

The Cold War in Chile, 1945–81

After 1945, the period of the Cold War affected the entire world. The South American country of Chile, located in the southern cone of the Americas, provides an interesting study of how Chilean domestic and foreign policies between 1945 and 1981 reflected the global realignments of the Cold War world. The political parties, in a nation that prided itself on its democratic traditions, certainly reflected the bipolar context of this period. Elected governments from the right of the political spectrum represented the conservative oligarchies and co-opted the middle sectors of society, ignoring the working classes. However, the lower classes, sought inclusion and by the 1950s, social malaise was expressed in labor conflicts and strikes. By the presidential election of 1952, Chile had universal suffrage, as women had finally obtained the right to vote in 1949. This certainly helped to elect rightist Carlos Ibáñez to the presidency, claiming 47% of the popular vote. Despite not having a majority, following the precedent set by the Constitution of 1925, he had the mandate.

The new government had to contend with a rise in the cost of living and an annual inflation rate of 51%. Ibáñez had to deal with an enlarged public sector and political incumbents who were manifestly corrupt. The Chilean Constitution allowed the president the power to issue executive decrees and Ibáñez made use of this; however, in the years between 1953 and 1958, the political sphere became increasingly polarized. Part of Ibáñez's foreign policy involved borrowing from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), but this obliged the government to follow strict and unpopular economic austerity measures.

Beginning in 1957, the political parties of the left banded together in the Frente de Acción Popular (Popular Action Front, or FRAP). The government of Ibáñez reacted with harsh repression against communists. Cold War alignments were expressed in the news media, reflecting global political tensions. The left focused on conflicts as part of a historic struggle against systematic exploitation that had to be replaced by a new and more equitable system. The right focused on conflicts as an attack on democracy that had to be defended by upholding principles such as private property and anti-communist "Western" values.

Amidst this right-left polarization, the 1958 elections took place. The new president, the rightist Jorge Alessandri, obtained less than a third of the popular vote, but was confirmed by Congress because he had the highest percentage of the three candidates running. The other two candidates reflected the center and the left, showing how divided the country was. Alessandri was unable to work with a Congress that was politically against him; not even to deal with the devastating



Valdivia earthquake of 1960, the strongest ever recorded in the world. The left, encouraged by the recent Cuban Revolution in 1959, fueled protest and gained strength. Alessandri, a conservative, firmly committed to free enterprise and foreign investment, continued to enforce IMF measures to stop the inflation rate of 39% and stabilize the economy. In particular, the government invited an increase in US investment in copper mining and refining. Alessandri's foreign policy included acceptance of the US Alliance for Progress. Alessandri did not rule by decree like his predecessor, but his government was marked by bitter parliamentary debate over an agrarian reform bill in 1962, as well as National Health Service strikes in 1963, which continued to divide public opinion and political parties.

As an alternative to the sharp left–right divide, a centrist party, the Christian Democratic Party (*Partido Demócrata Cristiano*, or PDC) emerged as a strong reformist, but not socialist alternative. To make their point clear, the Party adopted the slogan, a “Revolution in Liberty.” The PDC received nearly half of its campaign funds for its candidate Eduardo Frei in the 1964 elections from US and European sources, who viewed the emergence of a non-socialist party with relief. In view of the growing popularity of the leftist coalition, even the rightist parties decided to support Frei.



Eduardo Frei (center), Chilean politician and the Christian Democrat candidate for president in 1964, holding two fingers in the air to remind voters that his name is number two on the ballot slip, Chile.

The highly charged and politicized 1964 election, in the aftermath of the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962, caused the right to focus the election in the stark terms of communism versus liberty and dictatorship versus democracy. Although Frei won 56% of the vote, he encountered the same difficulty as his predecessors: a lack of consensus in the Congress. Strikes continued to plague Chile, now compounded by the implementation of an agrarian reform. While it succeeded in ending the long-term conservative-agrarian hold on political power in Chile, the PDC did not redistribute sufficient land to small farmers.

Activity

The Christian Democratic Party (PDC)

Research the political platform of the Chilean Christian Democratic Party in 1964 to find out what a “Revolution in Liberty” meant. Was it truly revolutionary or just reformist?

Discussion point

Chilean historian Sofia Correa has written that Frei was the first candidate to reach out to young people and to women, and that these two sectors were playing an increasing role in Chilean politics, starting with the election of 1964.



Why would these two sectors be so concerned with political events at the time? What would have been their concerns?

