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Santiago de Chile: Solidarity to the #ICEbreakers

From Those Denied Entry into the US (& Their Friends)

CrimethInc.

July 5, 2018

We've received the following open letter from Chile expressing support for the occupations of ICE offices and detention centers around the United States. It offers a useful perspective from outside the boundaries of the US.

Charting Transit despite the State

We stand in solidarity with comrades across the world who are bravely barricading and occupying ICE detention centers in the so-called United States, in cities like Tacoma, Portland, Atlanta, San Francisco, and New York. The politicians in their offices shuffle papers while the liberals hold signs nicely asking the government to stop ripping families apart and traumatizing children. By contrast, these partisans understand that the gravity of the issue at hand—human life and dignity—is not a matter of politics.

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For example, photos and videos from Atlanta spread across the world showed the #icebreakers blasting music while both the occupiers and those behind bars danced. Protesters taunted the police with donuts and repeatedly held their ground against police eviction. Rather than merely making visible that the voting public is unhappy with their elected officials' decisions, they took direct action against the state bureaucracies and their functionaries to create moments of life and joy that cut across the divide between citizen and non-citizen.

These occupations are occurring while politicians are preparing for election campaigns; many will undoubtedly promise a more humane yet still "sensible" immigration policy in order to get votes. We wish to share one thing that is clear throughout the West: Electoral politics is not a path to survival. As long as the United States has existed, its borders have cleaved families apart. As long as states have existed, their bounded territories have served to exclude and kill.

When the liberals tell us that the only solution is to vote for a progressive candidate, we say two things:

- 1.

While your international and immigration policies dictate whether we live or die, we are dying.

- 1.

While our friendships and families are being ripped apart, we can never vote.

Instead of living precariously at the whims of politicians and ebbs and flows of their legislation, we need to build the means to ensure our survival regardless of politics and law.

On September 11, 1973, the Chilean Military, backed by the CIA and US government, bombed El Palacio de la Moneda as General Augusto Pinochet overthrew the Unidad Popular (UP) government. Many UP party members and leftists managed to escape to the US or Europe where they lived in exile. However, those without the economic or social means to immigrate to the "First World" found

themselves in jails, torture chambers, or mass graves. While US policies overseas drive migration, US border policy serves to impede it, trapping people in war zones and dictatorships. The liberals around the world who expressed horror and demanded a return to democracy in Chile were blind to the array of non-democratic immigration policies that impacted the lives of Chileans before, during, and after the coup.

“Perhaps the Chilean exile that left the country with only what was necessary had privileges according to the political or cultural status they possessed when some of them could choose the embassy and destination that matched their dreams of picturesque European landscapes. Meanwhile, anonymous shoeless others landed where they were thrown: Mexico, Argentina, Cuba, or the distant Scandinavia, where they were coal cockroaches in the albino sky of the Vikings.”

-Pedro Lemebel. El exilio fru-frú (o “había una fonda en Montparnasse”) [The Fru-Fru Exile (or “There Was an Inn in Montparnasse)]

Now that we are in democracy “within what is possible” according to the former Chilean president Patricio Aylwin, the politicians and liberals exclaim: “To make a change, you should go out and vote!” How can we vote out the asshole working the visa desk at the local US Embassy? Did anyone actually vote in the jerk at the consulate who interviews foreigners for five minutes to decide if they are likely to overstay their visa for economic or familial reasons? The same official who has the power to deny your visa application, with no knowledge of your lives and dreams, for being a “would-be illegal”? For a government that claims to be “just, democratic, and transparent,” our treatment at the US embassy matches the treatment we receive at the most arbitrary of bureaucracies in

the “Third World.” Forgive us if we have trouble reconciling this fact with government calls for “Law and Order.”

In a global frame, what can democracy mean when we have no influence on the US government policies that affect us? Even as we write this, the Chilean militarized police are armed with drones, amphibian tanks, and tear gas supplied through US foreign aid to be used by commandos trained in Colombia, “El Comando Jungla,” to repress Mapuche land struggles. Mapuche immigrants in the US, like those from other parts of the world, were forced to leave their indigenous territories to escape poverty, starvation, and state repression. When deciding to flee to the US is a matter of life or death regardless of legality, the call for electing progressive candidates as a means to change immigration policy is a patronizing and exclusionary way to tell the rest of the world to put our lives in the hands of politicians.

As a result, while the call to simply #AbolishICE may seem like a radical move from within the state, if it goes no further, it is just a liberal invitation for US citizens to ignore the rest of the US state’s impact on the lives of those around the world.

To merely #AbolishICE is to shuffle around their roles and responsibilities to other agencies within the array of bureaucratic assemblages—embassies, armies, CIA agents—that exert the state’s force against those who lack US citizenship. These assemblages will continue to exist even if you elect a socialist to your local city council. They will continue to exist if your progressive mayor orders the police to refuse to detain new immigrants when a hundred detainees are still in their city’s jail. ICE has existed for less than 20 years, but the US government has worked much longer to intensify global human suffering through wars, coups, and trade policies. The US government has always detained and deported those who dare to immigrate on their own terms to a country where they believe they have a chance for survival. An #AbolishIce movement built on asking the state to abolish ICE serves to exclude non-citizens from building power.

A movement built on turning the direct action of non-US citizens and their friends—those who are barricading ICE facilities and taking direct action—into a spectacle to elect officials will only enable the politicians to win a game we could never play and will never win. We will lose the power we have to survive despite the state, while liberals and politicians buttress the power of the US government.

The only way to ensure our survival is to secure the conditions to meet our needs autonomously. That may mean crossing a border without a government’s permission. This is not a neoliberal call for transnational flows against the power of the state. Currently capitalism is only sustained by the political barriers that divide us. This is a war cry from our precaritized bodies.

The only actions that can insure our survival are those that break the division between citizen and non-citizen, the barrier of paternalism and exclusion. These actions acknowledge that our shared survival is predicated on building autonomy outside of the state and capital. This could mean barricading the entrance to an ICE facility, blocking a deportation bus, or hiding undocumented immigrants from the police instead of pretending that the state will protect them. This may also mean that, instead of hoping an humanitarian organization will care for undocumented immigrants, you go to the prison or detention center to build autonomous and powerful friendships with those incarcerated. Above all, this means building the infrastructure for our shared survival, knowing that state institutions and electoral politics have never ensured and will never ensure that we all live. All attempts at inclusion in electoral politics is built on the exclusion of others.

On either side of a border, whoever they vote for, we are all illegal.