



Written by [Christian Gomez](#) on November 2, 2019

## Socialist Protests Paralyze Chile

A wave of violent protests with socialists demands has paralyzed Chile, forcing the president to cancel upcoming APEC and UN summits that the country was scheduled to host in November and December, respectively.

Chilean President Sebastián Piñera formally withdrew his country from hosting an upcoming APEC trade summit, scheduled for November 16 to 17, and the UN Climate Change Conference, scheduled to run from December 2 to 23. President Piñera made the announcement on Wednesday, following violent revolutionary protests that have grappled the capital city of Santiago.



“As President of all Chileans I always have to put the problems and interests of Chileans, their needs, their desires and their hopes, first in line,” President Piñera said from La Moneda Palace, which houses the offices of the country’s president, interior ministry, general secretariat of the presidency, and the general secretariat of the government. President Piñera was accompanied by his Foreign Affairs Minister Teodoro Ribera and Environment Minister Carolina Schmidt. “Our first priority as a government is to focus first and foremost on fully restoring public order and social peace,” Piñera added.

Since March 2018, Piñera has been serving in his second non-consecutive term as president. In 2010, when he was elected to his first non-consecutive term, Piñera became the country’s first conservative leader since Augusto Pinochet and the first conservative presidential candidate to win the general election since Jorge Alessandri won in 1958.

Piñera’s abrupt cancellation of both the APEC trade summit and COP25 UN climate conference have forced both global governance bodies to scramble for alternative plans or locations, such as Spain, which has since offered to host the UN Climate Change Conference. The APEC summit was expected to bring 20 world leaders from the Asia-Pacific Rim, including U.S. President Donald Trump and Chinese Communist leader Xi Jinping, the both of whom were planning to sign a preliminary trade agreement. Now negotiators no longer have to rush to meet the hard deadline this month.

President Trump called Piñera on Wednesday to express his support for Piñera’s decision to cancel hosting the events. “The United States stands with Chile, an important ally, as it works to peacefully restore national order,” the White House said in a statement released on Thursday about the phone call. “President Trump denounced foreign efforts to undermine Chilean institutions, democracy, or society.”

The upheaval in Chile began on October 18, with violent protests and clashes with the country’s security forces ostensibly over a meager increase of 30 pesos (the equivalent of 4 cents in U.S. currency) to Santiago’s metro subway and bus fare.

*The New American* spoke with an American citizen currently living and working in Santiago, whose



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identity is being kept confidential out of concern for their safety. According to the individual, the protests erupted on October 18, shortly after the small fare increase. High school students in Santiago reacted to the modest increase by jumping the subway turnstiles to avoid paying. This in itself, albeit illegal, is not too uncommon for some high school students to do and not just in Santiago but even in the subway systems in other major cities around the world, such as the one in New York City.

Nevertheless, what began as simply some delinquent minors jumping turnstiles quickly escalated into violence and mass-scale arson and looting. “Within a short period of time, just before evening rush hours, many stations were destroyed and set on fire,” the individual said via email. “This caused major disruption as people were trying to return home and the entire system was shut down. Immediately the mobs got involved and started looting and burning stores in various parts of the city, mostly the poorer areas. Somewhere between the attacks and Saturday morning a state of emergency was called and the military was called in.” President Piñera’s state of emergency, which included a curfew, was the country’s first since 1987.

To many Chileans, the government’s state of emergency and imposition of a curfew drew memories of Augusto Pinochet, the country’s former longtime president from 1974 to 1990. Pinochet seized power in 1973, when while serving as commander-in-chief of the Chilean Army he led the country’s military in overthrowing Socialist President Salvador Allende. Allende was the first candidate of the Socialist Party of Chile to be elected president and he was backed by both the pro-Soviet Communist Party of Chile as well as by Fidel Castro’s communist regime, which sent Cuban troops to Chile following Allende’s election. By intervening, [Pinochet successfully derailed Allende’s plans to impose communist tyranny and the bloodbath that would have followed](#). A temporary military junta government was established and Pinochet, who represented the Chilean Army, was eventually named president. President Pinochet remained the country’s chief executive until March 11, 1990, following the results of the 1989 general elections, in which Pinochet did not run as a presidential candidate as agreed to per an earlier referendum.

While Pinochet’s leftist detractors and the international media echo chamber constantly refer to the late Pinochet as a dictator, they never use that epithet to refer to communist tyrants such as Fidel Castro and ignore the fact that unlike dictators throughout world history, Pinochet *voluntarily* stepped down from power.

In the wake of the 1973 coup, the then-newly established government military junta also imposed a curfew in an effort to reestablish order and quell violence in the streets from socialist agitators and other Allende loyalists. The country was virtually plunged into a civil war, in which a total of 3,065 people were killed or disappeared, and thus presumed dead, from both sides of the conflict. (For background on Pinochet’s rescue of Chile from communism, see our comprehensive article “[Pinochet: Patriot Enchained](#).”)

The current violence in Chile has already resulted in 25 deaths, as of November 1, 2019. In addition of the 25 dead, 41 others have been “gravely wounded by firearms, 23 people gravely wounded by having been run over by police or army vehicles; 62 with severe eye trauma; more than 1700 injured; and 5845 arrested,” [sic] according to the [Centre for Research and Globalization](#), based in Montreal, Canada.

Protesters have been resisting government efforts to put an end to the violence, alleging human rights violations by the military. “The calls for human rights violations have been claimed by those that feel all types of protests are justified and the police and military can in no way use force,” the American resident in Chile told *The New American*.



