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On the Front Lines in Chile

Six Accounts from the Uprising

CrimethInc.

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October 24, 2019

Retrieved on 17th June 2021 from crimethinc.com

lib.edist.ro

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Since October 18, a full-scale uprising has unfolded in Chile as people of all walks of life come together to protest austerity measures, fight police repression, destroy the symbols of capitalism, and defy a military occupation reminiscent of the years of the dictatorship. The following interview and firsthand accounts explore the character of the uprising and the experiences of those on its front lines.

This is part of a global wave of revolts unfolding in Haiti, Lebanon, Sudan, Iraq, Hong Kong, Honduras, Catalunya, and elsewhere. The uprising in Chile was sparked in part by a social movement in Ecuador that occupied the parliament and forced the government to withdraw planned austerity measures. There are signs of the momentum spreading elsewhere in South America: clashes at the Chilean consulates in Mendoza and Buenos Aires, protests in Bolivia, unrest in Uruguay. All of these revolts are driven by the same fundamental conditions—the same disparities in wealth and power caused by capitalism and the same loss of faith in the institutions of the state.

In a globally interlinked world, in which all governments—from the United States to Turkey, Russia, and China—are working together to coordinate the repression of all who struggle for freedom and dignity, it is essential that we understand our struggles as interlinked and interdependent. We must stand up for each other or else we will all be crushed one by one. As one comrade put it,

“Solidarity is important. Even if you just hold a banner with some friends to post a photo expressing solidarity, even if you just hang that banner from a bridge over the highway, the tiniest gestures of solidarity can mean a lot to people who are struggling elsewhere, it can make them feel less alone. Even if you just shut down the security gate to show Turkish Airlines’ affiliates the consequences of doing business with murderers. Even if

you just take over the Chilean consulate. Even if you just blockade a highway.”

I. Questions and Answers about the Fare Evasion Movement

The following is a continuation of our interview with a longtime Chilean anarchist and participant in the uprising.

Brazil experienced an uprising like this in 2013; is that a reference point for any of the participants today? And what is the connection between the uprising in Ecuador and the uprising taking place right now in Chile?

In this country, people are not informed about international events; they have a very short memory that is dictated chiefly by what appears on the television. The Brazilian uprising has not been discussed in this specific context, but the one in Ecuador has been. This situation has played an important role in legitimizing the fact that change can be made simply by *fucking shit up*, which is something people denied but, regardless, knew within themselves to be true all along. I believe it is even possible that there's a degree of awareness here that what happens in Ecuador has contributed to reviving the fighting spirit of a great part of the population of Latin America, something that had seemed hopeless in the Chilean context.

What demographics were involved in the #EvasionMasiva movement at the beginning? Why did it spread so quickly and draw in other participants? Are demographics involved in the unrest now that do not usually get involved in confrontational resistance?

model that would be implemented in the late 1980s, supported by a political constitution written by Jaime Guzman, that changes the laws so that from then until today the constitution defends businessmen over all other people. For example, Sebastian Piñera is accused of defrauding a bank and not receiving any punishment.

Here, the enemy is the state—its police, military, and political class. They have made the rivers run dry stealing water for plantations that produce fruit for export, leaving ordinary people with no livelihood. They exploit the land. There is an urgent need to denounce the TPP-11 (the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership, a neoliberal trade agreement), a long-term project that has already begun, which will be a way to plunder the region's natural resources.

For us it is a matter of life and death. *They are killing us!*

Long live the revolt!

VIVA LA ANARQUÍA!

mobilizations this week because they consider—as we all do—the high price of the subway tickets to be an abuse and even more so the increase in its cost last week.

Everything exploded on Friday, October 18. It started with protests in all the subway stations and the poor neighborhoods. Everyone was united by a common cause, except the bourgeoisie. The police tried to enforce order, then withdrew and left all the subway stations abandoned...

The next day the government put the military on the street, supposedly to protect public order. People continued to demonstrate. Curfew was declared from 10 pm until 7 am the next morning. That night, the police and military took shots at people, arbitrarily detained people, beat people. They shot tear gas in many places in Santiago, shot bullets in the air and at people's bodies. Gas stations exploded. That night, there were two people killed. Yesterday, Sunday, all kinds of demonstrations continued. There are reports that the military and police have sexually abused women in the streets and detention centers.

That day, the military shot people, even a photographer in broad daylight, leaving eight dead; it is believed that there are more than eight deaths, though this is the number that the government claims. Social networks are another point of mass disinformation. People publish false information and criticize direct actions against large stores.

It was also reported on Sunday that undercover officers and apparently people paid by the state have attacked the stalls of poor workers in neighborhood markets called "free fairs," plundering them with guns, creating fear in these small businesses and spreading the impression that it was the poor people who did this. But the poor do not steal from the poor. The poor only steal from the rich. In Chile, a poor man who steals from a poor man is beaten when he is seen robbing people of their own social class.

President Sebastian Piñera is a Chicago Boy, educated with several of his friends in Chicago where they studied the neoliberal

The first participants were students from well-known and respected high schools where, in addition to the struggle against the fare increase, they had organized a campaign against "secure" classroom laws and other laws that criminalize and persecute students who participate in struggle. Starting on Wednesday, workers showed up to participate in the transport fare evasions, and even the third-year students and the timidest people managed caught the spirit of the youthful rebellion, defending the rebels or taking the metro without paying. On Friday, almost the entire population showed up banging on pots and pans and young people fought with the police. Not since 2011 have we seen a movement so diverse and intersectional, in which popular support has developed to such a point that the protests and looting involve participants of all walks of life.

Are people utilizing new tactics?

