

THE RISE OF THE UNION BETWEEN THEORY AND PRAXIS: CHILEAN COMMUNISM IN THE COLD WAR (1934-1990)

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Lenin always thought that language was closely linked to content and criticized the language of those who avoid clear definitions and prefer vague, incomprehensible, and fallacious phrases. About this manner of speaking and writing, Lenin said: “They don’t use simple words, only complicated ones [...]. And with this monstrous language, without providing new information, without new examples, without much effort, drill trite socialist ideas, coated in vulgar terms of their own intent”.¹

The language of an anti-systemic left emerged in Chile in the last decades of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth century.² Chile, since its

¹ A. Olivares, “El lenguaje dentro del Partido”, *Principios*, 139 (October-December 1970): 92. Unless stated otherwise, all translations in this essay are mine.

² On the 1973 coup, see Paul E. Sigmund, *The Overthrow of Allende and the Politics of Chile, 1964-1973* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1977); Joan E. Garcés, *Allende y la experiencia chilena: las armas de la política* (Santiago: BAT, 1991 [original 1976]); Ian Roxborough, Philip J O’Brien, and Jacqueline Roddick, *Chile: the State and Revolution* (New York: New York MacMillan, 1977); Arturo Valenzuela, *El quiebre de la democracia en Chile* (Santiago: UDP, 2013); Tomás Moulián, *La forja de ilusiones: el Sistema de partidos, 1932-1973* (Santiago: Universidad Arcis, FLACSO, 1993); *La unidad Popular treinta años después*, ed. by Hugo Fazio Vengoa and Rodrigo Baño Ahumada (Santiago: LOM, 2003). For the insertion of Chilean politics in the Cold War, see Tanya Harmer, *El gobierno de Allende y la Guerra Fría Interamericana* (Santiago: UDP, 2013); *Chile y la Guerra Fría Global*, ed. by Tanya Harmer and Alfredo

birth as a nation, followed larger world political trends.³ In a way, in Chile there were communism and anti-communism before the Russian Revolution. In the years prior to 1914, a revolutionary or, rather, an anti-systemic language developed along with a counterrevolutionary one. On 4 June 1912, Luis Emilio Recabarren founded the Workers' Socialist Party. Recabarren visited Russia after the Bolshevik Revolution and, upon his return to Chile, transformed the party into the Communist Party on 2 January 1922 – the date the Communists considered the official birth of their party until the end of the Cold War. Shortly after its founding, the Chilean Communist Party (PCCh) would join and faithfully follow the directions of the Komintern.⁴ Simultaneously, it had deep roots in and had to act upon the Chilean reality. The PCCh pursued a revolutionary goal in a political system in which institutionalization had preceded mobilization.⁵ After a few upswings, the party became thoroughly stalinized by the end of the 1920s. It survived persecutions – not too violent – and after 1932 it was firmly established in the Chilean political system.⁶ The PCCh would remain in that political system with the exception of the period between 1948 and 1958, when it was banned.⁷ Its faith in the Soviet model as the grand communist paradigm would not weaken until the advent of Perestroika in the late 1980s.⁸

Riquelme Segovia (Santiago: Ril, Instituto de Historia Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, 2014); Kristian Gustafson, *Hostile Intent: U. S. Covert Operations in Chile, 1964-1974* (Washington DC: Potomac Books, 2007); Alfredo Joignant and Patricio Navia Lucero (compiladores), *Ecos mundiales del Golpe de Estado. Escritos sobre el 11 de septiembre de 1973* (Santiago: UDP, 2013).

³ Joaquín Fernandois, *Mundo y fin de mundo. Chile y la política mundial 1900-2004* (Santiago: Ediciones Universidad Católica, 2004), 16.

⁴ Sergio Grez Toso, *Historia del comunismo chileno. La era de Recabarren (1912-1924)* (Santiago: LOM, 2011).

⁵ Joaquín Fernandois, *La revolución inconclusa. La izquierda chilena y el gobierno de la Unidad Popular* (Santiago: CEP, 2013), 1-40; J. Samuel Valenzuela, *Democratización vía reforma: la expansión del sufragio en Chile* (Buenos Aires: Ides, 1995).

⁶ Gonzalo Vial Correa, *Historia de Chile (1981-1973)*, vol. IV, *La dictadura de Ibáñez (1925-1931)* (Santiago: Editorial Fundación, 1996); Jorge Rojas Flores, *La dictadura de Ibáñez y los sindicatos (1927-1931)* (Santiago: DIBAM, 1993).

