

## Beaten at the polls

ads on television only in the last month before the voting. The task was formidable. They had first to come to an agreement among the sixteen political parties opposing the dictatorship; they had to gather funds, mobilize their human resources and fight harassment and red tape as well as compensate for the late start. The regime reserved the right to censor the opponent's propaganda; in addition, public exposure for that last and only month was limited to fifteen minutes per night; with equal time given to the pro-Pinochet forces (besides their control of the news and public relations spots advertising official achievements). Despite all this, the opposition ran an extremely intelligent and "positive" campaign. Pinochet counteracted by a highly subliminal manipulation of the middle and upper classes fears of chaos and communism should the country return to the Allende years. In this, the explicit official propaganda reversed the early more positive image of its unofficial propaganda centered on Pinochet's achievements, thus sending contradictory signals.

In the early hours of the morning of October 6, 1988, the results came out. Over 90 percent of the registered voters had taken to the polls; blank and null ballots were very few. In ten of the twelve regions of the country the "Yes" vote lost; there would be an election next year. Women, who had always been a minority, constituted 51 percent of the registered voters. They had been a preferred target group of the regime's propaganda effort — but they too rejected the proposition: 52 percent to 45. Among male voters Pinochet fared even worse: 59 percent to 39. In the smaller provincial jurisdictions 73 percent went for the "No," with only 27 percent going to Pinochet.

Santiago, Valparaíso and Concepción, the major urban and industrial centers, went overwhelmingly for the negative. Even in those rural districts where close control, public spending and a fruit export-based economic bonanza made a victory of the "Yes" probable, the results were narrow. Only in those very small settlements such as Easter Island, Parinacota, Palena or Antártica, where the bulk of the electorate were military officers, did the regime win hands down. In metropolitan Santiago, where nearly 40 percent of the voters lived, Pinochet supporters concentrated in three upper class neighborhoods, in the overwhelmingly export-farming rural communities and in the districts with a heavy concentration of military personnel. The "No" vote was strongest in the working class districts and in the *poblaciones*, but it was also significant in most middle class neighborhoods. Once again, class politics appears determinant in Chile. It is as if the type of political stalemate which has characterized the political process there since 1920 has re-emerged, with the middle sectors and their political brokers holding the unstable balance of power.

There is, however, a different and far less optimistic reading of the plebiscite results: 43 percent of the voters chose Pinochet. Even discounting control, vote-buying, intimidation or simple effects of propaganda, there is still more than one-third of the population which supports an anti-democratic alternative. This is quantitatively and qualitatively a more important constituency, much larger than those sectors which in the past supported alienated "anti-political" solutions of a more conservative, populist or fascist bent. Moreover, unlike the "No" vote, which represented a conglomerate of sixteen dissimilar parties, with limited cohesion and stability, the anti-democratic vote constitutes a much more cohesive class alliance. This means that, all things considered, the regime still has "adequate support," espe-

cially if ballots are added to bullets. Its greatest failure so far has been its inability to institutionalize its support into a cohesive civilian fascist party or "national movement," but the source of sustenance is there.

### Pinochet's coup and counterrevolution

It should be remembered that the Pinochet dictatorship was not just an attempt to restore the old socioeconomic order, and accelerate growth. Rather it was a counterrevolution aimed at a thorough capitalist and authoritarian modernization of Chilean society. Given the nature of Salvador Allende's *via chilena al Socialismo* (1970-73) and the subsequent polarization of society, the military regime sought to dismantle, not preserve, the existing constitutional and socioeconomic arrangements. Plans to restructure Chilean polity and society included a new monetarist economic orthodoxy, a doctrine of National Security and the political exclusion of civilian society. This shock treatment was believed to prevent the intense pre-1973 class conflict which expressed itself through party politics, the electoral arena and in the system of labor relations. It was also aimed at breaking the resulting protracted and bitter sociopolitical stalemate, where class antagonisms were played through the wage-price spiral, strikes and other forms of confrontation, coexisting with representative democracy. Most directly, the coup was aimed at preventing a pattern of social mobilization and transformation leading to a different socioeconomic order and against democracy itself.

The implications of Pinochet's counterrevolution on any future transition towards democracy remain far reaching. The 1988 plebiscite reflected the limited alternatives to the present dictatorship. Many of those who benefited under the regime would prefer the trappings of liberal democracy: a civilian government, an election every four or six years, less reliance on the coercive apparatus. But they hesitate to support a restoration of the system that preceded the coup, i.e., the one that gave rise to a socialist president. The new electoral system thus could not resemble the one that had traditionally provided a forum for the institutionalized class conflict. In other words it could not be representative.

Pinochet has taken steps towards minimizing the risks of future representative working class "legal" political parties — given their potential to form a united front against the military regime. Thus several stipulations are attached to "legalizing" and registering political organizations that might run in future elections. For instance, no party that uses a "class conflict" analysis is "legal." This dispenses immediately with any bona fide socialist, communist or Marxist party, and limits the platform of party coalitions that include substantial left wing factions. Furthermore, besides being required to have at least Grade 12 education, political party leadership cannot overlap with union leadership, thereby severing crucial links with actual representation at the grassroots level. For all intents and purposes, the so-called "new democracy" or at least its transitional phase, will continue to exclude the great majority of civilian society.

### Class divisions remain

We must also consider that the nature of the social conflict has changed under the military. The working class is much smaller, and represented by more atomized and weaker labor movements. In fact, the traditionally strong and militant Chilean