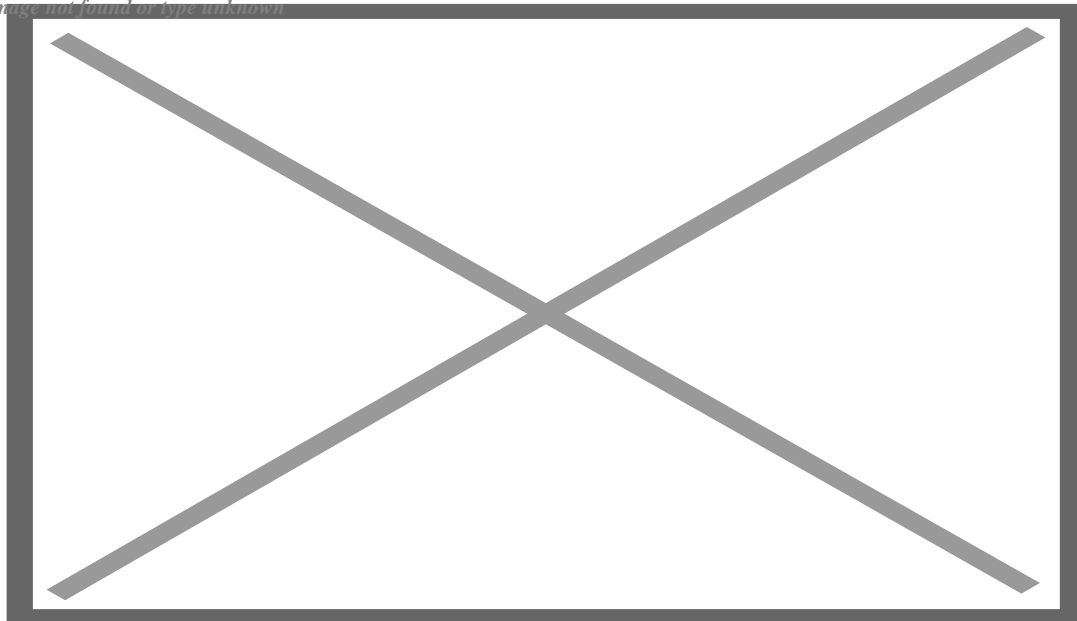


Is Chile on the move?

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By Guillermo Alvarado

In at least 25 cities and towns in Chile, tens of thousands of people marched the day before to demand that the Tax and Pension Reform bills, trapped between the opposition of the right wing and the passivity of Gabriel Boric's government, be unblocked in the National Congress.

Both initiatives were a core part of the coalition's work program that took the former student leader to the Palacio de La Moneda, but when half of his term has elapsed, they still have not seen the light of day and the forecasts are pessimistic.

In view of this situation, the Central Unitaria de los Trabajadores, CUT, the largest trade union organization in the southern country, called in its recent Congress for a national strike, accompanied by numerous demonstrations with the purpose of putting pressure on the Legislative and Executive bodies.

Particular discontent is created by the retirement system, created during the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet, which obliges all workers, public and private, to pay their contributions to the Pension Fund Administrators, AFPs, most of them large transnational financial corporations, in charge of managing this service.

Most of the AFPs are subsidiaries of U.S. firms that invest workers' resources in different areas, such as the fruit industry, real estate speculation and energy, where they obtain enormous profits with capital that comes free of charge.

In exchange for that, they give Chilean retirees miserable pensions, since more than 70 percent are below the legal minimum wage and one in four is below the poverty line.

Putting an end to this dirty business was one of the demands of the social outburst initiated in October 2019, but the fierce defense of the AFPs by right-wing deputies and senators has made such a task impossible.

No less complex is the task of reforming the tax system and making those who have more income pay more taxes. In addition to all the legal loopholes in the Chilean tax system, large companies always find ways to evade their obligations.

This prevents, for example, investment in the health system, where waiting lists for surgery or a consultation with a specialist often take years and many patients die while waiting for their appointment.

These and other similar reasons motivated the large march the day before in Chile, a country where, in addition, insecurity is growing due to delinquency and the action of organized crime.

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