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The "fall" of the Longueira Law: apparent victory, intact structure



After more than a decade of protests by artisanal fishers, coastal organizations, and coastal communities, the infamous "Fisheries Law"—popularly known as the "Longueira Law"—is faltering. On June 17, 2025, the Chamber of Deputies approved a bill that would end the system of perpetual quota allocations to large fishing companies, opening the possibility of a more equitable distribution that would benefit the artisanal sector.

Progressive media outlets are celebrating this vote as a triumph for democracy, the rule of law, and organized citizen pressure. However, this celebration must be met with extreme caution and a critical eye: it is not enough to repeal a corrupt law if the material basis that sustains the capitalist extractive model of the sea is not modified. Because the problem is not just the Longueira Law. The problem is private ownership of marine resources, the concession system, market logic, and, ultimately, the capitalist appropriation of the ocean and its riches.

The Fisheries Law was enacted in 2012 under Sebastián Piñera's second government, promoted by the then Minister of Economy, Pablo Longueira. Its content was clear: fishing quotas were granted free of charge and in perpetuity to seven large fishing families (the so-called "economic groups of the sea").

In practice, this meant: the covert privatization of fishing resources; the conversion of fishing into a tradable commodity on the financial market; the systematic exclusion of artisanal fishermen and coastal communities; and the legalization of a capitalist monopoly over the sea, disguised as public policy.

As is typical in Chilean capitalism, this operation was carried out with institutionalized corruption: bought parliamentarians, bribes from companies like Corpesca (Angelini group), and a political elite functioning as an intermediary for capital.

The new bill passed in the House eliminates perpetual allocation of fishing quotas and proposes dividing them between the industrial and artisanal sectors. At first glance, this sounds like a fair redistribution. But let's look at it more closely: large fishing companies are not expropriated. They are given less control, but continue operating with the remaining quotas; the concession system remains unchanged; the sea continues to be treated as a resource to be leased, not as a common good; and private ownership of the quotas is not challenged. They are maintained as economic assets, not recovered for the people or the State.

In short: the fishing bourgeoisie loses a fingernail, but keeps the whole arm. The neoliberal model remains intact. What's being negotiated is the percentage of the spoils between capitalists and small producers, without addressing the fundamental fact that fishing, as a natural resource, should be collective and not commodified.

From 2012 onward, thousands of artisanal fishers mobilized, blockading ports, paralyzing fishing coves, and occupying Sernapesca offices. They denounced not only the law itself, but also the systemic theft of the sea. Their struggle has been criminalized, made invisible, and often co-opted by parliamentarians.

Today, faced with this supposed "victory," we must have political clarity: the struggle was not for factions, but for the complete recovery of the sea for coastal communities and Indigenous peoples. It is not about better managing an unjust system, but about radically transforming it.

We must remember that natural resources are not merely "resources" but means of production. The sea, with its fish, mollusks, and algae, is not just nature: it is a source of value, a territory of human labor, and a space of contention within the class struggle. The Longueira Law was a classic example of what Marx called "primitive accumulation": the dispossession of common goods to convert them into private capital. Its partial repeal does not reverse the process; it only redistributes its effects. Capital remains, extracting wealth, polluting ecosystems, outsourcing fishing vessels, and creating precarious working conditions for maritime workers.

As Rosa Luxemburg said, capitalism expands through the constant dispossession of non-capitalist territories. In Chile, that means oceans, glaciers, wetlands, mountains, Indigenous communities. Everything can be converted into capital... as long as we don't stop it.

The partial repeal of the Longueira Law is a sign that organized popular pressure can force the hand of political capital. But it also reminds us that the bourgeois state administers the concessions of capital, not the rights of the people.

For true maritime justice to exist, it is not enough to divide quotas. It is necessary to expropriate the seven maritime families. It is necessary to reclaim the sea as a common good, under popular control, with community management and territorial sovereignty.

The goal is not to reform the quota system, but to overthrow the capitalist regime of the sea.

Down with the Longueira Law, but not the system!



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