

Chile at the Crossroads

A cabal of progressive intellectuals are working hard to turn an economic miracle into a Venezuela. Will they succeed?



by Bruce Bawer

In South America, Chile currently boasts the highest Human Development Index; Venezuela has the lowest. During the last thirty years, despite some relatively minor setbacks, Chile has undergone what can only be called an economic miracle, while – in a textbook case of just how quickly socialism can destroy an economy – Venezuelans, who for much of the postwar era enjoyed the highest wages in Latin America, were dragged by Hugo Chávez and his successor, Nicolás Maduro, down the proverbial drain. So naturally an officially appointed cabal of progressive intellectuals and activists in Chile have put together a proposed new constitution that seems designed to turn it, in record time, into a simulacrum of Venezuela.

Chileans will go to the polls on September 4 to give it a thumbs up or down.

I don't regularly follow developments in Chile, but I learned about this benighted project from a July 28 [article](#) in the *Guardian*. Under the headline "Chile is updating its constitution for the 21st century. The US should follow its lead," a writer named David Adler argued that the American Constitution, "drafted by 55 men who owned hundreds of human slaves, thousands of acres in landed estates, and millions of dollars in inherited wealth," has long since reached its sell-by date. Time to scrap it! Move on! Move up!

You see, instead of the backward 1788 text slapped together by the penis-having slavemaster James Madison and signed by know-nothings like Alexander Hamilton and Benjamin Franklin, the proposed Chilean constitution, called for by Chilean voters in a 2020 plebiscite and written by a female-led committee ftop-heavy with "workers" and "Indigenous peoples," is "a visionary document that would not only update, expand and advance Chileans' basic rights – to health, housing, abortion, decent work and a habitable planet – but also set a new standard for democratic renewal in the 21st century."

Exactly why does Chile, in Adler's view, need a new constitution? Well, for one thing, the current one was concocted during the Pinochet dictatorship by egghead protégés of Milton Friedman and is founded upon what Adler calls (*iDios mio!*) "free market fundamentalism." Among its horrible consequences, explains Adler, is that both university tuition and the proportion of short-term job contracts have increased. Worst of all, under the Pinochet constitution, "Chile became the most unequal country in the OECD."

Which brings to mind that famous moment in the British House of Commons when some hapless Labourite charged that under Thatcher "the gap between the richest 10 percent and the poorest 10 percent" had "widened substantially." To which

Thatcher [unforgettably](#) shot back: “All levels of income are better off than they were in 1979. But what the honorable member is saying is that he would rather the poor were poorer, provided the rich were less rich!”

Precisamente – and every bit as applicable to Chile today as to Britain then. One pesky little particular that Adler neglected to mention in his litany of Chile’s purported woes is that, under its current constitution, the poverty rate declined from almost 70% in 1990 to below 10% in 2018. Another tiny detail: of 16 OECD countries studied in 2018, Chile has the highest social mobility. I quote those stats from Mary Anastasia O’Grady, who [warned](#) two years ago in the *Wall Street Journal* against a new Chilean constitution.

Why, O’Grady asked, do some Chileans want change? One reason: “heavy doses of Marxist indoctrination at Chilean universities and income ‘equality’ claptrap from intellectuals and the media.” (Sound familiar?) Another reason: “as the population has become better off...it has also become angrier,” proving that “a free society is never more at risk than when expectations are rising faster than outcomes.”

Whom to believe, Adler or O’Grady? Well, she’s a winner of the Bastiat Prize, awarded by the Reason Foundation to journalists who stand up for freedom. He’s “general coordinator of the Progressive International,” which, according to its website, [consists](#) of “workers, peasants, and peoples of the world” who seek “to eradicate capitalism everywhere.” The other day, when British Conservative politician Rishi Sunak tweeted that “China and the Chinese Communist Party represent the largest threat to Britain and the world’s security and prosperity in this century,” Adler [shot back](#) that Sunak was spreading “anti-China, Red Menace propaganda.” So much for the guy whose opinion on Chile the *Guardian* wants you to hear.

But forget Adler. Let’s look at the proposed constitution itself, which is available [online](#), all 178 single-spaced pages

of it. The first thing that needs to be said about it is that at least the authors haven't tried to soft-pedal their radicalism. The very first words of the preamble are "Nosotras y nosotros, el pueblo de Chile..." In other words, "We [feminine] and we [masculine], the people of Chile..." Of course, the masculine pronoun would have been sufficient. But, as Napoleon or Lenin could tell you, when you're engineering a societal revolution, language must lead the way.

On to the text. The first article of Chapter I describes the new Chile as "a plurination [which does not mean multiple micturition], intercultural, regional, and ecological" and as "a republic in solidarity." A great deal more such enlightened language follows. And one soon becomes accustomed to the unending drumbeat of the refrain "every person has a right to..."

Oh, the rights! Dozens of them, scores, hundreds, most of which James Madison never dreamed of. And you certainly can't call them God-given, because even the Deity himself never imagined most of this stuff. Indeed, no sane person can read this document without scratching his head repeatedly and wondering: what *exactly* can this mean?

For example: "Every person has a right to leisure, to rest, and to enjoy their free time" (II:91). Does this mean that if the proposed constitution is ratified, a citizen who's not getting enough pleasure out of his free time can run and complain to somebody in the government? Another example: every person "has the right to use public spaces for cultural events and artistic performances" (II:92:3). Does this mean that some no-talent can storm Santiago's Teatro Municipal during a performance of *La Traviata* and tap dance on the stage for two hours?

Then there's these head-scratchers: "Every person has the right to a life and to personal integrity. This includes physical, psychosocial, sexual, and emotional integrity"

(II:21:1). Huh? Or: “Every person has the right to participate freely in the creation, the development, the conservation, and the innovation of the various systems of knowledge” (II:96:1). What? And how about this: “Every person has the right to receive an integral sexual education that promotes a full and free enjoyment of sexuality” (II:40). Hubba-hubba!

How to even begin to make sense of such “rights”?

And let’s not forget the green bits. “Nature,” the document informs us, “has a right to be respected, to protect its existence, to the maintenance and regeneration of its functions and dynamic equilibria, including the cycles of nature, ecosystems, and biodiversity” (II:103:1). Oooh-kay. Later, this: “Nature has rights. The State and the society have the obligation to respect them and protect them” (III:127:1). So if some of nature’s rights are violated, can it sue?

Some of this document’s assurances are, frankly, rather alarming. Here’s just one: “The state will employ all means necessary, including reasonable adjustments, to correct and overcome the disadvantage or subservience of a person or group” (II:25:5). Think about this one for a minute or two. In a single sentence, the state grants itself the power to do *anything* on the pretext of overcoming *any* disadvantage supposedly experienced by *anyone, anywhere*. Then there’s this: “The institutions of higher education have the mission of teaching, producing and socializing knowledge” (II:37:2). *Socializing* knowledge?

To peruse this singular document is to realize that every new beneficent-sounding guarantee of a so-called right is nothing more or less than a pushy claim by the government on yet another aspect of every citizen’s life. May the Chilean people give serious thought to what happened to Venezuela under Chávez, whose prodigious pledges to his people were drawn from the same well as the ridiculous “rights” enumerated in Chile’s

proposed compact. On September 4, may good sense, historical memory, and love of freedom overcome what seems to be an all too widespread human credulousness in the presence of preposterous progressive promises.

As for David Adler's suggestion that the U.S. adopt a new constitution similar to this Chilean text – thanks, but no thanks. Although I have the terrible feeling that some Democrats are already hard at work on it.

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