

The Libertarian Movement in Chile

1840 – the Present

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Contents

INTRODUCTION	3
THE ORIGINS OF THE MUTUALIST MOVEMENT	3
THE EQUALITY SOCIETY	4
THE SI UNDER ATTACK	5
THE FIRST MUTUAL AID SOCIETIES	5
THE GROWTH OF MUTUALISM	6
MUTUALIST POPULISM	7
A TRAGIC INTERLUDE - BALMACEDA AND CIVIL WAR	8
NATIONAL FEDERATION	8
REVOLUTIONARY ANARCHISM	9
The Beginning Of Industrialization	9
OTHER TYPES OF ANARCHISM	11
THE RESISTANCE SOCIETIES	11
THE MANCOMUNALES	12
ANARCHIST STUDENTS AND TEACHERS	13
ANARCHO-SYNDICALISM	13
THE IWW	15
COMMUNISTS VS ANARCHISTS	15
REPRESSION AND THE COUP OF 1927	16
IBANEZ AND THE CORPORATE STATE	17
ANARCHISM AND CORPORATISM	17
THE DECLINE OF ANARCHO-SYNDICALISM	18
THE ALLENDE REGIME	20
AFTER THE GOLPE	21
THE RETURN OF DEMOCRACY	21
THE LESSONS OF CHILEAN ANARCHISM	22
1. The Failure of Chilean Syndicalism Points Out Anarcho-syndicalism's Defects	22
2. Mutualism and the Future of Libertarianism	23
BIBLIOGRAPHY	26

INTRODUCTION

The rise and fall of the libertarian movement in Chile is a fascinating story. There is more to the story than mere historical interest, however. Chile is a country on the brink of development and hence is closer to a European country than to a truly underdeveloped nation. Chile is as urban as any developed country and even in 1900 about 20% of the population lived in cities, around the same percentage as Canada at that time. Population growth is low and vital statistics are at the developed level. Women have a more equal status with men than in any other Latin American country.

Chile is one of the few countries where libertarian ideology had hegemony over the labor movement. The Chilean movement gave rise to an unprecedented level of popular unity, albeit for a brief moment, uniting the vast majority of the population against the elite. Chilean libertarianism was notable for its practicality, its populism, its unideological nature and its lack of violence. The movement was highly adaptable, constantly changing its methods and not getting bogged down in dogma. The Chilean movement also shows the contrary danger of being too "undogmatic", as many syndicalists became corporatists.

While the past cannot serve as a model for the present, the Chilean experiences can give us some ideas for building a libertarian movement. The level of popular unity they created is exactly what is needed to crush the Leviathan State that threatens to swallow us. The importance of adaptability and of not getting trapped in dogmas and worn out methods is certainly worth borrowing. In this nihilistic age, wallowing in government and media-induced ignorance, their emphasis upon education and ethics should be reconsidered. Chileans also built a large network of mutual aid societies, pointing out an alternative to the present bankrupt Welfare State.

THE ORIGINS OF THE MUTUALIST MOVEMENT

The first form that libertarianism took in Chile was mutualism. Prior to the victory of what the elite claimed was economic liberalism, Chilean artisans were organized into gremios or guilds. These workers' organizations were an important force in the independence struggle and were the most radical sector of the revolutionary movement. The new post-colonial government paid no attention to the workers' patriotism and disbanded the guilds. Thus the artisan's living standards went into steep decline and this period proved to be the most difficult stage in their history... *With independence nothing was gained by the artisans.*¹

The printers remained the most active of the trades and by 1845, some two decades after the banishing of the guilds, produced a newspaper, *El Artesano Opositor*, which criticized the conditions of the working population.

A year later an independent journal appeared called *El Pueblo*. Its motto was *What are the People? Nothing! What will they be? Everything!* *El Pueblo* was influenced by the revolutionary events in France and French libertarian thought, especially that of Proudhon and Lamennais. Proudhon's writings were popular in Chile as shown by contemporary booksellers catalogues. Even as early as the 1850's his writings were readily available in bookshops. (translations into Spanish occurred in the 1870's.) Lamennais' book, *Le Livre du Peuple* was translated and pub-

¹ Illanes 18,19

lished in Concepcion as early as 1843. In 1847 a Sociedad de Artisanos was founded in Santiago, but little is known about this organization.

El Pueblo attracted a coterie of young libertarian-oriented republican intellectuals. They were interested in the concept of voluntary association. The republicans felt liberty without equality was meaningless and the only genuine way to achieve an egalitarian society was to create democratic associations among the people. They also believed the artisans should be politically autonomous and attempted to break them away from the aristocratic parties such as the Liberals and Conservatives.

THE EQUALITY SOCIETY

In 1850 two men returned to Chile from a lengthy sojourn in France. Francisco Bilbao and Santiago Arcos had been present in Paris during the revolution of 1848 and had witnessed the role played by the artisans. They were familiar with the thoughts of Proudhon and had held discussions with Lamennais, becoming followers of the ex-priest. Bilbao *can be considered fundamentally libertarian*.² On April 10, 1850 Bilbao, Arcos, the writer Eusebio Lillo and a number of other radical republicans held a meeting with representatives of the shoemakers, hatters, musicians, and tailors. They formed La Sociedad de la Igualdad (Equality Society, or S.I.) with its journal, El Amigo del Pueblo.

The SI was devoted to the concept of "associationalism", the complete sovereignty of the people and universal fraternity. *They sought a project of moral, material and intellectual [development] for the artisans*.³ They promoted the right of the people to organize, something supposedly guaranteed by the Chilean Constitution but ignored by the elite. The SI called *for the creation of a real republic and the regeneration of Chile*,⁴ which was to happen through voluntary association. In October 1850 they started a school for artisans, with courses in reading, arithmetic, music, English, dance, and ancient and Chilean history. The SI can be considered the model, in both organizational structure and ideology, for the future mutual aid societies.

The educational and moral theme runs right through Chilean libertarianism from the Igualistas to the CGT of the 1930's. This was common to all anarchist workers' movements. As with the industrial revolution in Europe, industrialization in Chile was very destructive of the family and society. Peasant families are patriarchal. As long as people worked the land as a family unit and lived in village communities this did not have too many negative consequences. Proletarianization and urbanization changed this.

The man took his own wages, plus that of his wife and children and spent them as he saw fit. With no community to provide a positive influence and a myriad of big city vices to choose from, the man would often squander "his" money on drink or dice. Families already poor became even poorer because of this and domestic violence flourished.

Early industrialization created not so much a genuine working class but a lumpenproletariat with all the irresponsible, violent and bigoted attitudes of that group. Society cannot exist where the lumpenproletariat predominates, only a jungle whose single law is "might makes right". To

² Alba 88

³ op cit 30

⁴ ibid 34

have a society requires autonomy, solidarity and mutual aid, all of which require a sense of responsibility and democratic attitudes.

*Alcoholism, drug addiction and family instability [were] brought on by the peasants profound inability to adapt to urban life and work.*⁵ The lack of education had a negative effect upon the working population for it *broadens the range of salaries, undermines solidarity and makes the peasant-workers impervious to complex explanations*⁶ and therefore open to demagogues. The workers organizations sought to create working class citizens and the means to do this was to civilize them.

THE SI UNDER ATTACK

The Liberal Party, which had counted the artisans among its supporters, was not pleased with competition. They attempted to co-opt or destroy the SI. One way to cause harm was to accuse them of being communists.⁷ To this slander Francisco Bilbao replied, *...we are not communists and don't like communism, which we consider a false system...*⁸

Repression came soon. Police spies were used and thugs broke up meetings. The Church intervened and denounced the SI from the pulpit. At one Executive Committee meeting sixteen men armed with clubs and swords broke in and threatened to kill the members. But the Iguualistas were able to drive them off by defending themselves with ferocity. The attacks spread to the popular neighborhoods, where the SI had many supporters, but the people responded in kind. The government, frustrated in its endeavor to snuff out this spark of liberty, made it illegal to carry arms and thus disarmed the opposition. In spite of this repression, the SI had 3000 members in Santiago.