Frei's term in government was plagued by miners' strikes and student demonstrations for educational reforms. Yet part of Frei's domestic policy included the encouragement of workers' unions, whose membership increased markedly even as the extreme right and left divide continued to grow, with the Christian Democrats in the middle. The left accused the PDC of slowing progress toward a more just Chile and of serving the interests of the upper classes. The right, on the contrary, saw the PDC as encouraging revolutionary changes that seemed in keeping with the left. Extreme parties were born on both sides: the Revolutionary Leftist Movement (the *Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionario*, or MIR), and the rightist National Party (*Partido Nacional*). Civilian-military relations became tense in 1969 due to low salaries and poor military equipment and armament. Frei's government attempted to improve this situation by providing upgrades. This was an important constitutional reform on the part of the Frei government as a concession to the young people that helped to elect him. After much debate, Congress agreed to lower the voting age from 21 to 18, which meant that by the presidential elections in 1970 there were nearly 1.5 million new voters. Women voters, who also provided support for Frei's government, were strongly encouraged to join 9,000 "Mothers Centers." Nearly half a million women did; they received work training and 70,000 sewing machines with easy credit, to start businesses.

Frei's foreign policy avoided direct confrontation with US hemispheric hegemony. There was internal political pressure to nationalize US-owned copper companies. Frei opted for a middle way, the "Chileanization" of the mines, and with the backing of Congress opted to buy part ownership of these companies and invest profits in improving processing plants. The results of this process were not as profitable as planned, as the US companies retained lucrative contracts. Still, Chile continued in the good graces of the hemispheric leanings in the Cold War, as decidedly pro-US, and was able to receive loans from the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank.

By the time of the presidential elections of 1970, Frei had been unable to fulfill all of his campaign promises. The PDC had tried, in a Cold War world, to solve deep-seated political and social issues by finding a middle position between capitalism and communism. It did not work. With the country deeply divided in three camps, the leader of the leftist coalition, Popular Unity (*Unidad Popular*, or UP), received the largest percentage: 36% of the popular vote in the 1970 elections. The traditional Congressional approval of the candidate with the largest share of the vote was bitterly debated this time. The centrist PDC was crucial in supporting the government of Salvador Allende, if he would guarantee respect for constitutional democratic process. US covert pressure to not confirm Allende was unsuccessful.

With Allende as president, the political climate in Chile became highly charged. The upper and middle classes demonstrated their fears of a leftist government with massive removal of capital, creating financial chaos. Some even opted for leaving the country immediately, closing factories and firing employees. Allende and his UP wanted to institute

Discussion point

Discuss the Frei government's views of gender roles when organizing Chilean women's associations in the late 1960s.

deep changes in the social, political and economic system of the country and build socialism in Chile. This included a People's Assembly, a replacement of capitalism by more state-owned enterprises in mining and other industries, banks, insurance and foreign commerce. But the years 1970 to 1973 were characterized by deep divisions in the six leftist parties that made up the UP on how and when to implement these radical changes. Although Allende preferred legal and constitutional means, the UP was anything but united and some advocated immediate revolution. The centrist PDC was split in factions and the rightist National Party warned of a socialist takeover. Even the Catholic Church was unable to call for more conciliatory language and debate, to avoid civil war.



President Salvador Allende waves to supporters in Santiago, Chile, a few days after his election on 24 October 1970. The car with Allende is escorted by General Augusto Pinochet.

Allende began to implement a domestic policy that enlarged government social services and the nationalization of key industries to the state, thereby alienating entrepreneurs. He continued the agrarian reform started by his PDC predecessor, Frei. Despite Congressional opposition and the US financial blockade of the Chilean economy, Allende followed through in nationalizing the copper mines and processing plants, as well as many banks and financial institutions. By 1971, however, the lack of coordination within the disparate factions of the UP was evident in the impact of agrarian reform policies, which seriously threatened the role of the private sector in agriculture. The expropriation of large landholdings created violent confrontations. Allende's foreign policy included reaching out to countries in the Soviet bloc, as well as inviting Fidel Castro to Chile. This was during the tense period in the Cold War after the Cuban revolutionary Che Guevara had been killed in Bolivia, in 1967, while exporting the communist revolution. The beginning of the 1970s saw an increasing role being played by Third World countries who challenged the predominance of the two superpowers. Allende also visited the Soviet Union, where he was warmly received. Allende's socialist government in Chile was becoming a focus for the bipolar conflict.

