

Bachelet Inaugural: 'In Chile, There Will Be No Forgotten Citizens'

by Cynthia R. Rush

On March 11, Chilean President Michelle Bachelet was sworn into office in the city of Valparaíso before 1,000 invited guests, and a jubilant crowd. Highly visible among the guests were the leading figures in the informal Ibero-American "Club of Presidents," whose motion toward an economic alternative to the International Monetary Fund's free-market austerity has greatly alarmed London and Wall Street bankers. Bachelet held warm bilateral discussions with Argentina's Néstor Kirchner, whom bankers see as the greatest threat to their interests, and with Brazil's Lula da Silva, Venezuela's Hugo Chávez and Bolivia's Evo Morales. President Kirchner and First Lady Cristina Fernández joined Bachelet at the head table for the post-inauguration luncheon, and Bachelet will make her first state visit to Argentina on March 21-22, where she intends to formalize a "strategic alliance" with her Argentine counterpart.

Synarchist financiers didn't share the unprecedented celebratory mood that extended throughout the March 11-12 weekend, however. They were rather shaking with justifiable nervousness. Bachelet's resounding victory over right-wing business magnate Sebastián Piñera last Jan. 15, has turned over their geopolitical and financial chessboard, and threatens to loosen the iron grip they have maintained on Chile since 1973. On Sept. 11 of that year, in a coup backed by former Secretary of State George Shultz and Henry Kissinger, Gen. Augusto Pinochet overthrew President Salvador Allende, and established the Hitlerian dictatorship that lasted for 17 years.

After 1973, these powerful financial groups ran the show in Chile. The University of Chicago's fascist economists engineered the destruction of the nation's economy, and elimination of the social safety net once provided by the state, into the internationally acclaimed "Chilean economic miracle." The Nazi Operation Cóndor murder apparatus, and Pinochet's secret police, the DINA, enforced the policy, kidnapping, torturing, and "disappearing" anyone who resisted.

Pinochet's Labor Minister José Piñera successfully privatized the social security system in 1981, granting unfettered looting rights to foreign banks and insurance companies, while leaving Chilean citizens defenseless. Piñera then travelled around the world to foist this same scheme on many other countries. George W. Bush promoted it in 2005 in his drive to privatize the U.S. Social Security System.

The British counted on Pinochet's Chile as an ally, in its

1982 Malvinas War against Argentina. A few years later, Chile again became a beachhead, this time for Spanish financial conglomerates—frontmen for the British—that gobbled up strategically vital state-sector assets in a privatization offensive that left no part of Ibero-America untouched.

What Now?

Synarchist power-centers fret that all these "achievements" will now be lost. Democracy was purportedly restored in Chile in 1990, with the election of the four-party Concertación coalition which has ruled continuously since then. But the Concertación governments have never dared to challenge or change the "Chicago Boys" free-market model, or the political structures left in place by the Pinochet dictatorship.

What will Bachelet do? There are no guarantees that she will break with "the model." But her March 12 promise to a Santiago crowd that "in Chile there will be no forgotten citizens—that is my commitment," set off alarm bells among international bankers, because it echoed Franklin Delano Roosevelt's defense of the "forgotten man" of the Depression-racked United States of the 1930s. Moreover, she added, "the state must be at the service of those who suffer the bitterness of defenselessness, and at the side of those who wish to progress. . . . I know I represent the hopes of millions of Chileans . . . those who desire an inclusive nation where we protect those who have been left behind."

The letter she penned in October of 2005 introducing the Concertación's 2006-2010 Program of Government, provides insight into the quality of leadership she can bring to Chile—and to the "Presidents' Club" should she join it. This is why the bankers are sweating so profusely.

"Politics entered my life by destroying what I loved most," she wrote, a reference to the suffering her family endured under the Pinochet regime. In 1974, her father, Air Force General Alberto Bachelet Martínez, was tortured to death on Pinochet's orders because he had worked in the Allende government. She and her mother were arrested and tortured at the notorious Villa Grimaldi detention center, run by former Nazi SS officer Paul Schäfer. In 1975, they went into exile, first to Australia and then to Germany, where Bachelet completed her medical studies.

