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1980: A YEAR OF STUDENT STRUGGLES IN CHILEAN UNIVERSITIES

The periodic expulsions of professors, scholars and administrative staff from various Chilean universities are symptoms of a purge aimed at changing the higher educational institutions into "depoliticized centres".

Such measures were accelerated just before the beginning of the academic year, in April this year, and should "free" governmental authorities, particularly the Rectors appointed by the junta, from "difficulties".

The last of those expelled — who amounted to 100 by the deadline of this issue — joined the dozens of victims of the dismissals ordered at the end of 1979 which affected the personnel of the University of Chile, the Catholic and the State Technical Universities and the University of Concepcion.

The dismissals — which have been taking place without conceding the affected persons the right to appeal — also are a part of drastic cutbacks imposed by the Pinochet military dictatorship on the Chilean universities.

The expelled persons have included e.g. Manuel Sanhueza, who had been professor of the School of Law of the University of Concepcion for over 30 years and is the current Chairman of the Group of Constitutional Studies, known as the "Group of the 24" which has drafted a political constitution as an alternative to the draft propitiated by the military regime.

Another expelled professor is Carlos Naudon, a columnist of the Catholic magazine "Mensaje" (Message). The same fate has been met by the outstanding journalist and writer Alfonso Calderon and other scholars known for their democratic and humanitarian stances.

"STRONG HAND" IN UNIVERSITIES

In order to step up its repressive policy towards higher education, General Augusto Pinochet's fascist regime has decreed a number of administrative regulations which are basically aimed at further strengthening the all-embracing authority of the Rectors appointed by Pinochet from among high-ranking officers of the armed forces.

Simultaneously, a commission was appointed several weeks ago which will give advice to the head of the military junta and should draft the definitive wording of the law on university education.

All its members were appointed by Pinochet himself who thus made sure of the imposition of his own ideas in the future university law.

In various meetings held by the junta's spokesman with the appointed Rectors, the participants have expressed their concern over the "political revival" in the universities; consequently, they have decided that this should be "solved", because it is an issue which affects the "stability"

of the regime.

This extremely hard line encouraged the policy of cutbacks and mass dismissals in the universities. Trying to justify these measures, high-ranking governmental officials explained in a Santiago newspaper that "the security service has detected serious dangers due to political activity in the universities", and argued that it was necessary to introduce a most rigid control, especially in order to prevent what they termed as "student agitation".



A student protest march on university precincts.

TRADE-UNION ORGANIZATIONS CONDEMN UNIVERSITY POLICY

The wave of repression affecting the Chilean universities and the political orientations guiding their functioning have been severely criticized by various sections of the Chilean society.

The "National Trade-Union Coordinating Board" pointed out some time ago that "our universities are under control and have been placed in the service of the interests represented by the regime with the aim of changing the university community into dehumanized technocracy which will become a part of a society in which only he who owns more is important".

This judgement clearly proves the elitist focus with which general Pinochet's fascist junta approaches the university issue.

Therefore, the recent official decree which will be enforced at the beginning of next year and through which state subventions to higher education are being eliminated, should be interpreted in this light.

A number of mass organizations, including especially student ones, have energetically opposed the said measure by claiming that it is aimed at changing the university into "an enterprise producing professionals for the market", a claim which expresses a sharp criticism of Pinochet's economic policy based on the so-called social market economy.

In accordance with the junta's decree, from 1981 on all students will have to pay for their education. Those who will not be able to pay in cash will have to pay on credit two years after graduation, regardless of whether they will have obtained a professional degree or not.

When the summer holidays were still in full swing, a large group of students issued a statement against that decree, stressing that the state had the

duty to subsidize the education of the economically most needy social strata.

It should be noted that, according to data issued by independent researchers, unemployment in Chile affects 20 percent of active population, while between 1972 and 1979 workers' real wages have decreased by over 50 percent. On the other hand, surveys have proved that at present 60 percent of Chilean families are unable to finance the university studies of even one of their children. Doubtless, the government's policy on university education is opposed by an overwhelming majority of the university community, which suggests that 1980 will be a year of strong people's and students' mobilizations in the country. This will certainly open up the way for an intensification of repression on the part of the government, but this development has long ago ceased to intimidate the Chilean student youth.

DYNAMITE DOES NOT EFFACE CRIMES

The Chilean military junta ordered a dynamite explosion in the mine of Lonquen where corpses of about 20 Chileans were found several months ago. Those Chileans had been arrested after the 1973 coup and appeared on the list of the missing political prisoners.

The junta's measure was qualified as a vain attempt of the military regime to efface the traces of that and other such monstrous crimes detected in various secret cemeteries throughout the country.

Referring to the above-mentioned measure, Catholic priest Mariano Puga mentioned that in the Santiago General Cemetery and various other places in Chile there are "more undiscovered martyrs" and that "a dynamite explosion cannot cast them into oblivion".

The Lonquen mine became a place of pilgrimage for the victims' relatives and people from the neighbourhood and other parts of the country who frequently organized marches to that place.

The case of the missing persons' bodies found in Lonquen was investigated by civilian judicial organs which charged eight officers of the uniformed police with the mass assassination.

Nevertheless, the guilty officers have remained at large and exempt from any charges as a result of Pinochet's amnesty that favours DINA-CNI agents and fascist criminals.



Thousands of families are still in the desperate situation of knowing nothing about their arrested relatives' fates.