These external pressures were having a strong impact by the end of 1971. As currency reserves diminished and inflation soared, the US blockade was being increasingly felt as Chile was unable to get loans. Agrarian reform and industry expropriations reduced the availability of consumer goods as well as foodstuffs and a black market began to grow despite the government's attempt to fix prices. The opposition staged an increasing number of protest demonstrations against the UP government. The extreme left and the extreme right organized protest groups, who fought against each other in violent street demonstrations. Political polarization and extremism penetrated the entire Chilean society in the cities and in the countryside. It affected

Activity

Music and politics

Quilapayún

Listen to the Chilean left-leaning musical group Quilapayún. In their song "La Batea" (The Basin), they sing about the effect of the Allende election on the rich, as they are leaving the country by road to neighboring Argentina. They are referred to as *momios* or *momije* ("mummies") that cling to ancient, dried-out traditions.

Listen to leftist singer Víctor Jara's songs *Plegaria a un Labrador* ("Prayer for a peasant") and *El Arado* ("The Plow") in which he dignifies the downtrodden farm worker.

What emotions do these musicians try to evoke? Analyze the lyrics to understand the messages they conveyed to the young people during the period of the Allende government.

schoolchildren and university students, all workplaces and the media, touching every aspect of daily life.

Allende's domestic policies of salary increase and price fixing helped poorer Chileans in particular and brought short-term political benefits. The UP obtained 50% of the posts in the March 1971 municipal elections. With a view to obtain a Congressional majority, in 1972 Allende resorted to populist tactics, creating Neighborhood Supply and Price-control Committees (*Juntas de Abastecimiento y Control de Precios*, or JAP), to dole out basic foodstuffs. In October 1972, the dearth of supplies in the cities was further complicated by a truckers' strike, which was covertly financed by the United States.



President Salvador Allende meets with Soviet premier Alexei Kosygin, General Secretary of the Communist Party Leonid Brezhnev and Chief of State Nikolai Podgorny in Moscow during his visit to the Soviet Union on December 11, 1972.

Allende's control of his own coalition grew weaker, so that he began to distance himself from them. Even the PDC now became allied with the rightist National Party, presenting opposition candidates to the Congressional election in order to stop Allende's reforms. Like some of his predecessors, Allende resorted to decrees in order to pass laws. One particularly controversial reform, aimed at creating Unified National Schooling (the *Escuela Nacional Unificada*, or ENU), in January 1973, upset the country and its traditional divided education of private and public schools. The demonstrations, all over Chile, were so powerful and violent that the president had to declare a state of emergency in 20 provinces to keep the peace. The ENU did not go through. Even so, by the time the Congressional elections were held in March 1973, 54% of the Congress was pro-UP and 44% opposition. The opposition parties wanted to impeach Allende for violating the Constitution. The copper miners began a long strike for two months, thereby slowing production considerably. Extreme leftist groups continued to call out for revolution. In an effort to alleviate the strained civilian–military relations, Allende installed several officers from the armed forces in his cabinet. The political conflicts, however, did not lessen. The PDC and the National Party argued that Allende had contravened the legislative guidelines, as set out in the Constitution. The UP, especially its most radical sectors, like the MIR, insisted that the process of transferring private enterprises and large landholdings to the state could not be halted.

By August 1973, Allende's government had gone through ten cabinet changes in three years. The media, especially those groups representing the right, spoke increasingly of civil war. The commander-in-chief of the Chilean armed forces, General Prats, came under increasing pressure for his conciliatory stance. Finally, he resigned and General Augusto Pinochet became commander-in-chief.

On a daily basis, Chileans were finding it increasingly more difficult to buy household supplies. Chilean women, in particular, two-thirds of whom were housewives (not in other jobs) at the time, were

Activity

Film activity

Machuca (2004, Dir. Andrés Wood)

Watch the film *Machuca* about schoolchildren at a Catholic boys' school during the Allende years. How did the political situation affect the two friends and their families?

Activity

Research activity

US National Security Archives

Divide into groups to search the US National Security Archives for transcriptions of calls between Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and president Richard Nixon on the situation in Chile. These archives can be found online at http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nsa/the_archive.html.



What was the extent of US covert operations in Chile between 1970 and 1973?

incensed at not being able to provide for their families and staged an enormous street demonstration in downtown Santiago. This protest was strongly supported by the coalition of the PDC and the National Party, whose supporters were on the extreme-right, leading to violent confrontations and arrests. The most important newspaper in Chile, the conservative *El Mercurio*, also gave particular coverage to this event, as it was still unusual at this time for women to take an active role in politics.