But rather than vindictiveness or bitterness, Bachelet's letter reflects a moving quality of *agapē*—love of mankind—

which is the complete antithesis of the anti-human premises of the Chilean “miracle.” She explained that, “Because I was a victim of hate, I have dedicated my life to loosening its grip, turning it into understanding, tolerance and—why not say it?—love.” Today, she continued, “We feel that divisions, hate, and fear belong to the past; the past embraced by those who want Chile to change, without changing themselves. Those who can’t imagine leaving their fights and egos behind for the good of the country; those who make arrogance and fear their only banner.”

The Concertación program was conceived “keeping in mind the needs of those Chileans whose opinions aren’t heard on the television or reported in the newspapers,” Bachelet wrote. Chile’s primary wealth, she wrote, “is her people.” Therefore, “We need to take a giant step in social protection, with better pensions, more generous unemployment insurance, and higher standards of healthcare for all . . . because it is immoral that many Chileans don’t have the right to get sick or get older without falling into poverty.” Noting that she does not belong to “the traditional elite,” she said: “It is my job to offer Chileans the opportunity for Chile to belong to *everyone*, and that we all be Chile. The key to the future isn’t in one person’s hands, but in all our hands.”

Restoring the social safety net that the Pinochet regime so brutally eliminated is Bachelet’s top priority. Her most challenging commitment is to reform the private pension system, which has left three million Chileans without a pension. Knowing that this means taking on the banks and financial cartels that have controlled the system from the beginning, Arturo Martínez, Secretary General of the CUT labor federation, told Bachelet after her victory to “count on us. We elected you. We’ll back you up.” Legislation on the reform is expected to be sent to Congress before the end of this year.

‘Different Winds Are Blowing Today’

In remarks made right after Bachelet’s Jan. 15 victory over Sebastián Piñera, statesman Lyndon LaRouche underscored the importance of Bachelet’s victory. She belongs to the generation that was persecuted by Pinochet’s Hitlerian regime, and witnessed the barbaric atrocities it committed, he said. Thus, she *has* to fight against those interests that destroyed so many lives and dismantled their nation.

The shifting world economic and political landscape also lends itself to change in Chile. The global financial system is shattering, and, as many Ibero-American leaders have recognized, the Cheney-Bush government in Washington is in deep political trouble. Governments are seeking alternatives to the Synarchist banking cartels’ neoliberal dictates which have destroyed their economies and immiserated their people for two decades.

The “Presidents’ Club” is debating how to free their nations from the grip of these predatory private banking interests, through physical integration and infrastructure development projects. These regional projects could provide a way

of cooling out the long-standing territorial and border disputes which British interests have historically instigated to keep these nations at each other’s throats, rather than working as allies.

Chile’s former President Ricardo Lagos was hardly an opponent of free trade. But his surprise initiative to attend Evo Morales’ January inauguration, and meet personally with the new President in his La Paz home, reflects the shifting situation. In return, Morales accepted an invitation to attend Bachelet’s inauguration, a first for a Bolivian head of state. When Morales and Bachelet met in Santiago March 10, they discussed the need to cooperate in dealing with common problems, with an eye toward eventual restoration of diplomatic relations, which were broken in 1978.

The issue of Bolivia’s demand for access to the Pacific Ocean, which it lost when Chile seized its territory during the British-orchestrated War of the Pacific (1879-1881), didn’t come up during the meeting. But Bachelet and her Foreign Minister Alejandro Foxley have indicated she is prepared to address this politically sensitive issue, which has long been a source of hostility between the two nations.

President Bachelet has announced that her foreign policy will focus on *strengthening* ties with her Southern Cone neighbors, and working closely with the Common Market of the South, Mercosur, of which Chile and Bolivia are associate members, along with permanent members Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, and Paraguay. In an obvious reference to the neocon Cheney crowd’s characterizations of Hugo Chávez as the greatest “destabilizing” threat to the region, Bachelet has indicated she has no interest in “stereotypes” of other South American leaders, and prefers to address the common challenges they all face. Lagos had earlier also refuted the accusation against Chávez.

Documentation

‘This Is an Historic Moment’ for Chile

We publish below excerpts from the Oct. 18, 2005 letter written by Michelle Bachelet Jeria as an introduction to the 2006-2010 Program of Government of the four-party Concertación coalition.

