

CHILE: STUDENTS SEEKING EQUALITY NEED VISION OF COMMUNIST EDUCATION

Ñuñoa, CHILE – Students from an all-girls high school took over their campus in January, defying Chilean president Pinera’s plea for an end to the massive student protests that rocked Chile for seven months in 2011. They demanded readmission for activists who were kicked out last year. These young women also sharply attacked the Ñuñoa mayor, who had called the activists “prostitutes,” trying to use sexism to isolate them. The protest movement is expected to escalate when the University of Chile in Santiago reopens in March.

Last year, thousands of students bravely fought Pinero’s riot cops under the banners of equality. But the reformism of FECh (the Chilean Student Federation) as well as the brutality of the capitalist state stands between them and their goal. Only a communist revolution, ending wages and the money system at the heart of capitalism, can sweep away exploitation so that we can collectively produce for the needs of the masses. Only a communist reorganization of work can end elitism, alienation, and privilege.

Education for the masses must be communist education.

The Chilean student movement has attacked the gross inequality of the school system and the way it maintains class society as it did under the Pinochet dictatorship. The lack of free public education, the sky-high fees, and biased admissions tests at public universities, exclude the children of the masses. Students also demand an end to government subsidies of for-profit schools and profit-making in universities.

FECh leaders vie to be seen as “the most Left,”



knowing that the masses of students are seeking radical solutions. But appearances can deceive.

Media darling Camila Vallejo, former FECh president and now vice-president, is a youth leader of the Chilean “Communist” Party which seems to have learned nothing from the Allende disaster forty years ago. It still relies on Chilean and international capitalist institutions. “We cannot be on strike for three years,” Camila said recently, promoting “different conditions for mobilization,” specifically “the next political events, like the elections.” Meanwhile she visited Geneva, Switzerland to ask the UN Human Rights Commissioner to keep Pinera’s government from passing a new law that would criminalize most mass protests.

In December, students seeking a more radical leader elected Gabriel Boric as the new FECh president. His “Creating Left” party talks about health care and the environment as well as educational issues. It wants to create a university movement that will “change the country.” But University students, alone, can’t fundamentally change society. Only the masses, acting on communist ideas and led by industrial workers and soldiers, can destroy class society and build a world free from exploitation and privilege.

Universities are capitalist institutions.

They do the research and train the technicians needed by the corporate class and its state to maximize the profits sweated off workers’ backs. They push capitalist ideas in a thousand forms. For example, Chile’s Ministry of Education” now wants to remove terms such as “military dictatorship,” “coup,” and “systematic violation of human rights” from Chile’s history curriculum. Actually, little of the truth about capitalism’s brutal history ever appears in textbooks – and even less about the heroic struggles of the masses to break the capitalist chains.

Worse, universities build walls between young and older workers, and between “mental” and “manual” labor. Working-class youth who manage to get into university find themselves



under intense pressure to succeed so as to “give back to the community.” But it’s the masses themselves who make history, not a handful of college-educated “leaders.”

Defeat racism – unite students and the masses for communism

While Camila visits Switzerland, President Pinera continues to use an “Anti-Terrorism Act” dating from the Pinochet regime against the indigenous Mapuche population. The Mapuches are fighting hard against the huge logging and mining industries that are destroying what little land they have left. FECh’s response? A demand for an “intercultural university” to meet “the unique demands of Mapuche students.” Instead of uniting all students with this mass anti-racist anti-capitalist movement, FECh pushes the divisive idea of “indigenismo.”

The issues facing students in Chile are not very different from those in Mexico, the United States, England, South Africa and many other places. Student-government elections, like any other elections, are a diversion. Fights to “open up the universities” or to “keep them open,” however well-meaning, obscure the class nature of education. Instead, our fight must be to tear them down along with all other capitalist institutions. On the campuses as in the factories and barracks, we must develop and massively promote a vision of communist work and education, by and for the masses, uniting knowledge and practice to develop more communists to serve the international working class.