



Parents and Children

by Neill McKee

Erasmó Escala looks like a typical street in the older part of Santiago, Chile. However, its buildings house a curious mixture of organizations — the Jesuits, the National Soccer Association, a bureau of the Chilean air force, a national trade union, and CIDE, the Centre for Educational Research and Development.

A private foundation, established in 1964, CIDE has managed to survive three political eras in Chile, and today it is operating a large number of educational programs throughout the country and in neighbouring Bolivia and Peru. It has survived because it stays out of politics and sticks to what it does best: educational research. CIDE is not an academic "ivory tower", however. The old mansion that houses its many small offices buzzes with activity. Its staff are involved in vocational training, modular mathematics for adults, mental health programs for the unemployed, youth leadership programs, an accounting course for small farmers, preschool programs — the list goes on.

There are three main dimensions to CIDE's work: research, development and diffusion. In the words of its director, Patricio Cariola, "We try to keep the cake and eat it too. We want to be good conceptually, intellectually and scientifically, and at the same time keep our feet very much in the development process of poor groups, campesinos, and (remain involved) in the whole Chilean education process."

Near the town of Osorno, 900 kilometres to the south of the sunny Santiago valley is the site of one of CIDE's most innovative programs. To get there is an overnight train ride into a different world.

When the sun shines on this land it looks almost like something out of a Bavarian fairy tale: rolling green hills with curious fences and vaguely familiar trees; Mapuche Indian people, making their way with wooden carts along gravel roads; lush pastures dotted with placid, holstein cattle. But when it rains, as it does much of the time in the

Osorno region, the land is transformed into a quagmire. The bright green shades of the hills fade and the peasants huddle in their isolated shacks for a little warmth.

Land of little comfort

The rain brings out the truth, for this is a land of little comfort. It is a region with a history of conflicts: wars with Argentina and class struggle. During Allende's time, some of the farms were seized by militants opposing the socialist leader's relatively moderate policies. After the coup, the people began to fight among themselves and they became badly disorganized. Unemployment is high in the region and "chicha", a crude local alcoholic drink, is the release mechanism. But alcoholism is only a symptom of much greater social illness. The gulf between the "haves" and the "have-nots" is so wide that you cannot see one side from the other. Besides, the rain brings a nearly permanent mist to this region.

In an area where the death rate is 135 for every thousand live births, one might expect that those children who do live would be nurtured and cherished. However, the problems are so many and the individual plots of land so small that children are often viewed as a debit, not a credit. Communication between the children and their parents is often only rudimentary, and reserved for the basics of living. There is little room for praise or encouragement, for teaching, or for showing affection. The children, who must often trek miles over muddy paths to attend school, are usually inadequately prepared. The drop-out rate is high. Ignorance and apathy might appear to have a good future here in the 10th region of Chile.

The great educator and activist, Paulo Freire, considers apathy to be the main enemy of education and development. "Apathy", he says, "is the internalization of the oppressor." Freire's influence in Latin American development is immeasurable. He regards education as a continu-