I wasn’t brought up to take power, and have done nothing to seek it. I don’t belong to the traditional elite. My name is not among those families who founded Chile. I went to a public school, and to the University of Chile. I studied medicine because I marvelled at the possibility of healing the sick, of



www.presidencia.cl

Chilean President Michelle Bachelet was sworn into office in a jubilant atmosphere. She does not belong to the traditional elite, and has vowed to restore the social safety net of the common people, which the Hitlerian Pinochet regime so brutally eliminated.

eliminating their pain, of erasing their anguish, and bringing happiness back into the home of a sick child.

Like the majority of Chileans, nothing has been given to me. Everything I know, I have learned by fighting, for the love of my children, my profession, my country.

Politics entered my life by destroying what I loved most. Because I was a victim of hate, I have dedicated my life to loosening its grip, turning it into understanding, tolerance, and—why not say it?—love.

I have lived too close to Chile's history not to recognize an historic opportunity when I see it. And this, without doubt, is an historic opportunity. A moment that won't be repeated again in Chile. . . .

We know that development with justice and peace are not empty words, but goals we can achieve. This depends only on whether we work together.

Today, as never before, we feel that divisions, hate and fear belong to the past; the past embraced by those who want Chile to change, without changing themselves. Those who can't imagine leaving their fights and egos behind for the good of the country; those who make arrogance and fear their only banner. . . .

My candidacy emerged spontaneously from the support of our citizens. It wasn't the result of some negotiation or backroom deal, or of a party agreement. This program reflects the roots of my candidacy. Hundreds of people contributed to it, through citizen dialogues and working groups.

This is a program that was conceived, keeping in mind the needs of those Chileans whose opinions aren't heard on the television, or reported in newspapers; those who can't hire an expensive law firm, who don't have relatives or influence in the government, in Congress, trade unions, or corridors of power. . . .

I have been criticized a lot because of my tendency to consult, and include people. For the elites, listening is a sign of weakness. I'm convinced, on the contrary, that it is there that the power of what we are doing can be found.

Chile's primary wealth is not its copper, fruit, or lumber, but its people. That wealth of ingenuity, of willingness, of

dreams is what I want to empower. . . .

We need to take a giant step in social protection, with better pensions, more generous unemployment insurance, and higher standards of health care for all. . . because it is immoral that many Chileans don't have the right to get sick or get older without falling into poverty. It is immoral that so many middle-class families live in the fear that some unforeseen event will cause them to lose what they have earned through many years of work. . . .

We need to ensure that our State offers more, and treats people better. It cannot be the case that so many Chileans feel alone and defenseless. . . .

My job is nothing other than to offer Chileans the opportunity for Chile to belong to everyone, and that we all be Chile. The key to the future isn't in one person's hands, but in all our hands. Among us all, we can achieve change and together see a better country. For me, it is a privilege to serve all Chileans in this new and promising Spring.

From Bachelet's speech given March 11 in Santiago:

I know that I represent the hopes of millions of Chilean men and women, who see in me an opportunity to have a better country. . . .

I want to lead a government that connects deeply with the transformations of Chilean society. A government close to its citizens, which addresses the big issues of development, and at the same time, shows concern for the lives of its citizens. . . .

This is an historic moment. Look who is speaking to you. You elected me on Jan. 15. . . . What you have done has focussed the eyes of the world on us. . . .

I know I symbolize a coming together of Chileans. In the past we suffered too much with the pain of so many men and women. How many beloved human beings cannot be with us here tonight! But we are leaving *that* dramatically-divided Chile behind.

I said it yesterday from the balcony of La Moneda [Presidential palace—ed]. We cannot forget the pain. We cannot minimize the memory of such sacrifice. But we have learned from that suffering, because today our eyes are on the past, but also on the future. A country is emerging in which we can look at each other and recognize that we all belong to the same Chile. . . .

We don't want individualism or indifference. . . . We want solidarity."

From a March 12 speech in Santiago:

We are on the threshold of making this a developed country, with greater justice and opportunity. The world is watching us. . . . This little country today is preparing to take a giant step in its history, of prosperity for all its sons. . . . The time for *all* [Chileans] has arrived, in this my beloved country, a nation of, and by, its citizens. . . . Viva Chile!