The exploited have used the tools that they have always had: rocks, gasoline, barricades, things that have proved truly effective against the police in many flashpoints of conflict. This guerrilla strategy has been adopted unconsciously by the population to help ensure that neither the police nor the military can respond effectively to the barricades and the looting. In many cases, the looters used the merchandise they obtained to construct barricades, as well as sharing it with passersby who received it with delight.

The tactic of evading the fares is not new; many people have already been doing it independently since the introduction of the new transportation system. The difference is that now it's taking place on a massive basis.

Besides all this, thousands of videos of police and military violence have also circulated, including horrible scenes of torture and abuse but also clever memes that humiliate the police. Social media has been used to spread these images as a way around the mainstream media's censorship.

In certain neighborhoods, residents have organized assemblies to make decisions collectively and defend their homes, both be-

cause of the rumors of looters that are being spread by the TV channels and also simply as a way to figure out how to make it through the difficult situation we're all experiencing right now.

Here, we're also seeing small groups organizing territorial self-defense, who are a little more prepared than most demonstrators, using tools like Molotov cocktails, water with baking soda (to alleviate tear gas), sticks, paint bombs, and so on. There have also been labor actions on the part of hospital workers and legal workers to support comrades who are arrested, tortured, injured, and so on.

What goals or political horizon can be identified among the protesters? Is there any danger that the movement will be hijacked by parties or groups that have a different set of goals, in the way that right-wing populists used the movement in Brazil in 2013 to launch their own organizing?

The revolt is truly acephalic—headless—and there aren't any legitimate representatives. No one is in control of the situation and nobody, up until this point, has been able to position himself as the leader of those who protest. The groups on the right don't have any popular support, and thus they haven't been able to manipulate the situation in their favor. There are certain neighborhoods where people are defending businesses and their own houses, and there are cases of fascists trying to rally people against the demonstrators, but it hasn't had much of an impact.

Neither the word of the anarchists nor the (small c, non-party) communists nor any other left milieu carries more weight than those who are in the street. The majority of the people in revolt just see themselves as angry citizens tired of being abused by those in power. At the beginning, the majority of protesters were students, but when everything exploded, the movement exceeded the previous forms of organization and identity.

At the moment, the official left organizations are trying to hop on the bandwagon of victory even though they never supported the students and, even worse, they try to minimize the students' role in

- 2620 detained, 200 children and underage
- 130 or an unknown number more disappeared
- more than 15,000 troops deployed, including police, PDI agents, soldiers, and undercover officers

The media are obviously trying to sow terror and to blame the people, but is it possible that the people could burn all of the little markets, supermarkets, and stores? In the whole country? Quite unlikely.

In these moments, we are scraping by with respect to food and money. Many of us people here live by hustling, selling stuff on the streets, so we're not able to generate any money. But we are "OK," with lots of strength, taking care of ourselves in the midst of everything.

"Rival Medios" is another non-fascist press organization that is publishing real images... I hope you're able to see the images that we have witnessed, showing how the authorities are acting... In the end, it's not much of a surprise, but we do feel the rage, the hatred and the powerlessness... But we're trying here to channel it so as to not make the wrong move.

VII. "Everything Exploded"

Hello friends. My name is Rodrigo, I am writing from Santiago in Chile, South America.

We are experiencing a state of siege, with all police and military forces on the streets since Saturday, October 19, following local protests against subway ticket prices. The fare is between \$1 and \$1.35, approximately. The secondary students began the

Wednesday, October 23

Yesterday was the fourth day of curfew in Valparaíso, from 6 pm to 6 am; in Santiago, the fifth day. The city is full of soldiers and they are shooting at anyone. The soldiers have seized and detained many people in civilian cars or in the vehicles of the PDI [the Chilean FBI]; some of the detained have reappeared dead, charred in the burned supermarkets—they want to make us believe all of them were killed the previous day in the fires during the looting. Other detainees they have been taken to centers of detention and torture... a lot of videos have come out in which it's clear that they are staged/set up the police themselves.

They are using the Estado Nacional (the main stadium in Santiago) as a center of detention and torture, the same as they did during the coup in 1973.

They have broken into people's homes and people are being taken to the stadium.

Yesterday, they started to cut the electricity in the center of Valparaíso, and we don't know when they will start to cut off the water... There are huge lines to buy food...

Well, for us it's basically the same as a coup, only that as of yet, they're not declaring permanent martial law.

This is a rundown of the numbers up through this morning:²

- 50 people murdered
- more than 20 women sexually abused by police and the military
- 226 people wounded, 125 by firearms

² Editor's note: We cannot confirm these numbers, nor do we have access to the sources the author was drawing on. We reproduce the statement here chiefly for historical purposes, though we consider it worth noting that the number of state murders reported by participants in the movement is consistently higher than the "official" numbers acknowledged by the state.

the struggle, since they never had control over the students. Now, after five days of revolt, they have called a general strike—words you don't hear much in this country—and they're trying to seize leadership of the movement. It's hard to say whether it will work out for them because, for the most part, the official left groups are seen by the angry, tired people as traitors and sell-outs who stayed quiet and didn't call on people to struggle.

We can't be sure that it will go on this way. Maybe social democracy will contain the discontent and return the city to normal, while gaining nothing more than a few table scraps—this is the risk posed by the involvement of the left organizations. But who knows. The interesting thing is that the movement actually did stop the fare hike, and the president has announced a (laughable) package of reforms to confront the crisis, but no one fucking cares because it's just more of the same shit. Despite beating the fare hike, despite the reforms package, people are continuing to revolt.

Would it be possible to crush social unrest in Chile today by means of a military dictatorship, like in 1973?