⁷ Andrew Barnard, “El Partido Comunista de Chile y las políticas del tercer período, 1931-1934”, *1912-2012. El Siglo de los comunistas chilenos*, ed. by Olga Uliánova, Manuel Loyola Tapia, and Rolando Álvarez Vallejos (Santiago: IDEA, 2012), 128; Olga Uliánova, “El Partido Comunista chileno durante la dictadura de Carlos Ibáñez (1927-1931)”, *Boletín de la Academia Chilena de la Historia*, 111 (2002): 385-436.

⁸ Olga Uliánova, “El PC chileno durante la dictadura de Ibáñez (1927-1931): Primera clandestinidad y ‘Bolchevización’ estaliniana”, *Chile en los archivos soviéticos 1922-1991*, tomo 1, *Komintern y Chile 1922-1931*, ed. by Olga Uliánova and Alfredo Riquelme (Santiago: DIBAM, 2005), 215-258.

Even though the PCCh had a clear international orientation, it was rooted in Chilean politics and society and its language, as all orthodoxies, allowed for some practical accommodations. In any case, the party always found in Moscow-oriented communism a means of self-explanation and a vital breath that kept alive the hope of a radiant and infallible future.⁹ Before the Cold War, this adherence to Moscow allowed the party to assume the positions of the “Third Period”, the popular fronts – and help elect a left-wing president in 1938 through its alliance with bourgeois parties – and promote the “National Union” strategy during World War II after stoically and obediently accepting the Nazi-Soviet Pact.¹⁰ Representative of this attitude are the editorial words of the party’s magazine in July 1941:

Principios (magazine) will strive to raise the ideological, political, and theoretical level of the working class and the popular masses, will help them employ all the rich teachings and experiences of the international workers’ revolutionary movement and, above all, those of the country of triumphant socialism, the Soviet Union. It will help them apply these experiences in their own struggle, for their best success. *Principios* is a theoretical and political organ of struggle. It is a weapon the Communist Party of Chile lays in the hands of the working and peasant masses in their struggle in the ideological, theoretical, and political front.¹¹

The PCCh became one of the main engines of the country’s workers’ movement and it enjoyed sustained electoral growth at the beginning of the Cold War, gaining about 10% of the votes in 1945 and 1947.¹² The PCCh’s electoral performance was very good, considering that it was a strictly disciplined party. It was linked to a wider Marxist political subculture, which would progressively define virtually the entire Chilean Left in later decades. In September 1946, the PCCh helped elect a center-left president, Gabriel González Videla, who appointed Communists in three ministries. In April 1947, the

⁹ Santiago Aránguiz Pinto, “El Partido Comunista chileno y la Revolución de Octubre: ‘herencia viva’ de la cultura política soviética (1935-1970)”, 1912-2012. *El Siglo de los comunistas chilenos*, 219-240; Eugenia Fediakova, “Rusia Soviética en el imaginario político chileno 1917-1939”, *Por un rojo amanecer. Hacia una historia de los comunistas chilenos*, ed. by Manuel Loyola Tapia and Jorge Rojas Flores (Santiago de Chile: Valus, 2000).

¹⁰ Marcus Klein, “La elección presidencial de 1938. El despertar fortuito de la era radical”, *Camino a La Moneda. Las elecciones Presidenciales en la Historia de Chile 1920-2000*, ed. by Alejandro San Francisco and Ángel Soto (Santiago: Centro de Estudios Bicentenario, Instituto de Historia UC, 2005), 160-162.

¹¹ “Editorial”, *Principios*, 1 (julio 1941). It is not clear whether it was written before or after the German invasion of the Soviet Union.

¹² The PCCh obtained 10.2% of the vote in the congressional election of 1945 and 16.5% in the municipal elections of 1947. Ricardo Cruz-Coke, *Historia electoral de Chile 1925-1973* (Santiago: Editorial Jurídica, 1984), 70.

Communists exited the government and, after a bitter fight with the president, the party was banned through the Law of Defense of Democracy (LDD) in 1948. As a result, party members suffered persecution and hundreds of them were confined to detention camps.¹³ The persecution lasted a year and a half; the formal banning – actually, the party acted publicly – until 1958.

