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‘Chile Needs a Communist Party,’ an Interview With Lautaro Carmona, General Secretary of the Communist Party of Chile

Author Bio: This article was produced by [Globetrotter](#).

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[Article Body:]

On August 31, 2023, the President of the Communist Party of Chile Guillermo Teillier was buried in the historical cemetery of Recoleta. In this graveyard lies the remains of a range of important people, from former Chilean President Salvador Allende to the socialist

singer Victor Jara. Both Allende and Jara were victims of the military coup d'état that took place 50 years ago on September 11, 1973. Teillier, who was tortured for several years in prison after the coup, went underground after his release and led the efforts of rebuilding the Communist Party (CP) underground (since it had been banned), its armed wing (*El Frente Patriótico Manuel Rodríguez*), and the broader popular movement that led to the restoration of democracy in 1990. Chile's President Gabriel Boric attended the memorial before Teillier's burial and [called](#) for two days of national mourning on August 30 and 31 to mark the loss of Teillier, who he [said](#) lived a "dignified life."

At the funeral, the Communist Party's General Secretary Lautaro Carmona emphasized the importance of Teillier's leadership—at great personal cost—in the fight against the military dictatorship and in the fight in the past three decades to revive a socialist project in Chile. Despite attempts to bury the legacy of the left—including the advances made by the Popular Unity government led by Salvador Allende (who served as president from 1970 to 1973), the communists—who are part of Boric's government—continue to struggle to advance an agenda to establish sovereignty over Chile's economy and to improve the everyday living conditions of the people of the country. This socialist project—which is written on the "*las banderas Allendistas*" (flags of Allendism), as Carmona [said](#) at the funeral—has recently been virulently attacked by the Chilean right-wing [media](#) outlets and the center-right.

Why has there been this fierce attack on the communists? When we spoke to Lautaro Carmona in his office in Santiago, near Plaza de la Dignidad, he provided us with a detailed explanation of the social and political context in the country. There is, he told us, a widespread view in the right-wing media that if they can sow doubt inside the government about the policies advanced by the Communist Party, then this would discredit the influence of the CP, tear apart the left, and allow the right to return to power for several electoral cycles. During Chile's constitutional council election in May 2023, the right wing [prevailed](#), but among the liberal and left parties, the Communist Party got the highest share of votes. That result and the key role that the communists play in the government of Boric, Carmona told us, is the reason why the right-wing media began this fierce campaign against the Communist Party.

The Impact of the Social Explosion

In 2019, [cascading protests](#) broke out all over Chile. At the heart of the protests was a general sense of social despair, Carmona told us, one that mostly wracked the middle class. It was, he said, "an accumulation of frustration" with a system of permanent

household debt being the only avenue to sustain a basic middle-class and lower-middle-class lifestyle. One of the key elements of this debt has been debt for education, which is why the [protests](#) demanded that the government find a way to lift this “invisible weight” from the shoulders of Chile’s youth. No government—not even the center-left governments of Michelle Bachelet (2014-2018) or Gabriel Boric (who came to power in 2022)—has been able to address this problem of educational debt. Proposals made to eradicate student loans are often tied to other issues—such as [tax reform](#)—and they scuttle any forward movement for debt relief. “If you want to solve in your lifetime the problem of your debt, you have to take another loan,” Carmona said. The crisis of finances in Chile does not yet impact the financial sector, but its cost debilitates the lives of millions of Chileans.

These protests, Carmona said, need to be understood clearly. They demonstrate that a large section of the Chilean population has an “implicit level of consciousness” about their situation. The unhappiness with the system has been demonstrated in a range of ways, from the demonstrations (which were significantly halted by the pandemic), from the election of Gabriel Boric in 2022, and from the demand—imposed by the street—for a new constitution. The public mood has remained frustrated with the existing debt system, but the political embodiment of this mood oscillated dramatically from support for the center-left Broad Front election campaign in 2022 to the [vote](#) for the right-wing Republican Party during the May 2023 campaign for the constitutional council.

The Attack on the Communists

The attack on the Communist Party in Chile is not new, as documented by Iván Ljubetic Vargas in *El Partido Comunista de Chile* (2014). Founded in 1912 as a worker’s party and renamed the Communist Party in 1922, the CP was first banned from 1927 to 1931, then again from 1948 to 1958. On September 22, 1973, 11 days after the coup, the military declared all Marxist parties to be illegal. The military assassinated six members of the CP’s central committee and disappeared 11 others in 1976.

The current attack on the CP builds on this long history of repression. The right wing, Carmona told us, wants to use this attack on the party not only to dispute the views of the party but also to isolate the party from other sectors with which the CP has built alliances. With the resumption of democracy in Chile, the Communist Party made the case for its legality with the slogan, “Chile needs a Communist Party.” Carmona told us that the CP might need to revive that campaign because it should not underestimate the attack against it. The right wing wants to deepen the neoliberal model in Chile, a model that the

communists are trying to undermine from within Boric's government. The party, Carmona said, faces two risks: "first, by not giving the attack enough importance, and second by believing that just because it is a campaign based on lies it is going to be ineffectual."

There is a social problem that Chile must confront. Only 30 percent of Chile's population was alive during the coup years, which means a majority might underestimate the danger of the right wing, which continues to defend the coup and its neoliberal policies. The overall media landscape, with its frivolous programs on television and in the right-wing newspapers, Carmona told us, is not serious about the challenges facing the country. The social movements and the unions, he said, are weakened, and often passive in their approach. Whether the people of Chile—along with the communists who have taken to the streets—will be able to overcome the deep legacies of the coup is not yet clear.