples and football teams are seen. On the government's end, they are desperate to fabricate the representatives of the movement, the authorized spokespersons who can be negotiated with. They are searching amongst the social and union organizations and also calling citizens' assemblies. So far nobody has dared to put themselves in that role. The massiveness and diversity of this movement is an antidote against any intent at recuperation.

There have already been more than 4000 arrested (among them more than 400 children and adolescents) and more than 1300 people wounded by firearms. There's more than 100 complaints of torture and a score for sexual violence at the hands of the police. According to the official numbers, there's 23 deaths and more than 140 people that have suffered some type of ocular lesion. 26 of them lost the vision in one eye. (When I read in the text censored by Le Monde that also in France the police have been taking eyes I was very surprised to realize that they share repression techniques).

There had hardly passed a few hours of the insurrection -which cost the big capitalists dearly, although it doesn't compare with all that they have robbed- before the State declared a "state of emergency", which allowed it to impose curfews and bring the soldiers out into the streets to repress along with the police. Since a week ago the state of emergency has been lifted, but this has not caused the repression to decline. The police continue using anti-riot weapons in the protests (that was only implemented in these demonstrations) and continue making massive and selective arrests.

From all the political sectors and on the television they say that we can demonstrate "as long as it's peaceful" (Some good citizens have appropriated the yellow vests which were used in the protests in France to distinguish themselves as allies of the police and have their own techniques for keeping the order). But even when the people demonstrate in the least offensive and most cultural way, the police repress with force. They dread us passing much time together..

The State has its hands full of blood and it tells us that it's doing it to give us peace. Those that believe it are very few and, despite the enormous violence which it has used, nobody fears it. In fact, nuclei have proliferated that practice aggressive violence and self-defense against the "forces of order" in the demonstrations.

And the thing is that the majority of us feel that we don't have anything to lose. We see everywhere that there's no future in this society. On one hand, the television doesn't cease to inundate us with news about the environmental catastrophe which it later wants to make us forget by showing us advertisements for things that we can't buy. On the other, we see that being old in Chile is a living hell. People can work their whole life and retire with a miserable pension. In fact, the old have to continue working until they die and I'm not exaggerating. 5 years ago I took note of the case of a gardener that worked in front of the Palacio de La Moneda (headquarters of the president) and died sitting on a bench in the same plaza that he had spent the final years of his life cleaning. He was 80 years old.

There are those that want to put this eruption behind the cause of the creation of a new constitution. The one that we have comes from the epoch of Pinochet and it's the one that endorses the looting. The demand for a constituent assembly to create the new constitution is something that resounds increasingly among certain groups. At times I fear that if that was conceded it would end up drying up the force of this movement. But, on the other hand, I think that such a constitution, if it really responded to the multiple demands of the people, would imply such a modification of the order of things that it would be another Chile where perhaps the constitution itself would no longer have a reason to exist: this revolt is intuitively questioning the foundations of the capitalist social structure.

This moment appears to be the only fertile ground. And for a few days everything appeared to be possible. Many self-organized assemblies have appeared in the neighborhoods. Certain cities hit by the contamination of the extractivist industries have confronted the grand capitals and detained their activities, etc. To see this spontaneous organization sprouting up has been very thrilling.

The demonstrations continue being massive and seem like a party. The people are more content in the reclaimed streets, people dance, sing, share ideas, food, smiles. Nobody knows what is to follow. For the moment, we continue enjoying having found each other, putting our stakes on the power of seeing and feeling ourselves.

What is needed in order to advance in the destruction of this order that seems to be going under without our intervention?

Is it just a matter of living our lives against the current of the demands of capital? Not to try to topple the system in its entirety, but to dedicate ourselves to building, among these ruins, our organization, here and now, with all the limits and potentials of the circumstances?

Raoul Vanetgem, 1-11-2019

*Translation by Malcontent [https://malcontent.noblogs.org]
from the spanish version found at https://punkfreejazzdub.blogspot.com/*