**Headline:** A Communist Wins the Left Primary in Chile and Prepares to Battle the Right in the Presidential Election in November

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**[Article Body:]**

Jeanette Jara (born 1974) prevailed in the Chilean presidential primary of the four major left political forces held on 29 June 2025. With 60% of the vote, Jara defeated Carolina Toha of the Democratic Socialist Party (28%), Gonzalo Winter of the Frente Amplio or Broad Front (9%), and Jaime Mulet of the FRVS, a merger of the Greens and the Progressives (2%). In November, Jara will therefore lead the Unidad para Chile (Unity for Chile) coalition into the presidential elections where she will face the candidate of the right, who will be either Evelyn Matthei (born 1953) of the Independent Democratic Union (UDI) or José Antonio Kast (born 1966) of the Republican Party, or she will face both of them if they cannot agree to a single candidate. If both Matthei and Kast stay in the race, they will, of course, split the vote of the right and provide Jara with a historical opportunity to win the election as a Communist. This has not happened in Chile’s history. If Matthei and Kast decide to back one or the other and carry all the votes of the right, then it appears likely that the left will not win. But November is far away, and the jubilation of having Jara as the candidate of the Unidad para Chile slate is evident. The celebrations of 29 June carried deep into the night, with the flags of the various left groups flying high in the air.

Jara was a member of the government of Gabriel Boric, who took office in 2022. From March 2022, Jara served as Boric’s Minister of Labour and Social Security, leaving only in April of this year to be the Communist Party of Chile’s candidate in the presidential election. This was the first time a Communist was a minister in Chile since the military coup of Augusto Pinochet against the Popular Unity government of Salvador Allende (1970–1973); during Allende’s government, the Communist ministers were Orlando Millas (Finance) and Luis Figueroa Mazuela (Labour and Social Security).

Before the elections that put Boric into power, we had met with him, and he told us that his most important priority was pension reform. It was no surprise that he turned to Jara to run this reform for his government. She had worked as an Undersecretary of Social Development (MDS) from 2016 to 2018 in the government of the social democratic Michelle Bachelet (enormously popular in Chile for her time as president from 2006–2010 and 2014–2018, a confidant of Jara, and likely the next United Nations Secretary General). Reforms of pensions are very difficult, torn between the neoliberal commitments of financial institutions inside the government and the difficulties of budgetary calculations based on the low levels of revenue brought in by taxation. Jara’s attempt at pension reform had to be built through concessions and coalitions, which, of course, weakened their radical potential. But, even with all that, the pension reform increased employer contributions by a new 7% figure, sharpened the Universal Guaranteed Pension, provided substantial gender equity, and strengthened the regulations of the pension industry. Anything short of the elimination of private finance in pension schemes will not satisfy a Marxist, but Jara had to work in the conditions provided to her, which did not permit more than a few important reforms rather than anything more revolutionary.

When Jara’s victory in the primary was certain, her former boss, President Boric, congratulated her and said, ‘What lies ahead will not be easy, but Jeannette knows about tough battles. Now, let’s all work together for unity to rally the majority of our compatriots to continue building a fairer, safer, and happier country’. Boric also said that Jara would be a better president than him. The tough battle is guaranteed, but Boric is right: Jara knows about tough battles. Born in Conchalí, north of Santiago, to left-wing parents – her father Sergio Jara, an industrial mechanic and mother Jeannette Román, a homemaker with five kids – Jara joined the Juventudes Comunistas (Young Communists) at the age of fourteen, the earliest that one can do so. Married at 19, she was widowed at 21, which was a very big blow to this young woman. ‘It was a very long period of mourning’, Jara said. But it did not stop her. She became the president of the Student Federation at the University of Santiago (Feusach) in 1997 and led a series of student strikes against the presidency of Eduardo Frei (1994–2000). In 1999, Jara joined the Communist Party, and – when interviewed by its paper *El Siglo* a few years after – she said of her generation of Communists, ‘We are conservatives. We lack political audacity and instinct. We need to show that our opinions are diverse. On the left, no one should be deferred to simply for standing in front of a guanaco [a riot control vehicle]’.

Jara’s easy style – her casualness on Instagram, for instance – has earned her a dedicated following. While she made instant coffee in her kitchen and talked about the late Communist leader Gladys Marín, her opponent, Carolina Tohá, made Bolivian coffee in a French press and spoke about Trump’s tariffs. Kast’s father, Michael Kast Shindele, fled Germany in the 1950s to prevent being put through de-Nazification. He was a lieutenant in the Wehrmacht and a member of the Nazi Party. When Michael Kast came to Chile, he joined together with his family to become very rich through a sausage factory initially. His son, the politician, does not disavow his father, and indeed holds views that are comparable to the ideology that had gripped him.

Matthei is not as extreme as Kast and will position herself as a more liberal person and try to tar Jara with the negativity around Communism that exists in Chilean society. Like Kast, Matthei has a father who will pose his own challenges for his daughter. Fernando Matthei Aubel, the son of a German military officer who was trained by the US Air Force, returned to Chile after the 1973 coup to become a general. During the dictatorship, General Matthei is said to have led the programme for the testing of bacteriological weapons against political prisoners. His daughter, Evelyn, joined the military dictatorship government at its tail end to privatise the pension system. In 2024, The Economist said of her that she is the ‘woman who will lead Chile’s counterrevolution’. While Matthei tries to hide her extremism, she recently said that the deaths during the military dictatorship were inevitable.

So, the election may be between Jara, a hardworking Communist who wants to build a social pension system, and Matthei, who worked in a military dictatorship to privatise the pension system. If the choice were that simple, then there would be no real election. But in the months ahead, the media sphere will be muddied with half-truths and full lies. Jara’s first battle will be over perceptions: the media has already hit her hard for being a Communist; Jara will have to turn the corner on the anti-Communism in Chile, which was cultivated during the dictatorship.

If Jara wins, she will be the first Communist to win the presidency in Chile.