

Close to the bench

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The details of the perverse business involving Piñera came to public light thanks to Pandora's Papers.

Photo: File/RHC

By Guillermo Alvarado

In a vote described as historic, Chile's Chamber of Deputies approved the day before the constitutional accusation against President Sebastián Piñera, accused of obtaining personal benefits for himself and his family by taking advantage of the privileges granted to him by his position.

The session in the legislative body lasted 23 hours, 14 of which were spent by the deputy leader of the Socialist Party's bench, Jaime Naranjo, who presented the case before the plenary.

The long speech was intended to take the debate beyond midnight on Monday, when several legislators, whose votes were indispensable to reach the minimum required by law, were ending a quarantine by Covid-19.

Finally, in the early hours of Tuesday morning, the vote took place and 78 deputies voted in favor of the impeachment against Piñera, 67 were against and three chose to abstain.

There was jubilation in several sectors of Chilean society upon learning the result, but the case now passes to the Senate, where the government has a majority and it will be very difficult to achieve its approval, which would automatically lead to the president's dismissal for serious faults.

It is pointed out to the head of state that in 2010, nine months after taking office for the first time, his family sold to a close friend a project to build two mines and a port, for US\$152 million.

The transaction was made through a tax haven located in the British Virgin Islands and was agreed in three payments, with the controversial clause that the third payment would only be made if the site, located in northern Chile, was not declared a protected area as environmental organizations claimed.

The latter was never done, in fact, and the president's relatives received all their money as planned, despite multiple protests because it is a unique area in the world for its biodiversity.

Unfortunately for Piñera, the details of this perverse business deal came to public light thanks to the Pandora Papers, an investigation by an international consortium of journalists.

The scandal has already claimed its first victim, as it was one of the reasons why the official candidate for the presidency in the elections of November 21, Sebastián Sichel, fell sharply in the voting intentions.

It is very unlikely that the Senate will also condemn the ruler, because the right wing is not going to commit political suicide in the middle of the electoral stage, but the facts remain in history and show how for this social class laws and ethics do not matter when economic interests are at stake.

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