The violence of the authorities increased. Houses were ransacked by the military or gangs of government supporters. Francisco Bilbao was forced into hiding and many Iguualistas were arrested, imprisoned and tortured. On April 20 1851 the SI's last major demonstration in Santiago was violently crushed by the State. This event marked the death of the organization. It had been *a short but fecund life. The SI sowed in Chile the seeds of...mutual aid...*⁹ One member of the group, Pablo Munoz, had formed a branch of the Equality Society in the town of La Serena, where he enrolled more than 100 local artisans. This association was less of a political movement than the SI and more of a true mutual aid society. The La Serena society is the connecting link between the SI and the Sociedades Mutuales.

THE FIRST MUTUAL AID SOCIETIES

The repression of the Iguualistas was part of a larger civil war occurring in Chile at the time. The winner of this unequal contest was General Manuel Montt. Even though the artisans were defeated and the country in the hands of a dictator, mutual aid was not forgotten. In 1853 the printers, influenced by the Peruvian-born Mutualist, Victor Laynez, formed the first permanent

⁵ Alba 205

⁶ *ibid*

⁷ Another generation of elitists would accuse the mutualists of fascism!

⁸ Illanes 37

⁹ *ibid* 44

mutual aid society. Its major function was to provide medical services for the members. Two years later a similar organization was set up in Valparaíso.

The depression of 1858 led to more unrest, civil war and repression. The printers Mutual suffered but managed to survive. The artisans sided with the faction closest to their republican ideals and Montt was overthrown. Jose Joaquin Perez became president. Perez guaranteed the basic civil liberties written into the Chilean Constitution. From this point on the Mutuals begin to develop in earnest. It should be pointed out how important the rule of constitutional law was in the establishment of workers organizations such as mutuals, co-ops and trade unions. A people dependent upon the whims of a despot or brutal oligarchy never have the freedom and security to organize lasting, and therefore effective, associations.

The Union of Artisans was formed in 1862 in Santiago. This organization inspired development of societies in other parts of Chile. La Union was a general mutual for all artisans of whatever trade. It provided medical services and attempted to create a workshop for the unemployed. An important goal was education, and so the Escuela Benjamin Franklin was formed to provide learning for the artisans and their children. The choice of name is significant. Franklin was an artisan, an autodidact and espoused a republican doctrine emphasizing self-help - just like the Mutualistas.

By the early 1860's some 70 co-operatives, both consumer and producer had been launched, but they were not very successful.¹⁰ In 1863 the shoemakers and the tailors created their own mutuals. Valparaíso was not far behind getting its Sociedad de Artesanos de Copiapo in 1864 and in 1866-67 Talco, Chillan and several other towns set up their own organizations. Tailors and shoemakers organized worker-co-ops and were inspired by the utopian socialist Ramon Picarte.

Disputes involving politics and religion within the Talco Mutual gave rise to a statute that allowed any member to belong to any church or party and believe in whatever faith he wished, but the Society would not discuss or take sides on such matters. This concept was made universal among the mutuals. Dissention was avoided and the mutual could concentrate upon its true goal of aiding the membership.

THE GROWTH OF MUTUALISM

By 1870 there were 13 Mutuals¹¹ but economic depression caused much suffering among the artisans. The Mutuals were important in alleviating misery - as much as they could within their limited means. In spite of misfortune, support for Mutualism grew and more societies were formed by individual trades. Branches of La Union also spread to more than a dozen cities. As well as the usual educational, health and welfare functions, La Union created the Workers Philharmonic Society in 1876.

The Philharmonic held classes in music and dance, sponsored theatrical and musical events, recitals, poetry readings, chorals, and festivals for family members. Mutuals also formed societies against alcoholism and created their own pharmacies. Nor were mutual aid societies restricted to independent workers. Toward the end of the 19th Century mutuals of laborers and white collar workers were organized.

¹⁰ Alba 246

¹¹ Albert

The Mutuals created a kind of alternate culture or society. *The workers and artisans created their own world, a micro-world...Inside these societies they created a parallel republic...*¹² The thinking behind this micro-world was the idea that society could be transformed peacefully through a civilizing process which involved the application of principals of liberty, mutuality, solidarity, education and self-help.

In 1879 the Mutuals banded together and published El Taller (The Workshop) which became the voice of mutualism. By 1880 there were 39 mutual aid societies.¹³ Another paper, La Razon, (Reason) more educational in nature, appeared in 1884. Three years later, The Workers Society for Mutual Aid was formed in Valparaíso. This group is significant as it was the first mutual developed specifically for women.

Juana Roldan was the most influential of the women mutualist leaders. She was also director of the Filharmonica José Miguel Infante. Out of this society in 1888, developed the first true women's political group, the Women's Emancipation Society. Two years later Roldan founded the Fraternidad de ambos sexos dedicated to improving the situation of Chilean women, the advancement of education and hygiene. Roldan was also a militant in the populist Partido Democratia.

MUTUALIST POPULISM

Mutualism had become an important force in Chile and the Radical Party, representing the "left wing" of the ruling elite, tried to seize the leadership of the movement. The Radicals had a number of working class supporters and used them to re-establish the Equality Society. It was a "front group" and nothing like the libertarian society of Bilbao and Arcos. The problem for the Radicals was their worker members were not keen on becoming stooges.

The printers mutual became more militant during the 1880's, engaging in a kind of proto-anarcho-sindicalism. As a result, they had difficulty getting their journal, Al Gutenberg, published. The printers were forced to use the pseudo-SI as a publisher and encountered the working class Radicals. Cross-fertilization occurred, resulting in the Radicals leaving their party and uniting with the Mutualistas. This group was the core of the Partido Democratia (PD) formed in 1887. The party's first act was to organize support against the tariff on Argentinian beef which was hurting working people. The PD was the political voice of the workers' organizations and was more or less controlled by the Mutuals, in fact, *one faction of the PD...was composed of anarchists...*¹⁴ The PD *was a forerunner of populist politics.*¹⁵

The PD Platform included; political, social and economic emancipation of the people, independence of the municipalities and protection of industry. One statute was a foretaste of State capitalism. It demanded the supremacy of the State over all associations, State assistance for health care and the aged... The author of this clause, Malaquia Concha, was enamoured of Bismarckian socialism, having visited Germany, he felt what Chile needed was German social democracy. The state supremacy clause enraged the Mutualists resulting in much dissention. After much pressure from then workers organizations, the statute was dropped. Authoritarian elements remained in

¹² Illanes 81

¹³ Albert

¹⁴ Alba 46

¹⁵ Skidmore 120

the party, forming a social democratic current which split off to form the first effective State socialist party.

A TRAGIC INTERLUDE - BALMACEDA AND CIVIL WAR

Neither the PD nor the Mutualists were left in peace, for a civil war broke out in 1891, resulting in the deaths of 20,000 workers and repressive laws limiting the right to strike and to form associations. The dispute arose over a conflict between President Balmaceda, a progressive reformer, and the Chilean Congress dominated by reactionary landowners. Balmaceda had been a member of the radical Reform Club in 1868 and espoused many of the ideas dear to the hearts of the Mutualists. *He believed that liberty (was) sacred and necessary for all moral and intellectual growth of the individual*, was opposed to monopoly, in favor of freedom of work, self government and wanted to limit the authority of the state by decentralizing power and creating provincial autonomy.¹⁶

That a member of the elite like Balmaceda should have such ideas and attempt to act upon them, shows the extent to which radicalism had permeated Chilean society. The fact that he was defeated, (committing suicide) also shows the limited extent to which these ideas were accepted by the ruling class. The defeat of Balmaceda guaranteed a bleak future for the workers and Chile missed an opportunity to become a modern society.

The Mutuals managed to pull through this disaster and proved their worth, since they were the only force working to help the people in their plight.

Once again, inspite of violence and oppression, the movement grew. But this time there arose a strong tendency toward federation of the multitude of societies.

