

labor movement constituted one of the main targets of the military regime. The Trade Union Central (CUT) was not only banned and its leaders exiled and persecuted; the policies of de-industrialization and free trade pursued by the economic team — the “Chicago Boys” — had the conscious effect of reducing the size and strength of the industrial labor force. Today there exists a great pool of unemployed that include not only skilled workers, but professionals and white collar *empleados*. The peasantry to a great extent has been displaced and forced to relocate in urban centers or *poblaciones*, joining ranks with the marginalized sectors and the squatters. The latter constitute a poor, subsistence sector but not an industrial proletariat. Mere survival has replaced political conviction within those sectors that lost the most under the regime’s socioeconomic and political policies. The breadth and number of grassroots organizations suggests, on the one hand, a retrenchment of the underprivileged into less “political” alternative forms of organization. On the other hand, it is precisely these sectors which constitute a potentially volatile opposition force.

In its efforts to restructure the economy, the military dismantled import-substitution industrialization and economic nationalism and sought to provide a new basis for capital accumulation. The reorganization that ensued led to several changes within the social structure itself. This included the emergence of new technocratic and commercial elites, a reduction of the industrial and working classes, the marginalization of the peasantry and the poor, and a related expansion of a non-traditional export-oriented farmer class. Moreover, as the state reduced its role in the economy, social welfare itself became tied to market forces. This meant in fact the end of Chile’s welfare state tradition.

Given the severity of the debt crises in the region and the continentalization of national security doctrines, the state itself, as in most other countries in the region, has become more transnationalized, and in essence more penetrated by foreign capital and military alignments. In substantially reducing its role in the economy and relying more on international forces, the Chilean state has internalized the policies of the International Monetary Fund and international lending institutions, including debt/equity swaps. On the military-strategic front, national self determination has been increasingly replaced by the most extreme notions of US continental security. And thus vis-à-vis external pressures, the Chilean state, as most peripheral states, has become paradoxically *both* repressive and weaker.

The military regime retains “close and enduring control over the transition process.” This means that the transition — if at all — will not essentially change the structure of authority or the foundations of society. This has little to do with a tacit agreement made within the regime, or with pressures from civil society. What is more important is the nature of the regime’s restructuring of Chilean politics and society over the last fifteen years, which sets limits to the kind of political order that may emerge in the post-Pinochet era. The system of correlation of social and

political forces — that is, the interplay between support and opposition within the polity — has been dramatically altered. The pluralistic stalemate of the past has given way to a new stalemate where the military retain a permanent veto power over society. It is no mere coincidence that Pinochet simultaneously reshuffled the high command within the regime and strengthened the intelligence network as he announced that preparations were being made for the plebiscite.

Future change difficult

This is not to say that decisions from above as to the timing and nature of transition, as contemporary transition theory seems to imply, take place exclusively in isolated quarters (i.e., a pact of elites). They are influenced by factors from below (i.e., popular movements) as well as by multiple and often contradictory international pressures. The perception within Chile regarding the severity of the crisis that preceded the 1973 coup, undoubtedly contributed to the regime’s longevity and the current level of support. Pinochet took every opportunity to stage public reminders of the fate that would have befallen Chilean society under Allende’s “Marxist-Leninist” program. And although the regime remains limited by its own discourse, the great majority of the opposition has recognized the importance of negotiating with the military, business and the US before any transition may be realized. It is quite likely that Pinochet will not hand power over to civilians that gracefully, even if it meant — as happened during the plebiscite campaign — becoming a civilian politician himself. The opposition, despite its primarily psychological victory, continues to be divided into a multiplicity of political organizations.

The next step in the process of “normalization” contemplated by the regime is a more competitive 2-round presidential election in 1989, where a candidate picked by the regime (Pinochet has announced that he will not run) would be confronted by a divided opposition. In this context, all evidence points towards a political scene where the best the opposition could hope for is a limited and meaningless democratic facade. Under this thin veneer, the authoritarian 1980 Constitution is to remain the unchangeable law of the land, its survivability being guaranteed by an autonomous military. The transition could be a lengthy and convoluted process such as the one following the defeat of the military in the constitutional referendum in Uruguay in 1980, culminating in a limited democratization in the 1985 elections. Fundamentally, it should not be forgotten that the Chilean military regime is more than Pinochet. It is an institutional arrangement tied by bureaucracy, class interests, complicity, ideology and external constituencies. The aging and discredited General could be replaced by an equally harsh, yet younger, general, or by a civilian technocrat, without basically altering the counterrevolutionary status quo.

The struggle for democracy in Chile has just begun. All signs are that it is going to be an uphill battle. □

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