On September 11, 1973, much to the shock of Chileans, a military coup led by General Pinochet took over the country. It was a bloody, violent end to the conflicted government of Salvador Allende, who shot himself as the presidential palace was being bombed and burned by the Chilean air force. Some Chileans celebrated, some mourned, but the internal political divisions remained and were now suppressed as the presidency was replaced by a military junta of the army, navy, air force and national police. Congress was dismissed and closed. The judiciary were in no position to defend Chileans due to the “state of siege” declared by the military, which suspended the rights of citizens, curtailing the freedom of the press, the right to assembly and so on. All political parties were prohibited, and elections were suspended

indefinitely. The supply of food improved, but Chileans now had to get used to curfews every night and censorship of the press, radio and television. Public offices and universities were purged of leftist functionaries and replaced by the military. The judiciary was also purged and many judges opted for silence or open support of the military government. Worse, government became a series of edicts and decrees for the control of the population. Leftists and those thought to be sympathizers of the Allende government were detained, often tortured and sometimes “disappeared.” The military organized systematic persecution of “subversives” it considered responsible for the political chaos of Allende’s three years in the government. The infamous National Intelligence Direction (the *Dirección de Inteligencia Nacional*, or DINA), also in covert operations with the Argentine and Brazilian military government, searched and detained political activists, murdering people as far away as Argentina, Italy or the US. The director and many officers involved in the DINA were graduates of the US counterinsurgency training School of the Americas at Fort Benning in Georgia.

Activity

Below is a photograph from the front page of *El Mercurio*, from September 6, 1973. Thousands of women congregated, beating pots and pans with wooden spoons or lids, to signify that they had no food to feed their families due to the ineptitude of Allende and his *Unidad Popular* (UP) government. The headline translates as “Women Reject the Government.” The two sub-titles say “Marxists attack the [female] demonstrators” and “50 injured in incidents.” Why would this female demonstration have been so shocking at the time? How is the right using gender roles to generate support?



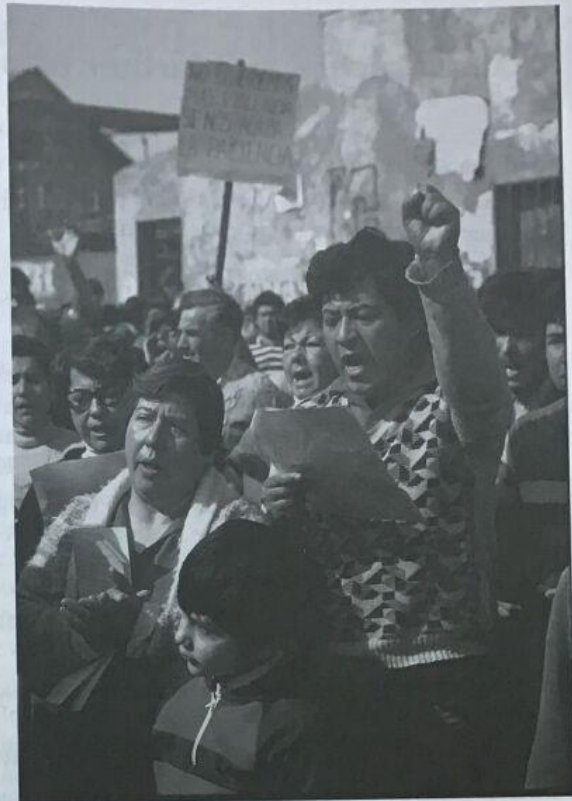
Activity

The School of the Americas

Research the formation and objectives of the School of the Americas at Fort Benning in Georgia, USA. What role did it play in the Cold War and Chile in particular?

By 1978, these human rights abuses became public with the discovery of bodies in the rural area of Lonquén. The murder of union leader Tucapel Jiménez in 1982 stunned the labor world and the murder of two teachers from the teachers union in 1985 greatly disturbed educators. These and the burning alive of two university students in 1986, were the most notorious cases of the more than 100,000 Chileans who were tortured or exiled, as well as the approximately 4,000 that “disappeared” when they were killed in military detention camps.

Pinochet acted harshly, yet sought legitimacy to his dictatorship by using *consultas* or plebiscites to document support in response to UN accusations of human rights abuses. In 1978, he claimed 70% support. Under pressure also from the Catholic Church, Pinochet eventually lifted the state of siege and the curfew and declared an amnesty, in an effort to improve his government’s reputation abroad. However, the detentions, tortures and disappearances continued. The Church responded by excommunicating the known perpetrators of these crimes. By 1980, the military dictatorship had elaborated a new Constitution, presented to Chileans in a plebiscite for their approval. This included a slow process for the end of military rule that was approved by the population. The new government would remain an authoritarian democracy guarding against what the military considered to be subversive influences. Dismay at the continuing human rights abuses and the changing circumstances of the Cold War eventually turned public opinion against the Pinochet government, which was voted out of office in 1989.



Anti-Pinochet, pro-human rights demonstration in a low-income neighborhood of Santiago, Chile.