NATIONAL FEDERATION

Already in 1888 mutuals began to federate at the city and provincial levels. The call for federation was not altogether ideological. Wretched living conditions and low wages put a strain on the resources of the local mutuals. They needed to band together for financial reasons. This illustrated the contradiction of Mutualism. Most workers were too poor to help themselves very much, let alone reach the long-term goal of a mutualist republic. One means to overcome this deficiency was to force a wage rise so workers could pay for adequate services. This was the anarcho-syndicalist solution. The method proposed by the PD was to make the employer pay the workers' mutual fees. The authoritarian socialists wanted to strip the mutuals of their rights and turn social services over to a State bureaucracy. Luis Recabarren, chief spokesman for the authoritarians *...urged absolute opposition to anarchist initiatives...*¹⁷

On September 23, 1894 all the mutualist organizations in Chile sent delegates to Santiago where they formed the Workers Confederation which later became the Congreso Social Obrero, (CSO) Chile now had a national federation of mutual aid societies. By 1900 there were 240 Mutuals,¹⁸ the comparison with the 39 existing only 20 years previously, shows the spectacular growth

¹⁶ Balmaceda

¹⁷ Alba 46

¹⁸ Albert

of the movement. The Mutuals under the CSO did not organize just the usual activities of education and insurance but also fought for social laws and protested the cost of living. In 1925 the CSO and several smaller federations united to form the National Mutualist Confederation which had more than 100,000 members.

We leave the Mutuals at this point, (returning to them later on) not because they were no longer important or had been superceded. A new libertarian force on the historical scene. This was revolutionary anarchism, a movement more ideological, more forceful, a movement which emphasized direct action and the long-term goal -abolition of the State and capitalism - to a greater degree than mutualism. One should not, however, make the error of treating the development of the labor and popular movements in themes of "social evolution". Such evolutionism is favored by marxist-oriented historians who claim a progressive development from anti-diluvian mutualism, to primitive anarcho-syndicalism to finally (fanfare please!) modern trade unionism and the socialist state. This schema is little more than rationalization for their own politics.

Mutualism was not a "stage of history", but ideally suited the independent worker. Since artisans and tradesmen continued to be an important sector of Chilean population, mutualism persisted. And anarchism was not semi-proletarian primitivism, for *Chilean anarchists were workers and not artisans or semi-proletarians...*¹⁹ Syndicalism did not "evolve" out of existence, replaced by some "higher" form of trade union life. That the movement made errors goes without saying, but it was largely snuffed out by left and right-wing authoritarians.

REVOLUTIONARY ANARCHISM

The Beginning Of Industrialization

The early period of industrialization in Chile (1890-1910) saw a 50% growth in the labor force. While wages rose, so did inflation at an even greater rate, causing a drop in real wages and hence impoverishment. In the period 1911-25 workers spent 97% of their income on basic necessities.²⁰ Industrialization in Chile saw all the horrors associated with the Industrial Revolution in England such as slums, disease, a high mortality rate, prostitution, drunkenness and family break down.

This misery was coupled by a level of brutality on the part of the elite the British or American worker never experienced.²¹ A thin band of capitalism was being imposed (mostly by foreigners) upon a society which was essentially feudal in its attitudes. Capitalism requires the concept of citizenship - the free individual, maximizing his advantage in a rational exchange. Someone who is guaranteed security, life and property under a system of laws. This existed only in a very rudimentary form, if at all, in Chile. The elite did not regard workers and peasants as citizens but as "human cattle" and if these "cattle" started demanding rights, well, mow them down with a Hotchkiss gun!

At the very beginning of this era (1890) 100 nitrate workers in Iquique were shot by the army. Their "crime" was going on strike. The seamen's strike of 1903 saw at least 40 workers killed. During the "Red Week" of October 1905, a protest over inflation in Santiago, 200 people were shot by the troops. The worst example of this cruelty was the slaughter by machinegun of 2500 Iquique nitrate workers in 1907, known as the Santa Maria Massacre after the church yard where

¹⁹ DeShazo xxvi

²⁰ *ibid* 62

²¹ In Britain in 1819, 11 were killed at Peterloo.

the butchery took place. Given this catalogue of horrors, it is no wonder that many Chilean workers were attracted to a more militant form of libertarianism.

Earliest revolutionary anarchist influence came from Argentine radical literature. The first anarchist nucleus was organized by a Bakuninist Spaniard, Manuel Chinchilla. Carlos Jorquera, the first Chilean anarchist, was influenced by Chinchilla. These anarchists were associated with the Printers Union. In 1892 they formed the Centro de Estudios Sociales and a year later the first anarchist paper, *El Oprimido*. Jorquera formed the Maritime Union. The first attempted labor federation in Valparaíso, FUPTS, was lead by anarchists. Other anarchists who were within the CSO produced *El Grito del Pueblo* in 1896. One year later, there were more than 100 organized anarchists in Santiago and Valparaíso. Kropotkin's and Bakunin's writings began appearing in pamphlet form about this time.

While influences came from outside, Chilean anarchism was essentially indigenous and was not subject to the anti-immigrant hostility of the local population. Being indigenous it was pragmatic, not wasting energy in doctrinal disputes or suicidal adventures such as the soviets in Argentina or the Brazilian revolt of 1918. Chilean anarchists were therefore never as ideological as those in other Latin American countries and even though they suffered at the hand of the authorities, *...did not set themselves up for repression...*²²

Most of these early anarchists were young skilled workers who were mutualistas. They favored an earthy and violent rhetoric in their attacks upon the corruption and iniquities of Chilean society. As the Santiago weekly, *La Tromba* stated in 1898, *Nothing will be left of the political, economic and religious garbage of this sodomitic society...Everything will be destroyed*. Or, the same year in *El Rebelde*, *We wipe our arses on the paper with which you print your laws...*²³ For this last statement the authorities shut down the paper and jailed the editor. Two important anarchists of the formative period were Magno Espinoza of *Rebelde* and the trade unionist, Alejandro Escobar. In 1900 the theoretical journal, *El Acrata* appeared. (*Acrata* means "opposed to society".) The visit of Italian anarchist Pietro Gori in 1901 also contributed to the development of Chilean anarchism.

From 1900 to 1910 the anarchists were the best organized of all the radical groups. They were strong in such trades as printing, baking, shoemaking, and the port workers of Valparaíso. There were anarchist coal miners at Concepcion. Escobar founded the first important Resistance Society, the Carpenters Union, which played a major role in the Santiago General Strike of 1907. Anarchists were instrumental informing the Printers Federation in Santiago in 1902 which had 7000 members.²⁴ An early attempt at forming an anarcho-syndicalist federation occurred in 1906 with the formation of FTCh, the Workers Federation of Chile. Anarchists also led the Shoemakers Federation which helped organize FOCH, the first successful national federation.

With the disintegration of the resistance societies after 1904 the anarchist movement went into temporary decline. The Mancommunal movement was not specifically anarchist but some anarchists held important positions in it. After 1905 the general strike was generally accepted by the anarchists. The most important anarchist newspaper of the later period was *La Batalla* founded in 1913 and running until repressed in 1925.

²² DeShazo xxvii

²³ *ibid* 93

²⁴ Albert

Many young intellectuals became attracted to anarchism, especially after WW1. University and college students organized the Federation of Chilean Students (FECH) as an anarchist union. Some important anarchist leaders of the Post-War period were Manuel Rojas, a novelist who was later in the IWW, the writer, Eugenio Gonzales-Rojas, Juan Chamorro, sailor and IWW leader, and Augusto Pinto, head of the Shoeworkers Union.

OTHER TYPES OF ANARCHISM

- In 1904 Augusto D'Halmar formed Colonia Tolstoyana - a collective working of the land by peasants. The colony failed due to its impractical nature. A Tolstoyan colony existed in Santiago as well and published La Protesta Humana.
- The only anarchist assassination attempt was by a Spaniard, not a Chilean, against General Renard, responsible for the Santa Maria massacre.
- Anarchist Communist publications included La Accion Obrera in 1915 and La Defensa in 1916. The Shoemakers Union and the IWW opted for anarcho-communism in the 1920's, as did the CGT in 1932.
- Anarchists influenced the Union Feminina in 1922.
- Anarchists formed cultural clubs in the 1920's called Centros Libertarios.

THE RESISTANCE SOCIETIES

The Resistance Societies (RS) were inspired by anarchists and influenced by the Argentine movement. A polemic ensued between the Mutualistas and Resistencias. Mutualists excluded the RS from their ranks in their 1901 conference, yet Mutuals acted as resistance societies as well. The first RS was formed in 1898 by railway workers. Soon after groups formed among shoemakers, coal miners, printers, bakers and carpenters. Escobar and Espinoza were important in the development of RS. Societies were concentrated in Central Chile and found chiefly among industrial workers. By 1900 there were 30 of them. This number mushroomed to 433 by 1910, with a total membership of 55,000.²⁵ RS's were decentralized, rotated leadership and practised autonomy. Out of the RS came a series of periodicals; El Alba (for coal miners), El Obrero Libre and La Agitacion. During this period, and up to the 1920's, the workers struggled to reduce the work day to eight hours and fought against such abuses as the "company store" and the use of script for pay. They wanted a real cash wage that they could spend anywhere.