I don't think that the dictatorship will return, at least not in the style of the 1970s. Nowadays, it's more useful to go on with the myth of democracy but still use the state of exception for situations like this, creating a de facto dictatorship but one that won't last for a long period of time. This will bring things back to "normality" but will leave everyone who has participated in this movement with valuable lessons. Everyone here has the sensation that nothing will be the same again after this—that this revolt has marked a fundamental threshold, a before and after.

In contemporary democracy, I believe that military takeovers and the state of exception will be the weapons used by the powerful to camouflage a dictatorship. **We need to understand that dictatorship and democracy aren't opposites—rather, they are tools of the powerful for different periods and different ways to keep us submissive.** But there won't be a military coup like in 1973, because until now there hasn't been, nor in the near future

will there be, a sector or group in society that could take the power away from the those who have the economic and class privilege of the ruling class.

The interesting part of this situation is that it will open a rupture in which we can spread our own proposals as anarchists and they will have more purchase because many of the things that are happening spontaneously right now are the things that anarchists have been proposing for a long time. What's happening now is thanks to the years of work and propaganda via which various comrades have influenced their places of study, workplaces, and neighborhoods.

What do you think the long-term effects of this movement will be?

It's a little early to answer this question. The people here, or rather, the various peoples that are included in what we call "Chile," have been traumatized from torture and murder. All of our mothers and fathers and grandparents are terrified of demonstrating, whereas the youth here grew up under a neoliberalism that atomized them from each other and eradicated a tradition of organization from this territory. But now that two generations have grown up without the dictatorship, younger people don't have as much fear. This is also, in part, thanks to the different currents—including anarchists—who have shaped what social combat looks like nowadays. What is most likely to happen is that this movement will cool off and out will come the social-democrats to stand in as the representatives of the movement in order to gain power for their coalitions of left political parties like the Frente Amplio or the Communist Party.

What has definitely happened is that the government has announced a variety of measures in response to this so-called "crisis," all of which are an insult to the exploited of this country because they're nothing more than table scraps. People received the news with indignation. The truth is that in the periphery of the city, in the

VI. The Dictatorship Never Left

From a comrade in Valparaíso.

Tuesday, October 22

We're entering into a critical state. Many Chilean cities have risen up, in the midst of looting, fire and chaos... Food is already getting scarce, it's hard to get it, you have to wait in super long lines at supply stores to buy rice, vegetables, etc. the majority of supermarkets were looted, so now the military are guarding the areas nearby. The curfews are beginning at 6 pm, everything is militarized and in any moment they'll declare martial law. The president has declared war against the people and their discontent.

The dictatorship is being unleashed again—it never left, they just called it democracy.

They have killed ten or twelve people in one weekend, with gunshot wounds from lead bullets or pellets. Some comrades have suffered injuries. A comrade has lost an eye recently as a result of them launching a tear gas canister directly into their face, and others have pellet and small bullet wounds in their bodies. In a squatted territory where comrades and people with families live, soldiers entered and raped a women who they found there.

We know that if this gets any worse, they're going to start disappearing people.

For now we can use water and electricity, but we don't know how long it will last.

The media are attempting to sow terror, the citizenry justifies the militarization... everything is divided. For now, it's really difficult for us to make a compilation of audiovisual material, but in media like "Prensa Opal," "Radio Bio-Bio," "Radio Villa Francia," and on youtube/facebook/instagram, a lot of videos are up about the situation here.

Fifteen minutes later, we hear the loud squawk of a police vehicle. Pacos. *If it's just the cops, we can take them.* Some people started to build the fire higher on the barricade; others kicked stones into the streets, getting ready to hold their ground. *They aren't backing down.*

The police approach slowly, shooting tear gas canisters at us. People kick them back. We pull up our masks to make it easier to breathe. POP POP POP. More gas. *El Jefe* is ready to defend his corner. He isn't dancing anymore. We dodge in and out of side streets, trying not to get gas in our eyes while holding our ground.

A crazy few charge the police with rocks. We hold out for a little while, but then the balance of power shifts and we're running, a loud hollow sound behind us. The lights have gone out. We make it to a side alley between the houses where someone is holding a large iron gate open frantically calling people in. A few more people crowd in behind us, but then someone accidentally closes the gate before the last three boys can get in. The gate has barbed wire on top and they can't climb it. I'm devastated. I try to find a way to open the gate again, but the person with the key isn't close enough. The boys have to keep running.

More gas. More sirens. We hide until things calm down a bit. A small argument breaks out about the three boys who were locked out. Everyone feels bad about that. I hope they make it to safety.

It would make sense to call it quits now, but my roommate and I decide we want to stay out longer. We take the side street to his *barricada familiar*. It's comforting—there are young kids out here still, all tending the fire. Way after midnight, we decide to go inside to rest. Tomorrow is sure to be intense as well. My only regret is that if we had defended the other fire longer, we could all have slept there, under the stars.

poblaciones,¹ the ghetto, the situation is very different from the situation in the more comfortable neighborhoods. Even though they are still shooting people in the center—and sometimes with live ammunition—the majority of the shots are rubber bullets, whereas in the *poblaciones*, the soldiers and the cops are using live ammunition against the people. They are torturing, killing, and disappearing people. I don't think the people who protest in the center really realize this.

Another factor is the repression that will come after all this. The government has already spoken about “organized groups” who torched metro stations and some authorities have pointed towards anarchists, but to be sure, there will be a wave of repression afterwards in which we will once again be hunted.

Regardless, this will be a lesson and an experience for the struggles to come. The exploited know, consciously or unconsciously, that in order to win victories we have to fuck shit up. Nothing will be the same after this, because so many people got to struggle and to see the repressive brutality of those in power. That will not be forgotten.

