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Anarchism in Chile

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bringing together anarchists and libertarian-leaning members of the former Popular Unity coalition. Anarchists were involved in struggles against the dictatorship in the 1980s. With the return of “democracy” in the 1990s, many anarchist groups formed, disappeared, and regrouped.

SEE ALSO: Allende Gossens, Salvador (1908–1973) ; Anarchism, Argentina ; Anarchosyndicalism ; Industrial Workers of the World (IWW).

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The first Chilean anarchists were mutualists. Francisco Bilbao and Santiago Arcos visited Paris during the revolution of 1848 and were influenced by the mutualist anarchism of Pierre Proudhon and the Christian socialism of Felicité de Lamennais. Returning to Chile in 1850, they formed La Sociedad de la Igualdad (Equality Society) (SI) Within a year the group was suppressed by the authorities, but not before the La Serena branch enrolled 100 artisans in the first functioning mutual aid society. Other mutualist societies were formed in the late 1850s, but it was not until 1862, with the founding of La Union in Santiago, that mutualism became influential among artisans. La Union branches spread to more than a dozen cities, providing medical services as well as a workshop for the unemployed.

The mutualists created an alternate culture, a microcosm of a workers’ republic. They believed capitalism could be transformed peacefully through the practical application of the principals of liberty, mutuality, solidarity, and self-education. In 1894 the Chilean mutualists formed the Federacion de Trabajadores de Chile (Workers Confederation) (FTCh), the first national federation. The confederation fought for social reform, as well as the usual activities of education and health insurance. By 1925 it had more than 100,000 members.

Revolutionary anarchism came to Chile in the 1890s through a Bakuninist Spaniard, Manuel Chinchilla. Carlos Jorquera, the first Chilean revolutionary anarchist, was influenced by Chinchilla and in 1892 they formed the Centro de Estudios Sociales, and published a paper, *El Oprimido*. Jorquera also organized a maritime union. Revolutionaries within the Mutualist Confederation produced the journal *El Grito del Pueblo* in 1896. Most of the early revolutionary anarchists were skilled workers who came out of the Mutualist Confederation.

From 1900 to 1910 anarchists were the best organized of all the radical groups, strong in printing, baking, shoe making, and the docks. The first Resistance Society was formed in 1898 by railway

workers, but they also founded a Resistance Society among carpenters, which played a major role in the Santiago General Strike of 1907. The Resistance Societies were anarchist-inspired and influenced by Argentine anarchism. They were decentralized, rotated leadership, and locally autonomous. The movement was concentrated in central Chile, chiefly among industrial workers, and by 1900 there were 30 societies. This mushroomed to 433 by 1910, with a total membership of 55,000.

The *mancomunales* (brotherhoods) developed from the mutualist movement and were simultaneously mutual aid societies and trade unions. First organized in 1900 in Iquique by anarchists, they soon had 6,000 members – the majority of the nitrate and maritime workers in the North, and all the major strikes in that region were organized by *mancomunales*. The movement favored direct action and a much greater level of organization and solidarity than the Resistance Societies. While the Resistance Societies were local, the Brotherhoods were organized on a territorial basis, uniting different trades, first on a city-wide, then a provincial, and finally at a national level. The *mancomunales* federated in 1904 as the Gran Mancomunal de Obreras, uniting 20,000 members. The movement almost died after the 1907 depression and military repression, the worst instance of which was the Santa Maria Massacre in Iquique, where 3,000 miners were killed by machine gun fire.

The Brotherhoods revived in 1916–18 and created the Federación de Obreros de Chile (Chilean Workers Federation) (FOCh). This organization was an umbrella group containing all tendencies – mutualist, populist, anarchist, and socialist – and was the first national labor federation. As militancy increased, the FOCh radicalized. In 1919 the union adopted anarchosyndicalist principles and a federal structure. Most trade unions remaining outside of FOCh in the period 1917–22 were also anarchosyndicalist. During this period and for several years after, anarchism was more influential among workers than Marxism. The syndicalist FOCh was short lived, however, and in a few years it was taken over by the communists.

Many young intellectuals were attracted to anarchism, especially after World War I. University and college students organized the Federación de Estudiantes de Chile (Federation of Chilean Students) (FECh) as an anarchist union. Some important anarchist leaders of the postwar period were Manuel Rojas, a novelist who was later in the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), and the writer Eugenio Gonzalez-Rojas. Pablo Neruda was close to the anarchists at this time as well.

The Chilean IWW was officially launched in 1919 at a national convention, and soon expanded to 19 cities. Total membership stood at about 10,000 at this period. In 1925 Colonel Carlos Ibanez took power in a coup, and in 1927 formally abolished the labor movement. Union offices were raided, the IWW and anarchist groups disbanded, and all their journals shut down. The anarchists and the IWW never fully recovered from the coup. Even though more influential than the communists, they had lost their leadership role among the workers.

In 1950 anarchists formed the Movement for Workers' Unity to combine all labor unions in one central body. Thus was born the Central Unitaria de Trabajadores (Chile's United Labor Center) (CUT) in 1953, uniting most of Chile's unions, including the CGT. The CUT executive had four anarchist members, and anarchists controlled the shoe workers, printers, and maritime unions. After the failure of the 1955 General Strike called by CUT, most anarchosyndicalists withdrew from the federation. By 1960 anarchists had little influence in the union movement.

During the Popular Unity government of President Salvador Allende, anarchists were too few to be of any great influence. Nonetheless, there were developments similar in spirit to anarchosyndicalism. These occurred spontaneously, such as the Cordones Industriales (a form of workers' councils), and the Comandos Comunales (self-governing neighborhoods). Six years after the 1973 coup, the libertarian left began to reorganize. An umbrella group, Socialist Ideas and Action (PAS), was formed,