The first workers to win a strike were the printers. Strikes at this time were mini-civil wars since employers refused to bargain and could undermine strikes with strike-breakers and armed thugs. Workers broke machines and sometimes rioting and looting erupted. Labor laws had little effect and both workers and bosses preferred that the government keep out. Improvements in income or working conditions during this period tended to result from direct action at the workplace. Some strikes were successful and attempts to cut wages were beaten back.

²⁵ ibid

In 1890 sailors in Iquique went on strike, demanding payment of wages in silver, not worthless paper. The sailors strike sparked a wave of unrest involving the nitrate miners and workers further south. The sailors won the strike, but 100 nitrate workers were wounded by troops during a demonstration. Women in Valparaíso rioted over the high price of goods and 50 of them were killed by the military.²⁶

Labor unrest occurred throughout the next decade, reaching a peak in 1907, with a march of 30,000 workers and their families through the streets of Santiago. An attempted general strike was broken, putting a momentary stop to the revolt. The general strike failed because of a lack of coordination among the Resistance Societies. This error was rectified in the future. Compounding the difficulties for the strikers, was the depression of 1907 and the massacre in Iquique which, as one can well imagine, dampened any enthusiasm for militancy.

The period 1909-1914 saw the rebuilding of the Resistance Societies and continued growth of the Mutuales. The latter were not effected by the repression of 1907-08. Many workers retreated back to the Mutuales after the break up of their unions. But this retreat did not last, as union membership grew from 65,000 in 1909 to 90,000 in 1913.²⁷ Anarchist influence in Valparaíso and Santiago was greater than ever, and *the Anarchists, through their Resistance societies...[kept] labor unionism alive in Chile in 1905-1916.*²⁸

In spite of repression, by 1909 the workers were very active, with 29 strikes involving 200,000 workers.²⁹ Once again, the wave of militancy was only temporary. The depression which occurred immediately at the outbreak of WWI, caused hardship for the workers and therefore a loss of union strength. The anarchists changed direction and formed tenant unions to reduce rents. They did not succeed in this endeavor, but did *...form the basis for future tenant unions in the 1920's.*³⁰

THE MANCOMUNALES

The Mancomunales (Brotherhoods) came out of the mutualist movement and served both as mutual aid societies and trade unions. Their main function was defending the membership, but co-operatives were also launched. The Mancomunales were influenced by both the Resistencias and the Mutuales. Many of the latter became brotherhoods and the mancomunales always practised mutual aid. They emphasized improvement in working conditions and safety standards, education of members and opposition to alcohol, gambling and prostitution. The funds for these organizations were *...never fraudulently misused but spent on schools, libraries, newspapers and mutual aid during sickness.*³¹

The Brotherhoods federated. In 1904 the Gran Mancomunal de Obreras with 20,000 members, sections in 16 cities and 11 publications was formed at a meeting in Santiago. While the Resistance Societies were local, the brotherhoods were organized on a territorial basis, uniting different trades, first on a citywide, then provincial and finally national level. They were the *first true trade unions in Chile.*³²

²⁶ Alba 246

²⁷ DeShazo 130

²⁸ *ibid* 134

²⁹ Vitale 102

³⁰ DeShazo 134

³¹ Angel 21

³² Vitale 94

Mancomunales used direct action and allowed for a much greater level of organization and solidarity than the Resistance Societies. The first mancomunal was formed in 1900 at Iquique, through the efforts of anarchists, by port workers and soon had 6000 members - the majority of the nitrate and maritime workers in the North.³³ Their journals included *El Trabajo* of Iquique and *El Maritimo* of Antofagasta. The Iquique Mancomunal organized the Mutualist Party in 1900 and produced a paper, *El Obrero Mancomunal*. A strike by the Iquique brotherhood in 1902 shut the port for 60 days. The strikers were supported by the PD as well as other worker groups. All the major strikes in the North (Nitrate area) were due to the mancomunales.³⁴ Nevertheless, they almost died out after the 1907 depression and military repression. Political chicanery involving the Radical and Socialist Parties did not help. The brotherhoods revived in 1916-18 and were involved in creating the Chilean Workers Federation.

ANARCHIST STUDENTS AND TEACHERS

FECh, led mainly by anarchists and IWW, fought for reform of the university system - proposing autonomy of university, a university extension system and a revision of teaching methodology. A student strike was called to push for these reforms. It had much support until the government succeeded in dividing the ranks. FECh was seized by Communists in 1932 and the libertarian influence waned. The Teachers Association formed in 1922 was strongly mutualist and had anarchist and IWW influence, as did the Primary School Teachers Society founded in 1915. Like the student union, the teachers organizations ended up in Communist hands.

ANARCHO-SYNDICALISM

*Anarcho-syndicalists proved to be the most dynamic and successful element in the working class from 1902 to 1927.*³⁵

To divide the militant libertarians between "anarchists" and "anarcho-syndicalists" at this period is not particularly accurate. The early anarchist movement organized the first militant trade unions. Very few anarchists of the period prior to 1920 were anti-syndicalist, for hard-line anarcho-communists and individualists were few in number. However, prior to WWI the labor movement had been fragmented (in spite of anarchist attempts to the contrary) and only in 1919 do we see a mass syndicalist federation arising in Chile. Thus, we can characterize this latter period as a time of fully developed anarcho-syndicalism.

As with the *Mutuales* and mancomunales, syndicalist unions were not just about wages and working conditions, but also *emphasized leisure and cultural activities and perceived a glaring need for constructive entertainment.*³⁶ The anarcho-syndicalists put on a plethora of readings, concerts, dances, plays and sports events.

During the general strike in Valparaíso in 1913 a central command of all the various unions was formed. This strike was the most significant of this period and with its sense of organization was a foretaste of future anarcho-syndicalist methods. The railway workers organized the Grand

³³ Albert

³⁴ Angel 21

³⁵ DeShazo xxv

³⁶ *ibid* 79

Workers Federation in 1909 as a Mutual. Five years later, the mancomunales and resistance societies were smashed by the government and these groups were allowed to join the "Grand", which changed its name to Chilean Workers Federation. (FOCh) The union was an umbrella group containing all tendencies - mutualist, populist, anarchist and socialist, thus becoming the first true national labor federation. As militancy increased, the FOCH radicalized.

Luis Recabarren and other socialists in the PD hived off to form the Socialist Workers Party. From 1912 on the anarchists found themselves having in dispute with a strong Marxist tendency which tried to seize control of the workers' movement and channel it in the direction of State Capitalism. The Socialist's main area of labor activity was organizing within FOCh. They attacked mutualism as yellow and counter-revolutionary, and as the monkey stage of workers organization.³⁷ The Socialists succeeded in splitting FOCh into two factions, one devoted to direct action and the other to mutualism. There were at this time over 338 mutual societies with a total of 98,000 members. This was greater than the membership of the trade unions. Opposition to the mutualist movement divided the population and did much harm. *A division tore apart the popular movement and disoriented the working class...The loss is the lack of communication between the "traditional" and "moderate" with the popular movement, giving rise to grave consequences from the point of view of class autonomy and unity.*³⁸

The militant faction of FOCh, an alliance of anarcho-syndicalists and State socialists had the upper hand. In 1919 the union adopted anarcho-syndicalist principles and a regional federal structure. FOCh had about 60,000 members. But the syndicalist FOCH was short lived, for it was soon taken over by the Communists.

Most trade unions outside of FOCh in the period 1917-1922 were also anarcho-syndicalist. However, ideology was not considered as important as practical syndicalism. *Stability and success of the union were above ideological considerations.*³⁹ This practical syndicalism was also very militant. Between 1916 and 1921 there were 13 general strikes, 29 intersectoral strikes and 259 industry-wide strikes.⁴⁰ During this period and for several years after, *Anarchists enjoyed more prestige among workers in Santiago and Valparaíso than did the Marxists...*⁴¹ Numerous periodicals were founded to expound the libertarian philosophy. To name but a few, Verba Roja, Numen, Accion Directa, (The IWW journal) and Mar y Tierra.