Another point of analysis that is necessary for those who feel affinity with anarchist ideas is that this situation should serve as a wake-up call: because we've been so atomized, we lost a unique opportunity to shape the content and coordination of the revolt. We lost the opportunity to make it expand, to form bonds of affinity with the population through anti-authoritarian ideas and practice. It has cost us a lot that we have been so divided and poorly organized.

¹ Starting in the 1950s, houseless residents of Santiago began occupying large tracts of land and building shanties on them. These neighborhoods came to be known as *poblaciones*. Whether out of necessity or political conviction, they are known for self-organization and leftist politics. During the military dictatorship, many of the *poblaciones* were *focos* of resistance, which is to say, areas where guerrilla actions and other subversive activity developed and confronted the dictatorship. The *poblaciones* in Chile are analogous to the *villas* in Argentina and the *favelas* in Brazil.

This doesn't mean that there hasn't been anything gained—I believe that most anarchists have taken to the streets to fight and to participate in other important tasks—but we could have been a greater force if we had been more coordinated.

Let's never forget all those who were murdered in this revolt, nor those who were tortured or locked away.

II. Anonymous Account from Santiago, October 21, 2019

I make this announcement with the intention of spreading news about what is happening in the territory where I live—the territory dominated by the state of Chile, specifically the capital. In recent days, the state of Chile has shown its true face—what it really is—putting all the police and military in the street to suppress protests and mobilizations that are already reaching the national level.

People are being kidnapped and killed; women are being tortured and raped. So far, we have experienced an undetermined number of fatalities: officially twelve, but we know that the number is much more, as a lot of people have been seriously injured by gunshots from the police and the military.

To give a little context: about two weeks ago, massive protests began as a result of the drop that caused the glass to overflow, this glass filled with historical demands in this situation. Demands related to health, education, the transportation system, and the supply system, typical of a cruel neoliberal system implemented in the dictatorship.

The drop that caused the glass to overflow was the increase of the cost of ticket fare, the increase of the cost of basic services, electricity in particular. It began with crowds of roving secondary

lazos through the window. That was enough to inspire us to join our neighbors on the streets.

We put on everything we thought we might need for concealment and set out. My anxiety rose as we stepped outside, defying martial law is something I have not done before. But so far, the streets seemed empty of state mercenaries; the military had moved on. On the main road, we could see little dots of fires all up and down it into the distance. These were the “barricada familiar,” the barricades of your that neighborhood you tend with your friends and family.

First, we went to the biggest fire, just a few blocks away from the house, where the drums were loudest. Along the way, we identified potential exits in case we might have to run. People were dancing, laughing, steadily collecting trash from wherever they could find it. We dragged a few boxes over ourselves and warmed our hands by the fire, talking with our neighbors and sharing what horrific news we had heard.

One empty lot was full of material we could use for the barricade, but as people started to try to gather it, a fight broke out. It was hard to tell what was going on. The high-rise apartment next to the lot had a ton of people hanging out their windows and yelling. Then objects started flying and it became clear. Fucking fascists—these neighbors were in support of the military. We tried to sneak in about ten minutes later when things had cooled off; I barely missed being cracked in the head with a flower pot.

Someone brought out a large painting of a Dragon Ball Z character and threw it into the fire. A helicopter passed overhead and everyone flicked it off. *Paco culiado!* Fucking scum. The steady rhythm of the *cacerolazos* continued. One man in particular seems to be having the best night of his life. We called him “El Jefe” among ourselves, giggling. He was dancing and stopped a car that was driving by to reach in the window and turn up the music. It was beautiful to see people celebrating together, intentionally defying state orders despite the threat of severe consequences.

“Hey! Hey! Where are you going? You want to come with me?” I tried not to act afraid.

Fortunately, two punk girls I had seen at the last barricade came up behind me: “Want us to walk you home?” This pissed the man off: he got defensive, swearing he wasn’t bothering anyone. This drew the attention of a few other people and he started to get more aggressive. This didn’t go well for him, as the crowd got involved. He started to run and we watched as he was chased down the road, falling down every few moments. Many thanks to the observant people who came to my aid. It felt like people were more invested in their surroundings and more observant of others’ wellbeing as a consequence the protests. It felt empowering.

After saying goodbye to my new friends, I ran home with only a few moments to spare before the curfew. I heard some terrible sounds and looked out of my balcony. There were military goons posted up on my corner.

I immediately texted my roommate. I was worried because he wasn’t home yet.

Ok, I am at a protest still. The police are here.
Oh shit, should I come?
You stay there please. Here they are shooting.
BE CAREFUL!! Are you going to leave? Where are they shooting?
Real bullets? Or pellets?
Shotgun bullets.
And lots of tear gas

I was so worried, but I didn’t know what to do. I couldn’t leave the house, not alone. I started to cook food, pacing back and forth between the balcony to watch the street and the kitchen to tend my food.

Thankfully by the time I finished the meal, he walked in. I had made enough for two. As we ate, frantic notifications arrived on our phones from all over the city. *They killed someone in the outskirts of town. They dragged him across the ground, limp and bleeding.* Jesus. The news was heavy, but despite it we still heard the *cacero-*

school students at subway stations, mainly in the city center. Over time, the crowds demonstrating at the turnstiles came to involve people from all sections of the population, people of all ages found themselves ratcheting up the tension and taking the Santiago subway stations under their control, allowing all people to take the subway at that time without paying. Over the following days, this led to the presence of police special forces [*carabineros*] at the stations, guarding them and trying to suppress these demonstrations.

The authorities failed. People continued hopping the turnstiles and occupying the metro stations; then, on Friday, October 18, the protest radicalized and took to the street, reckoning with the eternal symbols of capital: supermarkets, banks, pharmacies, public transportation, subway stations. About 45 subway stations in Santiago were destroyed, with 20 of them burned down. This occurred chiefly on the outskirts of the city, in the *poblaciones* [the peripheral neighborhoods inhabited by people on the margins of Chilean neoliberal capitalism].