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President Piñera has condemned the violence. “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, who is willing to burn our hospitals, the subway, the supermarkets, with the sole purpose of producing as much damage as possible,” Piñera said.

President Piñera gave his “total support” to the Chilean military, who are trying to stop the violence and protect civilians, subway and bus terminals, hospitals, supermarkets, shopping centers, and other institutions and essential services.

A week after extending the state of emergency and night curfews on October 20, Piñera called them off due to massive resistance over the use of the military to quell the chaos. In response to the violent backlash, Piñera has since reversed the subway and bus fare increase. He also promised to reform the pension system and to increase the monthly minimum wage. But to the anti-capitalist protesters these gestures are still not enough.

“I ask all compatriots to join in this battle that we cannot lose. We are not going to allow those who commit violence and criminals to feel ownership of our country,” Piñera pleaded on national television. Of those protesters fanning the flames of violence and revolution, Piñera said, “We are very aware that they have a degree of organization and logistics that is typical of the criminal organization.”

Unidad Para el Cambio (Spanish for Unity for Change), a coalition of far-left political parties in Chile — including the Communist Party of Chile, Progressive Party of Chile, and the Social Green Regionalist Federation — and which support the protests proposed “[4 central points](#)” for the government to meet the “social demands” of the protesters. The points include: for the government to withdraw its market-based privatized pension reform, re-implement a previous tax reform, reducing the workweek to 40 hours, and changing the country’s constitution through a constituent assembly.

Chile’s current constitution was drafted under the presidency of Pinochet and approved by Chilean voters on September 11, 1980 in a plebiscite referendum. Communists and socialists in Chile have questioned the legitimacy of Chile’s constitution, which was drafted by numerous conservative jurists who drew inspiration from the U.S. Constitution.

In addition to individual freedoms or “first generation rights,” which protect individuals from the government, the Chilean constitution also places a strong emphasis on the free-market and economic liberties, guaranteeing its citizens the right of where to invest their pension funds and even where parents can choose to send their children for school.

Chile’s constitution has been attributed to what the late economist Milton Freedman dubbed in the 1980s as the “miracle of Chile.” And according to the World Bank, between the years 2000 and 2017, poverty decreased by 31 percent. Chile is also regarded as the richest country in South America.

The 1980 constitution replaced the country’s previous 1925 constitution, which the Pinochet government abolished. The 1925 constitution was drafted by young progressive-minded military officers, who sought to consolidate and expand the powers of the executive branch after decades of rule from an empowered Congress.

Leftists in Chile today have dubbed their country’s constitution the “dictatorship constitution,” because it was drafted under Pinochet. For many leftists that fact in and of itself justifies the need for a brand new constitution removed of all vestiges of the Pinochet government. But even with its 200-plus amendments, added over the past 20-plus years, socialists and communists in Chile believe that even more far-reaching changes are needed, which they claim can only be achieved by a constituent



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assembly.

The so-called constituent assembly is a type of people's convention and is not recognized under the current constitution as a legitimate manner to change the document. Any amendments to Chile's constitution requires a supermajority vote from the country's Congress.

Similar to a "convention for proposing amendments," under Article V of the U.S. Constitution, also known as a "constitutional convention" or Con-Con, delegates to a constituent assembly would also be regarded as vesting the "sovereign right of the people," and as such would be above the presidency, congress, and judicial system.

Should such a constituent assembly be held in Chile it too would consider itself as having greater latitude than the National Congress of Chile. And in the present temper of the country, the "constituents" who would comprise its various delegations would likely be drawn from the most violent and radical partisans currently protesting and looting in the streets.

A constituent assembly would more than likely be hijacked by such partisans, socialists and communists, in order to draft an entirely new constitution — one that would guarantee so-called "second generation rights" or "socialist rights," such as the "right" to government-sponsored universal healthcare, education, housing, and a guaranteed "living wage" in the form of a government-run pension system. And considering the political aims and aspirations of many of the protesters, any new constitution drafted at a constituent assembly would also likely consolidate the political power of the left and empower the executive branch in order to carry out and implement the reforms, much like Venezuela's current socialist constitution.

In addition to the aforementioned points, protesters are also demanding higher wages, lowering the cost of basic services such as electricity and mass transit, free college tuition, the elimination of toll fees for private roads, and abolishing the country's private pension system. Protesters have also called for Piñera to resign, perhaps with the hope of electing a new strong socialist president such as the deposed Salvador Allende.

"The call for the resignation of the current president doesn't eliminate these problems as they have developed over decades," the American living and working in Chile told us. "The communists are looking to use the anger and frustration of the people who the political class have ignored, to overthrow the government. Then they would like to throw out the current constitution and start again allowing the people to enshrine their demands." The individual continued, "What they don't know is [that] they are walking into the trap of communism and if they are successful with any of this, most all foreign and domestic investment will flee the country and they will be well on their way to following Venezuela."

Only time will tell if these recent violent protests will result in a resurgent pink tide that will overtake Chile and plunge it under the same specter of communism that has brought nothing but misery and suffering to the lives of countless millions in Cuba, Venezuela, and elsewhere in Latin America. Should a constituent assembly be successful in drafting a new socialist constitution, it could very well wipeout all of the economic prosperity and higher standard of living that Chileans have gained over the past 30-plus years.

*Photo of protesters in Santiago, Chile: AP Images*

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