

Giving George a Chile Reception

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George's Chile Reception: Next Stop, Ottawa!

Bush's impending visit provides an opportunity for Canadians to voice their dismay in person. Activists across the country are beginning to mobilize, hoping to emulate their South American compatriots.

Why They Hate Bush in Chile

50,000 Say "No to the Dictatorship of the Market"

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<http://www.counterpunch.org/>

Fifty thousand demonstrators greeted George Bush on his arrival in Santiago Chile for the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit meeting of twenty-one Pacific Rim nations. The largest and most militant demonstration since the dictatorship of General August Pinochet, the protestors called for an end to neo-liberal free trade agreements like those advanced by the APEC leaders. The demonstrators carried banners proclaiming "No to the dictatorship of the market" and asserted that trade accords drive workers and peasants into a "race to the bottom."

The ire of many protestors centered on Bush and the war in Iraq. Chants of "Terrorist Bush," and "Bush, Fascist, Thief, Murder!" rang through the air. While the demonstrations were overwhelmingly peaceful, groups of anarchists, punks and others broke away from the main march to vandalize a McDonald's restaurant and corporate stores. About 200 people were arrested and over 25 injured.

Bush, on his first trip outside the United States since the elections, found another unwanted answer to the question he posed in the aftermath of 9/11: "Why do they hate us?" It is certainly not for "our freedoms" as Bush inane asserts. Aside from the war in Iraq, many protestors in Chile are deeply hostile because the United States backed a military coup on September 11, 1973 that took away their freedoms. It deposed the democratically elected government of Salvador Allende and marked the beginning of a seventeen year dictatorship. One banner

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stated: "US Terrorist State: The First September 11." A common refrain of demonstrators who want no further US meddling in their affairs proclaimed: "Bush, listen, Chile is not for sale."

More than three thousand people perished in the aftermath of the coup, another 35,000 were imprisoned and tortured. With the acquiescence of the CIA and the cooperation of military regimes in Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay and Paraguay, the Pinochet dictatorship set up an international terrorist network, Operation Condor, that targeted opponents throughout the world. Prior to the attack on the Pentagon on September 11, 2001, the most sensational terrorist act in Washington D.C. took place in 1976 when Orlando Letelier, a leading Chilean opponent of the Pinochet regime, died when a bomb was detonated in his car just blocks from the White House. A young assistant, Ronnie Moffit, was killed along with him.

Even when Pinochet gave up the presidential sash in 1990, he continued to dominate the country's politics as commander-in-chief of the military. The United States orchestrated a controlled "transition" in which a coalition of political parties took office on a centrist platform and followed the authoritarian constitution drawn up by Pinochet. The Communist party and other militant organizations on the left that had backed Allende were excluded.

This austere civilian order was shaken by Pinochet's arrest in London in 1998 for crimes against humanity. Returned to Chile in March 2000 for alleged health reasons, the quiescent Chilean judicial system finally turned on Pinochet and became prosecuting him for his crimes. The Chilean political establishment, now headed by President Ricardo Lagos, sought to defuse tensions with the business community and right wing backers of Pinochet by pressuring the judges and medical examiners to get him off the hook, this time because he supposedly had "light dementia."

Events of the past year however have shaken the inertness of the Chilean political system. In a lengthy interview with a Miami television station, Pinochet insisted that the left owed him an apology for trying to get rid of him. This interview, in which he was evidently coherent the entire time, undermined his claim of suffering from dementia and led to the filing of new charges against him, this time for his role in Operation Condor.

It appears that Chile is at long last prepared to confront the crimes of the dictatorship as never before. Earlier this month an official commission backed by human rights organizations presented a report to President Lagos detailing the abuses and torture committed against prisoners from 1973 to 1990. Then just this past week the Supreme Court of Chile ruled that a

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clause in Pinochet's constitution that exempted many members of his secret police from prosecution was invalid and superseded by international law.

Nation-wide municipal elections at the end of October have also given momentum to the progressive forces in Chile. The ruling centrist parties decisively defeated the right wing parties while a left coalition led by the Communist and Humanist parties garnered almost 10 percent of the vote, the most since the days of Allende.

To oppose the right wing parties in the presidential election, the ruling coalition appears to be giving the nod to one of its more progressive leaders, Michelle Bachelet, who served in Lagos' cabinet. Her father, an Air Force General, was one of the few military officials who wholeheartedly supported Salvador Allende, heading up the country's food distribution system as the right wing tried to orchestrate a crisis by hoarding or reducing food supplies.

The left is also putting forth a dynamic candidate for president, Tomas Moulian. A radical sociologist who is rector of a university, Moulian is a talented speaker who will mince no words in going after the ruling parties as well as the right wing for their politics of complacency and the failure to deal with the workers and impoverished in Chile who are victims of globalization.

As the demonstrators greeting Bush showed, there is clearly a mass base for a new politics in Chile. Simultaneous with the APEC summit, 7,500 people attended workshops and seminars sponsored by the Chilean Social Forum. The main theme of the forum as well as the organizing slogan of the demonstration was "Another World is Possible." The forum called on Chilean society to "carry on a debate of democratic ideas, related to unequal social relations, issues of gender, sustainable development, and alternatives to globalization."

Bush spent much of his time in Santiago trying to bludgeon the other twenty heads of state into endorsing his war-mongering schemes for going after North Korea and Iran for their alleged weapons of mass destruction. There is indeed a Chilean alternative to Bush: it is to pursue former dictators and the real terrorists by using international law and building a global international criminal system that will be based on an egalitarian economic system that empowers people at the grass roots to build their own future.

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