

Chile

Verdict on Pinochet: No

On September 11, 1980, as Chileans were voting at gunpoint for a so-called constitution, General Pinochet certainly didn't expect what would happen eight years later. The opposition had been reduced to silence by seven years of bloody repression; the gaps in the economy weren't apparent yet; and he felt confident enough to accept the idea of a referendum on his rule for the sake of «authoritarian democracy». On October 5, 1988, the general's dream was over. The Chilean people were to vote Yes or No on giving Pinochet eight more years as president, and with 54.68% voting No as opposed to 43.04% voting Yes, the answer was clear.

In the beginning of the 80's, the idea of the referendum was unacceptable to the opposition, mainly because it was stipulated by a constitution which was only seen as a tool for Pinochet to remain in power. When the economic crisis reached its peak starting in 1981, and a huge number of Chileans took to the streets and participated in the *protestas*, the opposition's slogan was «Democracy Now». Towards the end of 1986, the protest movement lost some of its strength and broadness as a result of the repression. The Christian Democratic Party, due to a new growth of the economy from which it certainly profited, started to distance itself from mass actions, and was the first to break the consensus within the opposition and to announce that it would participate in the referendum. Within the left, a broad discussion about the relation between mass activities and armed struggle took place. Finally, in February of this year, 13 parties agreed on a platform calling for a mobilization to vote No in the referendum. The command for a No vote, as the alliance was called, later grew to 16 parties and represented a broad spectrum of the opposition. Participation in the referendum was seen as a possibility for inflicting defeat on the military dictatorship, by refuting its claims that the majority of the Chilean people stand behind it and its economic program, and thereby denying it the legitimation for staying in power. After a successful campaign which simply outclassed Pinochet's well-financed effort, the

opposition was sure to win the referendum. It managed to mobilize enough forces inside and outside of Chile to deter Pinochet from calling off the referendum or from instigating a coup and reinstating the state of emergency, two options that certainly came to the dictator's mind when he realized he would lose.

PINOCHET BALKS

It came as no surprise when Pinochet, soon after the referendum, made it clear that he has no intention of respecting the will of the majority of the people. Defying calls for his resignation, he repeated that he and the army are the guarantee «that neither the spirit of the constitution nor its content will be amended.» According to the constitution, presidential and congressional elections are to be held at the end of 1989, and the new president is to begin his term in March 1990, which means that Pinochet will remain in power for 17 more months. After this period, he will remain commander in chief of the army for at least four more years. The constitution also stipulates that the elected president would need the consent of the military-dominated National Security Council to make major amendments to the constitution. All this means that Pinochet would retain enough power to veto any decision taken by the parliament.

Within the opposition, the discussion has started about the degree of changes that can be achieved in the near future.

The agenda of the No Command includes the following:

1. Immediate negotiations to allow free elections in the shortest time possible.
2. The withdrawal of the military from politics.
3. Guaranteeing respect for human rights.
4. An end to political bannings, and reforming the constitution.

One of the most controversial issues is that concerning negotiations with the military. Parts of the armed forces were not in favor of Pinochet's candidacy, and would have preferred a younger, civilian candidate, but for the sake of unity, they finally backed him. It seems unrealistic to expect them to mediate between the opposition and Pinochet, first of all because some of them, like Admiral Merino, are at least as fanatical anti-communists as Pinochet. Moreover, an amendment to the constitution reducing the role of the National Security Council, as demanded by the opposition, is against their interests. The military has accepted that local military officials were replaced by civilian ones in the last weeks, but it remains unclear whether they will tolerate constitutional reforms.

The controversy within the Christian Democratic Party about the tactic to be adopted has become sharper. The youth organization and the party's left agree that Pinochet has to resign as soon as possible. The party's conservative presidium is not really interested in his immediate resignation. For them, it is enough to have some constitutional reforms which will make a formal democracy possible, without changing the economic system. National Renewal, the strongest right-wing party, has similar aims. Though it supported Pinochet during the campaign, it distanced itself from him after his defeat. Both parties' declared aim of pursuing Pinochet's neoliberal economic policy make their program sound like «Pinochetism without Pinochet». The 1985-87 macro-economic concept implemented by the dictatorship, with the full support of the international banking system, has had a catastrophic impact on the majority of the people. The 24% increase in exports in 1987 was attained at the price of further reducing consumption and the interior market. ►