On Friday, a state of emergency was declared; the military was already patrolling the streets, but the actions did not stop. People continued to take to the streets, barricading them—they remain uncontrollable to this day. On Saturday, October 19, the curfew was decreed overnight, the state of siege. Initially, it was announced to last from 10 pm until 7 am, then it was pushed back to begin at 7 pm. But more actions took place at night: people continued to take to the streets, while the military began to enter the *poblaciones*—and not only in Santiago, as by now there are seven cities that are in a state of emergency, three of them also in a state of siege, too, enforcing a curfew.

The police and military are firing live rounds, cracking down on the population, shooting at anyone who crosses their path. There are many videos on social networks of torture, detention, and kidnapping; there are even reports of rape. Intense repression is taking place against the *poblaciones* that historically organized and resisted before the dictatorship; police raids are taking place there,

a political persecution that we know will not be contained, that the government is trying to direct.

Fascist/right-wing President Sebastián Piñera, during a press conference, declared that “we” are at war, that there is an “internal enemy” behind all these organizations. There are attempts to point to existing political organizations, but we know that this is a vile lie; people are organizing themselves without leaders, horizontally and in solidarity.

They are threatening to cut off water and electricity, they are spreading fear, they are intimidating people. The presence of the military on the street serves the same role, clearing the metro stations and the avenues where people gather to protest.

We do not know how this will go, we do not know what murders and disappearances will follow. But this is not something new for this territory. Forty years ago, the landscape was no different. We started another way, but we don’t know how things will end now.

There is a call open to extend the agitation, seeking gestures of solidarity for us from all around the planet, so solidarity can expand beyond writing and words.

This is the moment for the struggle for dignity: discontent breathes, it is uncontrollable, expressions of anger have taken the streets of this city and the country.

III. Welcome to Santiago

I was in Buenos Aires to give a talk at an anarchist book fair. As the news from Chile kept flooding my phone, I started looking into buying tickets.

“Ok, in two weeks, so that I don’t miss the protests when Trump comes for APEC,” I told myself.

To give an idea of how daunting the walk home was, and how much chaos the closure of the metro caused, someone here told me that Santiago is the most dispersed and sprawling city of any metropolis in the world with over 4 million people. People really rely on public transportation here.

I knew I could stay with my friend again if I asked, but I wanted to be with my roommate, to see what would happen after curfew in my neighborhood.

I bid farewell to my friends and started to walk. It was long, it was really really long. I passed a few blocks of other protests and ducked down alleys to slip past police lines. There was one part of the city, a park, where it looked like they didn’t even know anything was happening anywhere else—until four large armored vehicles drove past me, with soldiers on top of them sporting assault rifles. It was an eerie, seeing them like that. That was their second day occupying the streets; I had heard stories of their violence already. They paid no attention to me and kept driving. I think they were getting ready for the curfew, when they would have full permission to use whatever force they wished to.

I finally made it to the outskirts of my neighborhood. Although it is still technically in the center, my neighborhood is not as wealthy as other parts. It’s a working class neighborhood, with an excellent open-air market that spans a few blocks. As soon as I crossed the street, the vibe shifted.

Plaza Italia has been one of the many focal points of protest and police clashes over the weekend. There were thousands of people spread out over a few blocks squaring off in various directions trying to defend the space. I saw people milling about on street corners, some standing in their doorways, all with a strong and guarded posture. Many held bats, pipes, and other weapons, ready to protect their homes and businesses from looters.

I saw a thick cloud of smoke rising a few blocks away. I watched it as I walked. *Is another building burning down?* Some man started to harrass me, drunkenly. Mostly, I tried to avoid his questions.

Finally, we hear that the President of Chile has declared a state of emergency and that the military will be arriving in the morning. No one knows what to expect—no one expected this! Now the military?! This really spooks many Chileans, especially those old enough to have lived through the Dictatorship.

I've lost track of time. Life itself is accelerating. It feels as if this day has lasted weeks. Will I even have school on Monday? If I do, would I care?

The promise of this revolt isn't just in the slogans and chants and graffiti we see calling for a better world—a world without capitalism, without work, without government, without police, without authority. The promise is something we are living—the fact that our lives can be full, can be beautiful, can be too much for us even to handle. I am swept away like a seed on the wind, ready to plant a new world in the ashes of the old Wal-Marts. In this day, my life, all of our lives are changed forever. After tonight, we all know this won't slow down any time soon—and also that terrible things are coming. Our enemies do not want us to have the lives we deserve.

V. Barricada Familiar

I had just gotten word that the curfew tonight would start at 7 pm instead of 10 pm, when it had the previous night. I was in the center near Plaza Italia, having just spent the day dodging tear gas clouds and participating in various protests. I had to make a decision about where to be for the night—and fast. After mapping it on my phone, I saw that it would take at least an hour to get there if I didn't get swept up in any other clashes along the way. It was already 5:30 pm; if I wanted to go home to my apartment, I would be cutting it close. There were no busses running at this point and I didn't want to take a cab.

“Fuck, OK, there are cheap tickets in five days. They leave at night, though. Surely there won't still be a curfew in five days, right?”

Then a text from a neighbor in Santiago convinced me: “I mean, can you come back today? There's a general strike tomorrow.”

I don't know whether it was because of the State of Emergency or because of how soon I wanted to fly, but the airlines' websites wouldn't let me buy anything that left that day. Fuck it, I'll just go to the airport and see what they can do for me there.