The cost of living was a major issue. As a result, an unprecedented movement for popular unity arose, uniting anarchists, FOCh, Catholic unions, populists, socialists, the mutualist societies, professionals, students and the middle classes. Called the Asamblea Obrera de la Alimentacion (AOA) it marked the highest level of popular unity in Chilean history. The AOA demanded abolition of taxes and duties on food and formation of free farmers markets in the cities. Demonstrations attracted more than 100,000 in Santiago in 1918 and 50,000 in Valparaíso in 1919. The failed general strike by FOCh in Santiago undermined the AOA and the movement was unable to push through its reforms. The coalition rapidly fell apart. Chilean anarchists could never again organize such a vast coalition, for the Communist-induced sectarianism made such unity impossible.

³⁷ Illanes 141

³⁸ *ibid* 141, 144

³⁹ DeShazo 155

⁴⁰ Vitale 103

⁴¹ DeShazo 157

THE IWW

The Chilean IWW was first formed in Valparaíso in 1918 by dissatisfied anarchist dock workers. Members of the Marine Transport Workers Union of the American IWW encountered Chilean dock workers and sailors in the port city. Juan Chamorro was disappointed in FOCh, thought the IWW's unitary union superior to federalism and helped organize the new union centre. Branches were also developed in Iquique and Antofagasta. At a national convention in 1919, the Chilean IWW was officially launched and soon expanded to 19 cities. Total membership stood at about 10,000 at this period.⁴²

In 1920 the IWW led a three month long strike to protest the export of grain during a food shortage. The government repressed both the IWW and anarchists, going so far as to frame the Wobblies with a planted bomb. They failed to destroy the movement. The Chilean IWW joined the IWMA at its formation in 1922. Hot on the heels of the 1920 post-war depression the employers went on the offensive and from 1921 to 1923 were successful in beating back the unions. There was a massacre at San Gregorio in 4 Feb 1921 with 565 nitrate miners killed.⁴³ IWW members were not involved, but this gives an idea of the situation in which workers lived at the time.

Even though readily co-operating with the IWW, most anarchist unions did not join the organization out of fear of losing their autonomy. In 1924 the IWW adopted anarcho-communism and radically decentralized its structure. But this did not preserve the union. Stuck between the Communists and the anarchists, the IWW lost many members to the syndicalists except for those in San Antonio and Valparaíso. The Ibanez dictatorship helped destroy the IWW. The Wobblies revived briefly in 1942-45. One of the causes of the break up of the IWW was the dispute over regional (federal) vs. unitary union structure. The port workers, bakers and printers hived off forming a new organization called FORCh.

COMMUNISTS VS ANARCHISTS

In 1921 the Communists under Recabarren took over FOCh and a battle commenced between the libertarian and authoritarian wings of the labor movement. This struggle saw the Communist unions on one side, opposed to the IWW and Anarchists on the other. The Communists attacked and beat the anarchists at a rally in Valparaíso in 1923, an act typical of their methods. The CP press slandered anarchists and Wobblies as "police agents" and "fascists" - other normal tactic in their repertoire. This bullying was not an isolated incident, but part of a world-wide conspiracy to either seize or destroy democratic and libertarian trade unions. The FOCh became a tool of the CP and non-communist officials were purged. Many non-communist unions left and the federation was severely weakened.

Recabarren and his supporters broke popular unity no less than three times - first by splitting the Socialists from the Populists, the second by fragmenting the workers movement into mutualists and syndicalist militants, and the third by turning FOCh into a Communist front.

The CP forced "ideological fine tuning" upon the labor movement, which up to this time, had showed little inclination toward sectarian foolishness and inter-group violence. *Thus by 1924 Communists, Wobblies, Anarcho-syndicalists, Democrats and Catholics...had defined themselves ide-*

⁴² ibid 199

⁴³ Vitale 276

*ologically...and unification of the labor movement became impossible.*⁴⁴ Once again, CP manipulation was not just a Chilean phenomenon. Prior to Bolshevism, worker protest movements throughout the world, in spite of any differences they might have, saw themselves belonging to the same family. Workers would flow in and out of different organizations, or belong to several different ones. This pragmatism was replaced by abuse and hatred - the ultimate result of which, was the destruction of the labor movement.

REPRESSION AND THE COUP OF 1927

Alessandri gained the presidency in 1920 on a pseudo-populist reform platform, however, most of the desired changes did not materialize. The military revolted in January 1925, insisting the reforms take place. Its goal at this point, was co-opting rather than repressing labor. Alessandri resigned and fled the country. A junta of admirals and colonels ruled. A coup d'état by Colonels Marmaduke Grove and "Paco" Ibanez resulted in Alessandri being invited to govern once more. The number of strikes increased, reaching a peak in May. Most of these strikes were by anarchist unions and not FOCh.

Workers at the Marusia mine in March 1925, fearing slaughter by the army, defended themselves with rifles and dynamite, killing 36 soldiers.⁴⁵ This was one of the few times workers went on the offensive and were not simply victims of the State. Alessandri decided to put a halt to the strikes and on June 4th, 6-800 nitrate miners were gunned down by troops at La Coruna. The anarchist press was closed and mass arrests occurred in Iquique and other cities. Government repression brought the 1925 strike wave to an abrupt end. In September Alessandri resigned once more, leaving power in the hands of Ibanez who became a dictator. His rule was "legitimized" in 1927 through a presidential election.

The labor movement went into decline after the repression of 1925. But the government was not the sole cause of this. The economy was in depression and the unity of labor had been broken. Organized workers were split six ways - Communists vs. Anarchists, federalists vs. industrial unionists and mutualists vs. syndicalists. The Communists, for all their machinations, were in worse shape than the anarchists, as FOCh lost most of its support.

The government passed a social security law demanding obligatory payments to the state. The Mutuels to become active, joining hands with the syndicalists in an attempt to defeat the legislation. The campaign failed since the CP-dominated FOCh refused to support the General Strike of February 20 1926 called against the institution of government social security.

A new central, the Regional Workers Federation (FORCh), formed in 1926 composed of anarcho-syndicalist unions and IWW dissidents. The union united both the regional and industrial union concepts. FORCh didn't have long to organize. On Feb 23 1927 Colonel Ibanez formally abolished the labor movement and union offices were raided, anarchist groups disbanded and all their journals shut down.

⁴⁴ DeShazo 207

⁴⁵ Vitale 286

IBANEZ AND THE CORPORATE STATE

The generally accepted view is the decline of the anarchist movement was a result of the repression of the Ibanez regime. But labor had suffered far worse before and come out stronger than ever. The decentralized nature of Chilean labor made it difficult to destroy. It had been beaten down and revived again in 1907, 1914, 1920 and 1925. All-in-all, 978 people were arrested and interned by Ibanez and only 12% of these were anarchists, the largest group being Communists. Nor were there any massacres. During the dictatorship, the anarchist printers and stevedore unions functioned and anarchists marched openly during the Mayday demonstration of 1928. Strikes were organized and the periodical *Rebelion* appeared. Something else was responsible for the defeat, *for the effects of the persecution were of secondary importance in comparison with the consequences of the government's social policies.*⁴⁶ Many anarchists were co-opted by corporatism and the movement divided and weakened.

Ibanez was a "Paco", (a rude term for a member of the Carabineros or State Police) and since pacos came from humble backgrounds, he had some sympathy for the workers. But this sympathy took the form of corporatism rather than anarcho-syndicalism. Ibanez and his fellow officers were not conservatives who wished a return to feudal labor relations, but wanted a corporate state to provide improvements for the workers and also integrate the unions into the state structure. They, like Juan Peron, were fascists in the genuine sense of the word.

As a first step toward creating a corporate state, Ibanez decreed a series of social laws, legislation which had been talked about for years, but never acted upon due to opposition by the oligarchy. He then called an election and the workers overwhelmingly supported him. (Winning 74% of the vote.) The landslide victory is understandable given this was the first time a government had ever done anything substantial to help the working class. The new state also created so-called legal unions. The laws under which these unions were to be obliged to operate made many anarchist unions illegal. (One of the restrictions being that unions had to be strictly anti-ideological) This measure was to be the undoing of the anarcho-syndicalist movement.

