

NUPGE stands in solidarity with the people of Chile, calling the conflict a cautionary tale against income inequality, austerity, privatization and oppression.

The National Union of Public and General Employees (NUPGE) is deeply concerned about the ongoing violent repression by the Chilean government and military of the legitimate citizens' protests against decades of failed neoliberal policies and military repression. Chilean peoples are being killed and their human rights violated by the very government that is sworn to uphold these rights.



NUPGE is calling on the Canadian government and the international community to stand with the Chilean students, workers, activists, and all Chileans who are facing violent repression from their own government as they demand a fairer, freer, and more democratic future. Canada should immediately denounce the actions of the Chilean government, should review the Canada-Chile Free Trade Agreement, and condemn the Chilean government human rights violations at the United Nations.

The current conflict escalated dramatically when Chilean trade unions implemented a general strike to support student protests against public transit fare hikes. The reaction by Sebastián Piñera, the billionaire right-wing Chilean President, was to call a state of emergency, enforce a curfew, and unleash the country's military against its own citizens. 18 have so far been reported killed, including a 4-year-old child.

NUPGE stands in solidarity with our union brothers and sisters in Chile as they take this strong and principled stand against injustice and repression. We know that the call for a general strike is not made lightly, but it was a necessary step against the illegitimate and repressive actions of this government.

In 1973, the world stood by and allowed the US-backed military coup that ousted the democratically elected socialist government of Salvador Allende. Chile then became the darling of the neoliberal experiment, privatizing virtually all public services. Health care, education, public transit, electricity and more are fully or partially privatized in Chile. The country has even privatized drinking water. Global capital responded by investing heavily in Chile, and while the economy grew rapidly, income inequality rose to become the second-highest in the OECD. While the financial world applauded Chile's rise in GDP per capita, it never asked who was really benefiting from the expanding economy.

This massive income inequality is why ordinary people have found it impossible to absorb rapid increases in the cost of electricity and water and in the price of public transit. Cuts to pensions and increasing education costs have also compounded the injustice. Many Chileans are struggling to get by while the very wealthy few get even wealthier. A right-wing government acting for the elites and hiking the prices on essential services has led to the current uprising in Chile, but this is a cautionary tale of income inequality around the world.

Neighbouring Ecuador has seen mass protests and riots against the cancellation of fuel

subsidies and increased austerity by their right-wing government. Lebanon is also seeing riots over a tax on the WhatsApp platform. But whether it is protests against a WhatsApp tax, a subway fare hike, or cuts to fuel subsidies, the common link is populations fighting back against massive income inequality, privatization and austerity—and then repression follows when they protest. The Arab Spring was sparked by rising food costs, and we could now be entering a new wave of protests against rising austerity and income inequality.

Income inequality is increasing around the world. Repression is clearly not the answer to these protests. NUPGE is calling for action to end income inequality and to signal that the failed austerity and privatization agenda championed by right-wing governments must be rejected. Investing in public services that people need, including health care, public transit and education is an effective way to reduce income inequality, coupled with fair taxation, and reform of the financial system, which benefits only the wealthy. Canada should take a strong stand supporting Chilean workers and denouncing the actions of the Chilean government, but we should also extend our global support for human rights, strong public services, and equality.