I bought not one, but two tickets. The first ticket I bought went straight to Santiago, but got in after curfew. Whatever, I could just take a taxi from the airport in the morning. The woman at the ticket counter assured me that flights to Santiago would not be cancelled. But then I bought another to a border town—maybe I could just take a bus or a sketchy driver could take me all the way to Santiago overnight. I had to decide. The border town flight left first. I took it—if the airport was still open, maybe I could cop a late flight from *that* airport to Santiago. I landed and everything was cancelled, including the flight I had been assured would arrive in Santiago. The border crossing over the mountains was closed too. Bus line after bus line assured me it would open up in the morning. Sure guy, I've heard this one before. Still, I didn't have any other option.

In the morning, I boarded a Sprinter-size airport shuttle-style van with eight other people for Santiago. It was really early, and the ride was quiet. Most people slept—but despite only having slept two hours as a result of translating comunicués and watching a Sisyphean quantity of videos from Chile, my nerves kept me awake. I had decided not to ditch the anarchist pins, patches, stickers, and posters that I'd brought to sell at the anarchist book fair in Buenos Aires. As we pulled up to the border station, a large road sign welcomed us to Chile. The passenger behind me grabbed my shoulder and said to me, “We made it! We're in Chile!”

I turned around and told her, “Ha, not yet.” Immediate regret—did I say too much? Her internal thought was written on her face:

Why would I be worried about not getting into Chile? As we got out of the bus, I went from feeling nervous and daring to feeling really, really stupid. Why the fuck did I do this?

“Uh, can I get my bag?”

“No, big backpacks aren’t allowed at the passport check. The customs people will unload them and then you’ll pass it through their x-ray.”

“Oh... OK.”

I’ve backpacked a bit around South America. I’ve learned how to reduce my absolute necessities to what fits inside a fairly lightweight backpack. The worst feeling in the world is being separated from my bag. It’s like the separation the protagonist in *The Golden Compass* feels when she’s separated from her daemon.

A nervous wreck, I follow the other passengers into the passport control. Motherfucking *four* other anarchists from the book fair are there too. I guess I wasn’t the only one who figured it was time to get back to Chile. Why are they looking at me? Stop looking at me. STOP IT. Why isn’t my telepathy or the obvious look of disinterest on my face tipping them off that I DO NOT WANT TO GREET OTHER ANARCHISTS WHILE CROSSING THE BORDER?

They are let through. Phew. We’re after them, but someone in our group moves us behind another line, making the wait even longer. Ugh, just let this end. Finally, we’re let through. Hey, they stamped my passport. SCORE! Now just customs—how bad could it be?

I pick up my bag from the conveyor belt. Good sign, right? If it’s inside already, they must have checked it already and no big deal. Just slip it in the x-ray machine and we’ll be on our way.

I lay my bag on the x-ray’s conveyor belt. It comes out the other side. A disinterested border guard points to it. A friendly agriculture authority takes me aside. “Are there any plant or animal products in your bag?” Ha! I know this one! “Just a little bit of chocolate.” They always crack a smile and let me go with that line. Except the

people are sharing social media posts about some really crazy stuff happening in other parts of the city, so we decide to suit up and walk around the city to see what else is happening.

Some of our crew expect that things will calm down as we exit this famously rebellious neighborhood. They’re wrong. Things are even more intense as we approach the large commercial avenue that cuts through the city. We see burnt out buses, evidence of recent conflict involving volleys of stones from demonstrators and tear gas from pigs. The neighborhood we are passing through is not known for its combativeness, but the youth are out and ready to stand up to the police.

It is getting really late, way past midnight. I have already witnessed three different combative events today. I am exhausted from walking miles across the burnt-out city in a daze. We finally give in and take a cab back to a friend’s apartment; the cabbies must be making a killing tonight. Our cab driver is a champ. He dodges smoldering barricades and other riotous residue, until we can’t pass any further, blocked by an active clash between police and protesters. Roll up the window! Quick! Tear gas!

“OK, let us out here, I guess.” We get out and escape through an alley.

The friend we were supposed to meet has been stuck inside his apartment all night, anxious to get out, but too nervous to go alone—and rightfully so. We walk further toward the center, to the traditional sites of conflict. There are pockets of stone throwers and police, graffiti everywhere; the air smells of smoke and the all-too-familiar burning sensation caused by tear gas. We see the burnt-out shell of the electricity company’s building. It’s an impressive sight, but as it gets later, I find myself wishing we had stayed on the outskirts. This rebellion is reaching beyond the traditional sites and people are truly waking up and standing up to police all throughout the city, including in barrios that haven’t seen conflict in a long time. I don’t think anyone could have anticipated this.

the city that is not well served by metro or even bus lines. As we are frantically trying to fulfill our obligations to our friends, we hear reports that the metro will be shut down for the entire weekend. Everyone is out on the streets. I mean everyone. No one can ride the metro; with all the traffic, people are walking. There is a carnival feeling in the air, an electricity. As the sun sets, the city begins to wake up.

We arrive at the social center, but as 8 o'clock got closer, it became apparent that no one is going to make it. A few people involved with the space are there to welcome our international comrades for a talk about the uprising in Ecuador, but it becomes clear that no one else is coming.

While the neighborhood isn't well-served by the city's infrastructure, it has a long and proud history of self-organization and resistance; there is another anarchist space a few blocks away. They decide to cancel their music event for the evening. How could we have been so stupid to think that anyone could come to this talk with no buses, no trains, and this much excitement?! It hadn't really set in how huge and unique this situation is in a country with such a tradition and history of rebellion.