ANARCHISM AND CORPORATISM

Two main tendencies existed within anarcho-syndicalism. One of these was revolutionary syndicalism, the other was "sindicalismo puro" or the gremialista (guild) tendency. However, the distinctions were not cut and dried. *Sindicalismo puro* sought immediate improvements in wages and working conditions and was not concerned with revolution or final goals. This group maximized the anti-ideological and anti-political attitudes found generally within Chilean syndicalism, rejecting ideology and politics largely out of fear of breaking workers' unity. Ibanez was well aware of the differences between the puros and the revolutionaries and took advantage of these differences.

However, syndicalist activities, regardless of stated ideology, involved immediate improvements of the workers' situation and *did not justify the existence of a revolutionary principle within the unions.*⁴⁷ The revolution was therefore something for the future, not now, and this resulted in an apolitical attitude and a concentration on the day-to-day. The revolutionary and

⁴⁶ Flores 144

⁴⁷ *ibid* 98

non-revolutionary anarchists often ended up sounding and acting exactly the same. Furthermore, ideologically well-versed revolutionary anarchists were few in number and a general vagueness of principles existed within the labor movement. Thus, anarchist unions were reduced to organizations fighting for better conditions and for many militants the "final goal" was reduced to the formation of a pure, powerful, democratic and unified trade union movement, or the revolution was reduced to internal life of the union itself.⁴⁸

Before Ibanez, all improvements in working conditions came through strikes. Anarchists were opposed to the legislative process and this reflected the reality of the time, for the government only oppressed the workers. However, the Ibanez social laws changed this. For the *puros* the new laws were seen as an effective tool to help fight the capitalists, but they did not accept the "harmony of interests" ideology of corporatism. While few anarchists, if any, went over to corporatism, they were willing to accept what they thought were its benefits. The anarcho-syndicalist idea of an economy controlled by trade unions also had superficial similarities to corporatism, enough to confuse many workers.

Thus, the largest section of the anarcho-syndicalist movement, the *puros*, were swept up into the "legal union" structure. The *puros* did not seem think this was a break with past ideology and *in the majority of cases, we see a coherence in the actions and words before and after the appearance of the Ibanez reforms.*⁴⁹

Not only the union movement was effected by corporatism. It caused disputes within the Mutualist movement as well. The directorate of the Mutualist Confederation wanted the membership to demonstrate support for Ibanez in 1927. Many members were opposed, for corporatism was a danger to the mutualist movement, taking away the reason for its existence. A pure mutualista slate fought in the Confederation election to "save the movement from politics." The slate won the election, but then turned around and supported Ibanez also.

THE DECLINE OF ANARCHO-SYNDICALISM

The anarchists never fully recovered from Ibanez and his corporate state. Even though they re-grouped in 1931-32 to form a new syndicalist federation, and were still more powerful than the Communists, they had lost their leadership role. The largest union centre was that of the legal unions, the National Confederation of Legal Unions, organized in 1932 out of two different legal union federations. The *Legales* outnumbered the revolutionary anarchists more than five to one. The Socialist Party soon came to dominate the legal unions, as many of the Socialist militants were themselves former *puro* anarcho-syndicalists.

In 1931 the General Labor Confederation (CGT) was formed, uniting the IWW remnants with FORCh and several other anarcho-syndicalist unions. Rather than based upon the IWW industrial union concept, the CGT adopted the regionalism of the Argentine anarcho-syndicalist centre, FORA. The new federation had 25,000 members including some of the most skilled and highly paid workers in Chile.⁵⁰ The 35 different unions included the Carpenters, Electricians, and Printers. The CGT's journal was *La Protesta*, which became the most important libertarian newspaper in Chile. The Communists tried to revive FOCh but weren't as successful as the anarchists were

⁴⁸ *ibid* 101

⁴⁹ *ibid* 99

⁵⁰ Angel 26

with the CGT. By 1936 the CGT still had 15,000 members with federations in 10 cities and affiliates in four others.⁵¹ They had a number of successes in reducing the work week and raising salaries. Several other anarchist unions remained independent of the CGT, such as the Plasters Union who had their own newspaper - published until 1955.

In 1936 the Communist, Socialist, independent, legal and CGT unions met to form a new federation. The CGT refused to join. Not out of fear of Communist domination, but opposition to the "legal unions". The CP, Radicals and Socialists supported the legal unions and so the largest group of organized workers ended up in the pocket of the political parties and not as allies of the syndicalists.

By 1946 the CGT was a mere shell of its former self. Part of this decline was due to the fact the CGT suffered more repression than any other union. Many of the poor who supported its campaigns against taxes, high rent and inflation were drawn to the Popular Front victories in government and abandoned the anarchists. The absorption by the parties of the "legal unions" also undermined them. In its 1931 congress the CGT voted in favor of libertarian communism as the final goal of the movement. They proposed a more ideological approach at the very moment when the dominant tendency within Chilean anarcho-syndicalism was in the opposite direction.

Virtually all of Chile's labor unions came together in 1953 and formed the United Labor Centre (CUT). This time the CGT joined. The CUT executive in 1953 had four anarchist members, Ramon Dominguez, Hector Duran, Ernesto Miranda and Celio Poblete. Within the new federation, the anarchists controlled the Shoemakers, Printers and Maritime workers unions. Although a minority, they had an important role to play, *during the early years of...CUT the principle opposition to the Communists came from the anarcho-syndicalists.*⁵² CUT was dominated by the Communists in alliance with the heretofore anti-communist Socialists.

With the new level of labor unity giving them confidence, workers became restive. Tension mounted as strikes and demonstrations became common. "Paco" Ibanez was president again, this time by election and not force of arms. Remembering the repression of 25 years previously, workers readied themselves to revolt. In July 1956 the membership forced CUT to proclaim a general strike which shut down the entire country for two days. But the Communist and Socialist majority soon agreed to end the strike, even though Ibanez had talked of handing the government over to CUT. Another general strike was called in 1957 but workers no longer trusted CUT and the strike failed to gain momentum.

After this failure most anarcho-syndicalists withdrew from CUT and many of those remaining tended to boycott union elections. *By 1960 anarchist influence in the Chilean workers movement became minimal.*⁵³ Anarchists who had been in CUT formed the CNT in 1960 and joined ICFTU and ORIT, but Victor Alba writing in 1968 stated that *...its development has been slow...*⁵⁴

One of the anarchists that stayed in CUT was Ernesto Miranda, leader of the Shoe Workers Union, who joined Clotario Blest's (radical Christian president of CUT) Movimiento de Fuerza Revolucionario, (MFR) a group which attempted to unite the far-left, anti-electoral forces in 1961. In 1965 this group became the MIR and Miranda was one of its leaders. Two years later, when MIR was taken over by a group of young militants favoring armed struggle, Miranda (and Blest) withdrew.

⁵¹ Greenfield

⁵² Alexander 98

⁵³ Albert

⁵⁴ Alba 253

Miranda was also a member of Blest's Frente Revolucionario de Accion Sindical which ran unsuccessfully in the 1972 CUT elections.

	1953	1957	1959	1962
anarchists	7.9 %	2.2	2.0	2.0
radicals	6.3 %	9.0	4.1	6.2
trotskyists	0.7 %	1.3	1.1	0.8
Christ. Demo.	6.3 %	14.7	14.6	17.9

THE POLITICAL ALLEGIANCE OF C.U.T. DELEGATES^a

^a Angel 218

At the formation of CUT in 1953 the anarchists were more influential than the Radical Party, which had a long tradition of working class support and the Christian Democrats who were to have a significant following among workers. This shows that even at this late date, anarchism was still a minority movement but not yet totally marginalized. (The group "anarchists" is listed in 1968 as having 1.8% of CUT delegates but the MIR, an ML group is thrown in among them.)

THE ALLENDE REGIME

By the time the Popular Unity government of Salvador Allende was elected in 1970, the labour and popular movements were dominated by the Marxist-Leninist parties. The only serious opposition to Leninism came from the moderate left - the social democratic faction within the Socialist party, the Radical and Christian Democratic parties. The anarchists were too marginalized to promote an alternative to State Capitalism. Nonetheless, there were developments similar in spirit to the old anarcho-syndicalist movement. These occurred spontaneously. In October of 1972 a more or less general strike of employers, the "Bosses Strike" occurred against the Popular Unity government. Workers responded by occupying factories and organizing production on their own. In order to co-ordinate distribution of products and to defend themselves against attack, workers organized Cordones industriales. In the countryside the council movement or Consejos, similar in function to the Cordones was organized.

