

Between December 1981 and January 1988, the wage index shrank by 14.7%, and the buying power of the minimum wage was reduced 45.7%. According to this, one wonders about the «democratic means» the conservatives intend to use to convince the Chilean people that a further reduction of their standard of living is necessary to pay for a debt which wasn't made to improve the national economy, but to increase the wealth of a few privileged circles.

PROSPECTS FOR DEMOCRACY

The US administration praised «the people of Chile» 15 years after the military coup which the Nixon administration sponsored by aggravating the problems of the Allende government with a CIA program of destabilization and economic embargo. The Reagan Administration, embarrassed by Pinochet's human rights abuses and doubting his ability to remain in power, has placed verbal and largely symbolic pressure on him to reform. Unable to find a younger, pro-US candidate with a more moderate image, the US concern shifted to calls for a fair voting process. Its funding of the conservative wing of the No Command to the tune of

\$1 million can be seen as an attempt to block a genuine democratization process by supporting the advocates of cosmetic change.

While the referendum has shown majority opposition to Pinochet, it has also shown that the struggle for genuine democracy has a long way to go. The brutal repression of demonstrations in the days following the referendum, and the fear expressed by many exiled Chileans concerning their security if they returned, clearly show that Pinochet still holds the reins of power. The referendum was an opportunity for the opposition to beat Pinochet on his own ground by denying him the legitimation for staying in power. It was a chance for the opposition to unite under a common program and to focus its efforts on the main task, which is

pushing forward the transition from military to civilian rule. Pinochet still rejects the main demand of the opposition for change in the constitution, but the disunity of his supporters after the referendum has made his margin of maneuver much smaller. Criticism has become stronger within the military, and the fact that the government has resigned twice since the referendum indicates that there are differences within his civilian supporters. In contrast, the opposition has remained united. The No Command now calls itself the Assembly of Political Parties for Democracy, and has decided, among other things, to present a common candidate for the December 1989 elections. The combination of these facts leads us to believe that the post-Pinochet era has already started. ●