While we are discussing whether to cancel our event as well, a pair of young siblings walk by—both under ten. The younger one is banging on a toy kitchen-set *cacerolazo*, while the older one carries a tiny little sofa chair. Surely he isn't taking that to burn, right? We peek out the door. He is. There is a burning barricade and neighbors gathered just down the street. That decides it: the talk is canceled.

All of us walk down the street to gather around the flames, bang on pots and pans, and share beer and chants with the neighbors. Whole families are out. Reinforcements arrive out of nowhere with boards, furniture, garbage bins... there is even one guy with an entire pickup truck full of dry wall scrap that he drops off. Thanks!

The fire blazes as people bring out more trash and garbage from their houses, lawns, and empty lots. We start to receive texts;

x-ray operator comes over and says, "No no, they didn't want an agriculture check on this bag. Customs wanted to look at it."

OK... A much sterner customs official comes over. "It looks like there is a machine in here or something? Maybe a computer?"

Phew. "Oh yes, here, this is my laptop."

"Oh great. Now, would you mind allowing me to take everything else out too?"

"Uh... sure..."

Fuck. Fuck fuck fuck. She passes over the pins, that's good. Opens the pouch with all the stickers and patches and just stuffed them back in the bag. That's great! "What's this?" FUCK. I was carrying a ream of CrimethInc. gender posters and police posters—in Spanish. "Oh, just some gifts. It's like a comic, I like to leave them for people I meet while I'm traveling." She takes out a gender poster and proceeds to read it, slowly, in its entirety. For a long time.

I had arranged the posters in such a way that all the gender posters were on top with the police posters underneath and facing down, in case a customs official looked through them—hoping that it would look like I was only carrying gender posters. At least the gender posters doesn't say anything bad about cops, or anything specifically about Chile—unlike the police poster. As she finishes reading the poster, she cocks her head and stares into the distance with a bemused, bug-eyed expression. She cannot decide if this poster is subversive or not.

"And these are all the same poster?" She flips through the stack.

Holy shit, if I had not arranged those posters the right way, she definitely would have seen that they are *not* all the same poster. Way too close for comfort.

"Yup... all the same..."

"Ok, you can pack your things and go." You better fucking believe I do.

Once I'm back in the transport van, the driver immediately peels off and gets out of there. Fuck yeah. The woman behind me asks, "Did it go OK for you?"

How does she know? Then I realize the whole van is full of chatter:

“You got ALL that tobacco through? That’s amazing dude!”

“Yeah, they were overwhelmed today. I think there were some new recruits too because it’s an all hands on deck situation.”

“Psh, they didn’t even know what they were doing. I definitely should not have been let in after getting arrested in Argentina last week.”

Oh. Right. The bus. These are my people! Everyone here is sketchy. I’m loving it.

I get in on the chatter now, after realizing that I’m among fellow lowlifes who all have things to hide from the authorities, just like me. However, unlike everyone else, I don’t spill what it is I was hiding.

The woman behind me is sweet. She’s about my mother’s age and we talk about family, my educational ambitions, you know, mom stuff.

As we pull into Santiago and see all the destruction, she cautions me about how to take care of myself on the streets, lest someone... mistake me for a protester! We can literally smell the char from the looting and burning the night before. We pass an entire Wal-Mart that has been burned to the ground. “*Evade*” graffiti is everywhere. The ashes of burnt barricades fill the middle of every intersection.

The driver turns on the news on the TV screen inside the van. The government is asking people to obey the curfew tonight, to return to normal life after today’s general strike. There are armed troops posted on street corners throughout the city. Large trucks with squads of them zoom past us on the highway.

“Oh, last night, they’re shooting and beating people and today, they’re asking nicely? No, that’s not how this is going to go,” comments one of my fellow sketchy bus passengers.

Everyone starts chatting about the protests, the inequality in Chile, the authoritarian repression of the government. Now that I’ve feigned ignorance and innocence for so long—”I’m just a wide-

cops holding the gate. Fuck, it’s over for us... But they let the first two out. I see a crowd of people on the other side. Oh, they are just stopping people from coming in. They just want everyone out. Now I feel guilty for leaving, especially with the permission of the cops! I begin to wonder how the rest of the demonstration will go?

After I get out of my entrance exam and registration, I receive some texts from other friends:

Hey im at cerro Santa Lucia

The metro got shut down so people took the streets

And now there is tear gas.

Whoa, that’s wild.

I can’t wait to tell you about what happened at Los Heroes today

I’m trying to get back to my apartment, but most of the metro lines are shut down. I start to try to find some buses. I have to walk quite a while to get to a bus stop that will take me to where I need to go, and I finally get on a bus. It’s really hot in here. Everyone is fanning themselves and trying to open windows. We get stuck in standstill traffic. Cars are honking, nothing is moving. Fuck it, again! I get off and start to walk. It can’t be that far.

I pass a street performer with a guitar and I smile. They look at me, smiling, and say “CAOS.” I keep walking. I see people running. I start to run. I smell smoke. Again, I am filled with adrenaline. Students have occupied an intersection, holding up traffic. There is a burning barricade. They are holding ground as a *guanaco* (an armored police vehicle with a mounted water cannon, named after a spitting animal like a llama) starts to chase people up and down the streets with its powerful stream. They are not deterred, even as police on foot shoot tear gas canisters into the crowds to disperse them. Armed with rocks and bricks, kids start to fight back. It’s a special kind of feeling to see the police forced to retreat or, even better, lose their composure and have to disperse in disarray. For today, the students are victorious.

I finally meet up with my friend. We have a talk that we are participating in at 8 o’clock at a social center in a peripheral part of

This station becomes more and more ungovernable and the police know it. They must have called for back up because about 15 more cops arrive at the only other exit to the outside. They begin charging back and forth from one entrance of the station to the other, in a formation, occasionally snatching students and dragging them behind their line. This does not take place without a fight. Students hurl objects at them and attempt to tear their friends away from the arms of the police; but for an unlucky few, it is too late.