The poblaciones (poor working class neighborhoods) saw the creation of comandos comunales which by-passed the inefficient government organizations called JAPS. Here were proclaimed the existence of "self-governing neighborhoods" *and for the first time, people who had previously been excluded from participation in social life were able to make decisions concerning the basic realities of their daily lives.*⁵⁵ MIR tried dominating them, so the comandos were not free of politicians.

During the coup the areas where the cordones and comandos operated were singled out for attack by the military. They were also the areas where the greatest resistance occurred. The largest number of victims came from the poblaciones. Ironically, had a successful Chilean revolution occurred these very same people might well have become the first victims of the "proletarian dictatorship" - like the anarchist sailors at Kronstadt or the Anarchists in the Cuban Revolution.

⁵⁵ Point Blank

AFTER THE GOLPE

The libertarian left began to reorganize in 1979, some six years after the military take-over. An umbrella group, Socialist Ideas and Action (PAS) was *formed uniting long time anarchist militants [and] libertarian socialists...independents in the Unidad Popular coalition*. These latter were former members of the left-wing split-off from Christian Democracy, MAPU. In July 1982, PAS held a national conference in Santiago and produced a Declaration of Principles. This stated that the group wished for *a new social order based on the free federation of the people for mutual aid and co-operation in the production of social wealth*. They also sought a further development of neighborhood autonomy and *immediate recallability* for union officials. PAS, at this time had to work as an underground organization.

In a document released in November of 1982, PAS wrote that the Pinochet regime was most likely to restore democracy in the face of growing unrest rather than risk a social explosion. They also felt that the reestablishment of democracy would in itself led to an explosion as the movement re-emerges into the open *as the flame hits the air*.⁵⁶

THE RETURN OF DEMOCRACY

The re-establishment of parliamentary democracy did not lead to a social explosion, in fact the opposite occurred. This is understandable. Chileans By 1989, Chileans had gone through some 20 years of violent upheaval and only wanted social peace and normalization. Nonetheless, anarchist groups continue to produce propaganda and to participate actively in social struggles. El Acrata was re-established in 1994 by the KAS group in Santiago. Like its predecessor of 1900, it concentrates on the more theoretical aspects of anarchism. Syndicalism is favored and among other things, the group has been active in protesting insanitary conditions in maximum security prisons. (However, at the time of writing this article I was not able to contact either El Acrata or KAS, so it is possible the group has dissolved)

The Sociedades Mutuales still function, and in a society where the Welfare State is practically non-existent, mutual aid plays a much greater role than elsewhere.

Co-operatives, both agricultural and consumer, are found in Chile, although they do not have the same level of economic influence that similar movements have in Western Europe or Canada.

There are other libertarian-oriented developments. Left-wing Christians and ex-Marxist-leninists who rejected the vanguard party formed local "base committees" working in the poblaciones. They function as mutual aid societies and centres to organize local issues. Free market libertarianism is of growing interest among a sector of the professional middle class, in part a result of the successful market-oriented economic policies of the Pinochet and succeeding democratic governments. The Green Movement out-distanced the Communist Party in the last presidential elections. Most of these environmentalists may be authoritarian, as is the case elsewhere, but a decentralist, local-control faction also exists. One example of this is a group which encourages intensive gardening in the poblaciones, both as good environmentalism and to improve the diet of poor Chileans.

⁵⁶ Re-emergence NMG

THE LESSONS OF CHILEAN ANARCHISM

1. The Failure of Chilean Syndicalism Points Out Anarcho-syndicalism's Defects

Chilean anarcho-syndicalism was afflicted by a problem that no other anarcho-syndicalist grouping, nor any other revolutionary movement for that matter, has ever been able to overcome. This is the contrast between day-to-day "bread and butter" struggles and the final goal of revolution and the ideal social system. Social democracy tried minimum and maximum programs, only to end up dedicated to the former. Lenin thought he found the key in the pure revolutionary party, but such parties still had to relate to the demands of non-revolutionary front groups and trade unions, not to mention suffering from the conservative effects of internal bureaucratization. Thus, Leninists too, inevitably slide into reformism. In the real world that lies outside the fantasy-world of the system-builders, to remain a pure and unsullied revolutionary is to condemn one's group to the life of a tiny, ineffective sect, unable to intervene in the popular struggle.

The contrast between the present and the future goal causes great stress within any supposedly revolutionary mass movement, continually giving rise to factions that are either purely reformist or ultra-revolutionary. Such internal conflicts undermine the effectiveness of an organization. As the pressure of daily reality makes itself felt, more and more of the membership of a revolutionary organization abandon revolutionary politics. Those who are ideologically committed to revolution turn their ideology into a Sunday faith, and the rest of the time behave no different from the so-called (and despised) reformists.

The revolutionary is faced with an impossible task, a sort of political squaring of the circle, for what s/he is trying to do, is be two places at the same time, the wicked Here and Now and the distant Future Paradise. All the shouting of traitor, sell-out, agent-of the bourgeoisie, petit-bourgeois mentality etc, can not hide the fact that what the revolutionary desires is simply impossible.

The revolutionary has committed an error - a form of reification common to intellectuals. The revolution is a myth. The total and complete overturning of society in one sudden blow has never happened and never will happen. The model upon which revolutionary ideology was based, the French Revolution, at one point attempted to "storm the heavens", but in the end was little more than a series of reforms made by force of arms.

Revolutionaries have adopted a secularized version of a literal interpretation of the Second Coming of Christ. This is a deeply-rooted archetype within Western society, but revolutionaries are the very sort of people who reduce everything to social structures and are therefore unaware of the unconscious workings of the mind. They are people who look to external forces for all explanations and are do not heed the wise words of Socrates, "Know Thyself!"

The split between present and future is also a split between end and means. Since the end is so wonderful almost any means seems viable to reach it. Hence we have an Orwellian world where democracy will come through dictatorship, peace through violence, liberty through statism. What is not understood is that the end is contained within the means and if we apply the correct means on a daily basis in our "bread and butter" reality, life may some day come to approximate the mythical final goal. In other words, the revolution is now, not in the future. The final goal, which even Communists claim to believe in, is a society that maximizes liberty. Not the liberty of atoms, not the liberty of the jungle, which is no liberty at all, but a liberty

that comes with solidarity and mutual aid. The means then, is the same as the end - liberty and reciprocity will, in the end, give rise to a society where liberty and reciprocity predominate.

Few anarcho-syndicalists, then or now, would disagree, these are aspects of the ideology. But the problem is, they are merely aspects and can be brushed aside by seemingly more pressing issues. For example, the need to preserve the union, or winning a strike. In terms of ideology, the natural tendency for revolutionary syndicalism is to put class struggle first. All people, not just syndicalists or revolutionaries, will find a hundred excuses as to why we must give up our liberty, (just this once, mind you!) because of some important cause. Hence, an anarchist joining the Communists becomes understandable. (After all the Bolsheviks are successfully defeating the wicked capitalists!) So too support for the Ibanez reforms, or the Welfare State. (After all these reforms are helping the workers!) Freedom? Well, Sorry that'll have to wait. No one for whom liberty is the priority could make such errors.

The stresses within Chilean syndicalism (and syndicalist movements in other countries) in the 1920's indicated that the movement was somewhat ill-adapted to the contemporary reality. Not only in the revolution vs. reformism aspect discussed above. Its theory was rooted in an other era, a time of primitive industrialization with an elite dominated by a feudal culture.

By the 1920's, even in Chile to an extent, the period of primitive industrialization was terminating and the economy was moving toward what Gramsci called "Fordism". An expanding "middle class" of better paid workers began to buy consumer goods. This group would grow in size and influence to become the largest sector of the population. The workers, their unions and mutual aid societies were a force to be reckoned with, a force now courted by politicians. Everyone in society, except a minority of feudalists, preached the virtues of Modernity, Progress, and Economic Development. (The dispute that arose was over how this development would occur, not whether it should occur.)⁵⁷

Astute European revolutionaries such as Antonio Gramsci and Alphonse Merrheim understood that capitalist society was changing and sought, in their different ways, to adapt working class politics to these changes. However, the majority of syndicalists went along blithely as though it was still 1906. This could not disguise the frustrations which arose within the unions. Communism and corporatism proved to be the political ideologies that would attract the dissatisfied syndicalists, and with the exception of the French CGT, which ultimately failed, there was no serious attempt to modernize anarcho-syndicalism.

