

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-wracked 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.