Just when I think the police are about to gain the upper hand, we all hear a deep rumble from the lower platform. For a moment, everything stops as we all look down to the tracks below. I see a massive crowd of students with their fists raised, half marching, half sprinting toward the stairs. The police got 15 reinforcements, the students get hundreds. Everyone starts to chant “El pueblo unido jamas sera vencido!” (“The people, united, will never be defeated!”) as they make their way up to join in the fighting.

The skirmishes continue. There is another feeble attempt over the metro station speakers to make an announcement that no one hears. The police charge back and forth through the station and begin chasing people up and down the stairs. As I’m running down a discontinued escalator, I think about how dangerous this is. I worry about people being trampled, about falling face first onto the stairs. These cops really don’t give a shit about these kids. At least, I think to myself, we can all jump on the next train—but no next train comes. The other train currently in the station has been sitting in place for a while already.

Oh shit, they shut down this entire line! That’s quite an accomplishment. The kids already knew this. They are dancing and bouncing while chanting “Whoever isn’t jumping is a cop!” I jump too. We are all celebrating, every person I make eye contact with is grinning ear to ear and so am I.

Eventually, I really do have to go to my school. I find a break in the police lines and slip through. I see a few other students do the same. I get to the metro entrance and it is being guarded by two

eyed backpacker from abroad!”—I can’t really get in on the conversation.

Despite false warnings in Mendoza that protesters might get on our bus and try to burn it, we arrive safely at the bus station. I exchange numbers with the sweet woman behind me. Her husband walks up while we are doing so. “Oh, let me introduce you to my husband!”

“You decided to come to Chile to go backpacking... today?” He looks at me incredulously.

“Yup. That’s right!”

“You know, it’s been a wild few days here. I don’t know if you’ve seen the news.”

“Oh, yeah, I heard something about it. I’m sure I’ll learn a lot while I’m here.”

He stares at me, dead in the eyes, and raises his fist. “Viva el proletariado!”

Is this a joke? Is he trying to give me, like, the authentic South American leftist experience or something? I mean, “Long live the proletariat” is a bit on the nose, isn’t it?

Nope. I kind of giggle, but he doesn’t take his eyes off me until I raise my fist back and repeat, “Viva el proletariado.” The woman smiles warmly, proud of me, and gives me a big hug as if we were family. “Have fun and be safe!”

IV. A Day in the Uprising

As a recent arrival in Chile, I was already enamored with Santiago. I had found so much that beckoned to me. There was an extensive calendar of anarchist events and party flyers plastered on the walls and stacked on the counters of subcultural stores. I

ate the best vegan empanada I have ever had for cheap, made by a punk selling them on the street. You can basically ride any bus for free, if you just scan your card and put on a very transparent façade of being surprised that it is out of money. Just say “excuse me” very nicely to the driver and walk past the gate... as every person behind you does the same thing. The general rebelliousness of the people in Santiago was inviting.

I began to hear from friends about the groups of students staging mass evasions on the metros in protest of the fare prices being raised, and heard stories of them happening over the past few days at one station or another. That afternoon, I was with a friend, just running some errands, and we heard the unmistakable sound of a large crowd shouting and cheering on the street. We ran to the window of the building we were in and looked down to see just the tail end of a group of about a hundred students running down to a metro station. The street was wet from water cannons laced with diluted tear gas; even from that far away, we felt the small tingle on our faces. I was so impressed with the students here, for their bravery, their independence.

The next morning, I woke up and started to get ready for my day. I had plans to go take an entrance exam for my Spanish Immersion school in the city center, just two metro rides away. On the ride, I was regretting not bringing my headphones and daydreaming about what my life would be like here, while anxiously checking every stop to make sure I didn't miss my transfer.

“This is it, Los Heroes, great. Okay...? Transfer to the red line here! Which way heads towards my destination? Whoa. Wait... HOLY SHIT.”

Walking up the stairs, I hear chants of “*Pacos culiados!*” and loud crashes and bangs. The station manager is trying to make an announcement over the intercom, but I can't hear anything except hundreds of excited voices.

I walk to the far end of the station, opposing the main police line. They are dressed in riot gear, helmets, shields, batons. I'm regret-

ting not bringing any extra clothes, no mask, no shirt or jacket to cover my face. There are so many cameras. How was I supposed to know this was going to happen? I'm kicking myself for not at least bringing my scarf; the weather is a little brisk anyways. The students are amazing. Most of the gates and turnstiles have been demolished and are now being used either destroy more of the station or as projectiles to hurl at the police. The few gates that remain are being held open as students let people through who are just trying to catch the train, cheering as each person walks through without paying. Broken glass is everywhere, but the demonstrators keep sweeping it into a pile on the side with their feet so no one gets hurt if they fall. Some kids tie on masks with red and white caution tape probably left over from the metro station attempting to regain some flimsy semblance of control after previous protests. I briefly look for some on the ground but can't find any more. There is the familiar smell of spray-paint and I look over to see some kind scrawling, “EVADE!” on the wall.

I'm so enraptured by this moment that I forget I was supposed to go to my school soon. Fuck it, they are open all afternoon—when do you accidentally walk in on such inspiring acts of rebellion? I will stay for a while longer.

I am full of adrenaline. I grab my phone and start to text a few friends to let them know what's happening in case things go south from here. I also to invite them to come if they can. My hands are shaking.

Holy shit.

This is wild

this station is destroyed ppl fighting the police
hahahahahahh

Responsibly take a video!!!

I'll show you when I get back

Someone is arrested and everyone is
charging and attacking the police