That's basically where the syndicalist remnants and revolutionary anarchists find themselves today. A turn-of-the-century world where all social problems are reduced to the iniquities of capitalism and little awareness exists of the complexity of post-modern society. A simple black and white world of rich capitalists and poor workers, evil right-wingers and good revolutionaries. Where the contemporary world does intervene, it takes the form of ideologies such as feminism and ecologism tacked on the end of syndicalist ideology. The work of building a contemporary anarcho-syndicalism remains to be done.

2. Mutualism and the Future of Libertarianism

When visiting the city of Chillan recently, I happened to wander into the local La Union mutualist centre. It had been founded in 1869, but the large three story building must have been

⁵⁷ There were four fundamental models for development, fascism, stalinism, social democracy and pragmatic liberalism.

built in the 1950's. A glass display case in the foyer held information about the latest meetings and events. People bustled in and out of offices and inside an immense meeting hall scores of children were rehearsing a Christmas pageant.

The Mutualist Movement makes an interesting comparison to the revolutionary anarchist movement. While the mass revolutionary unions are long gone, mutualism is alive and well. Nor are benefit societies the only form that mutual aid takes. I also visited the Capel distillery, the largest manufacturer of pisco. (a kind of grappa, the highest quality of which is like brandy) The young woman who led us through the factory told us that Capel was a co-operative, owned by thousands of small farm co-operatives. I also saw housing co-operatives under construction as well as consumer and credit co-ops.

Mutualism has survived for over 140 years, having gone through at least three economic depressions, a civil war, corporatism, stalinist hegemony over the workers movement and the 1973 golpe. The reasons for the success of this movement need investigating. One reason is that it is practical. Trade unions are also practical, but are still future oriented, the worker must struggle now and at some later date his pay might be higher. That which is won now, can also be lost later either through inflation or a repressive government. A purist revolutionary sect has no practical basis whatever. The mutualist group gives immediate and lasting results. People remain because of the benefits they receive by belonging.

Political groups, (and most especially revolutionary groups,) are ideologically inclined. They preach an ideology that only a minority is interested in. The ideological emphasis leads to disputes and sectarianism, splits develop and the organization is weakened by schisms. The anti-clerical and atheist tendencies of the revolutionaries limits their appeal to the religious. Mutuals try at all times to be above religious and political disputes, concentrating on the task at hand. Concentrating on what everyone can agree on, regardless of belief. In this manner mutualists unite the broadest number of people and not suffer from destructive in-fighting. Mutualism does have an ideology, but one that is inclusive not exclusive.

Few people, except for the most hide-bound of feudal oligarchs, could find much wrong with the doctrines and practices of the mutualists. For Christians, there was the emphasis on morality and mutual aid which seemed a way of putting Christ's teachings into practice. Businessmen were pleased by the emphasis on education and self-help. Civil libertarians could look to the emphasis on civil and democratic rights. Classical liberals saw the hostility toward statism.

Mutualism was not threatening, which explains how it survived the anti-red hysteria during the Pinochet coup, during which left-wing unions and organizations were crushed, their members arrested, and in many cases tortured or killed. The mutualist movement never called for expropriation of property, or the seizure of state power, nor did it preach hatred against the rich or sneer at the so-called petite bourgeois. Mutualism never directly challenged existing property relations and therefore property owners both large and small, were never frightened by it.

To be unthreatening is not something positive in the eyes of the revolutionary. To them, it meant mutualism was useless as a tool for emancipating the workers and indeed, in spreading social peace, was a reactionary force. True, there are times when force and threats are unavoidably necessary. Also mutualism did have its limitations, which are discussed below, and sometime even being peaceful can be threatening to the established order, as for example, the Civil Rights Movement and the Segregationists. But this does not mean it is a virtue to threaten. Those who laud a threatening stance have a primitive sense of psychology.

Create a climate of fear and people will begin to hate the people they fear. When you hate someone you dehumanize them and turn them into objects. It then becomes relatively easy to justify killing them.⁵⁸ For the weak to go out of their way to threaten the strong is also suicidal. The mutualists were using what Tolstoy called "non-resistance to evil". One's weakness is used to an advantage. The artisans were very numerous yet poor and powerless. Liberalism, as an ideology, but not necessarily as a practice, was becoming dominant in Chile. The mutualists were able to use their numbers and the liberal ideology to an advantage. They were not threatening, so they were allowed to organize. In organizing they became a force to be reckoned with. They forced liberalism to make its democratic and republican rhetoric more of a reality and in doing so they were able to carve out a space for themselves within society.

While mutualism did not challenge property relations directly, it did so indirectly. Workers banded together for health insurance, consumer and credit co-ops, for housing and co-operative workshops. Some of activities competed with capitalist business, and there were attempts to limit mutualism, but without any lasting success. Halting the growth of mutualism through force, legislation, or chicanery conflicted with liberalism's central tenants; free competition in a free market, the right of property and freedom of association. Mutualism put the reactionary capitalists over a barrel of their own making.

However, no country in the world has more than 10% of its economy in mutualist and co-operative ventures. Not a great deal of progress in 150 years, a critic might say. Yet, when compared with the alternatives, mutualism does not look like such a failure. What have the expropriators, the revolutionaries, accomplished during this time but totalitarian regimes and mountains of corpses? What has social democracy done, other than create massive government bureaucracies which stifle autonomy and solidarity? Mutualism was only one current among the workers. What if the energy that was sunk into revolutionary utopias and statist reformism had been put into mutualism?

Mutualism does have limitations, as mentioned earlier. When the vast majority of the working population live at subsistence level or lower, it is difficult to pay the association's fees, let alone invest money in a co-operative. Hence, mutualism tends to be limited to better-off artisans and skilled workers. In order to remedy this defect, workers formed unions to drive up their wages and populist mutualists suggested that the state should pay the fees of the poor through general tax revenue. But with a country whose per capita GNP is, say, \$500 a year, people are going to be poor even if you took all the wealth of the rich minority. What is needed is rapid economic growth combined with social legislation and trade unions wage pressure. Present day Chile is therefore better prepared for mutualism than 100 years ago, since the country is many times richer. The same is true of the fully developed economies.

Another problem with mutualism is its tendency to become conservative and to concentrate only upon the immediate tasks at hand. Expanding the movement, let alone building a mutualist society, becomes forgotten. We see this in the developed world with the co-operative movement, where the notion of the "co-operative commonwealth", if it exists at all, has become a Sunday faith. While practicality is a good thing, too much of it is not. Utopianism should be avoided, but a strong desire to change society is definitely needed. The problem of conservatism, so similar

⁵⁸ The pre-modern attitude was that rebelling workers were a kind of diseased animal life and that it was necessary to shoot them.

to the contradiction facing anarcho-syndicalism, has never been successfully overcome by any mutualist movement. Perhaps it cannot be resolved.

In spite of these problems, mutualism could have a bright future. In the developed world the limits of social democratic corporatism have been reached, pushing state capitalism into crisis. Yet, society still wants and needs health care, education and social services. There is full agreement on this, no matter what left-wing propaganda would have us believe. Where disagreement lies is how these services are to be provided. The "right" argues in favor of the private sector coupled with state subsidies for the poor, while the "left" favors the state capitalist status quo. The only satisfactory solution to this political conflict and to the crisis of state capitalism is to adopt mutualism.

Almost anyone in the rich countries who works can afford to pay the costs to mutual aid societies for health care, unemployment insurance etc. Those who are too poor could have the government pay their fees, as implied by the contemporary "right". Since these societies are "non-profit", and depend upon much volunteer labor, premiums would be cheaper than private capitalist organizations. People would be less likely to abuse a system they owned and controlled, as compared to the present callous state bureaucracies. Doctors would be employees rather than being paid on a per-visit basis and health care costs would decline. The present 40-50% of the economy that is comprised of government social services and pension funds would end up owned and controlled by ordinary people and economic democracy would finally flourish.

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