I. Political Subculture

The PCCh is better understood as a political subculture: it existed within Chilean society but it also had a life on a parallel road, subjected to rituals and discipline in a much more evident way than other Chilean parties or movements.¹⁴ Its world went beyond a political structure; it was more of a lifestyle, under rigorous control – at least in comparison with other political forces – and showed the typical signs of the totalitarian movements of the twentieth century, even though the party acted within the framework of a democracy, an institutional system to which it adapted. The party drew its strength from three main sources: organized labor; its own political structure, capable of mobilizing effectively the party's membership; and its influence in the cultural and academic worlds.¹⁵ The PCCh was particularly strong in a few provinces and was able to maintain a significant presence at the national level. It even reached to segments of the upper-classes, replicating the historical trope that revolutionary processes draw members of elites – a sort of reverse “revolt of the notables”.¹⁶

Although the directive bodies of the PCCh included more persons from organized labor than the case of other persons, in general its leaders belonged to an intelligentsia.

¹³ Carlos Huneeus, *La guerra fría chilena: Gabriel González Videla y la Ley Maldita* (Santiago: Debate, 2009); Cristián Garay Vera and Ángel Soto, *Gabriel González Videla: “no a los totalitarios, ya sean rojos, pardos o amarillos”* (Santiago: Centro de Estudios Bicentenario, 2013). On anticommunism in Chile see Marcelo Casals Araya, *La creación de la amenaza roja. Del surgimiento del anticomunismo en Chile a la “campana del terror” de 1964* (LOM: Santiago, 2016). On the inter-American factor, Andrew Barnard, “Chilean Communists, Radical Presidents, and Chilean Relations with the United States, 1940-1947”, *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 13, 2 (1981): 347-374.

¹⁴ Some even considered that marriage between Communists would “reach the objective of mutual help, education of the children in the ideology of the proletariat, and the active participation of the working class in the struggle to transform society”, Carlos Robles, “Nuestro concepto del matrimonio”, *Principios*, 63 (1959).

¹⁵ Luis Enrique Délano, “El Partido conecta a los escritores con el mundo del trabajo”, Partido Comunista de Chile, *Intervenciones y Resoluciones del XIV Congreso celebrado entre el 23 y el 29 de noviembre de 1969* (Santiago: s/e, 1970).

¹⁶ Luis Enrique Délano, *La base* (Santiago: Editorial XA, 1958).

The party's secretaries general came from humble origins, albeit not exactly from the ranks of the industrial proletariat.¹⁷ Luis Corvalán, secretary general of the party between 1958 and 1990, was a primary teacher and, through his intellectual and political capacities and interests, got to master a public language that allowed him to gain a position of hierarchy within the Chilean public sphere. As it is often the case, from a sociological point of view, persons like Corvalán and other Chilean Communist leaders became members of a political class and are no longer pure representatives of 'the people'. In the 1960s and 1970s, two other key figures of the party, Orlando Millas and Volodia Teitelboim, were typical members of an upper middle-class. Millas came from a family that, had its members dedicated to more profitable activities, would have belonged in the upper class. A lawyer and avid reader, albeit always looking at the world through the prism of a scholastic knowledge of marxism-leninism, Millas devoted his entire life to the party and political activism.¹⁸ Teitelboim, for his part, descended from a Russo-Jewish immigrant family and became a writer of some consequence in his youth and again in his last years. Socially, he had access to a wide range of classes in the country, and personally he was linked to traditional elites. Like Millas – with whom he sustained a veiled rivalry – Teitelboim's adhered intellectually to a pro-Soviet orientation of Marxism, of which, at least externally, he never doubted and experienced with stoicism the fall of Soviet Communism as a result of Gorbachev's reforms. Teitelboim excelled at polemics, in which he combined Leninist orthodoxy with cultured and sometimes archaic expressions that elicited laughs sometimes but always made substantive impressions on various audiences.

Party leaders and functionaries mingled in their daily lives with actors of various social milieus; these experiences, however, did not affect their relations with the organized labor base of the party. Some intellectuals and professionals carried a sort of double life, enjoying the material perks of the 'bourgeois' experience while propagandizing fiercely a cataclysmic transformation of Chilean society – although this type was more common in other left-wing parties. In general, party members carried themselves rigorously and discreetly in their personal lives, especially avoiding the ostentation of wealth, if they had any. Orientation toward a proletarian lifestyle was dominant, and sometimes forced. The organizational structure, compartmentalized in cells, guaranteed a minimum of uniformity that kept in place the party's subculture.

¹⁷ Luis Corvalán, *De lo vivido y lo peleado* (Santiago: LOM, 1997).

¹⁸ Orlando Millas, *En tiempos del Frente Popular. Memoria. Primer volumen* (Santiago: CESOC, 1993); Orlando Millas, *Memorias, 1957-1991. Una digestión* (Santiago: Ediciones Chile-América). It is a fundamental text to understand the daily life of Chilean Communist leader, willfully obedient of Soviet orthodoxy as all the other leaders.

Being a Communist was a way of life that integrated the whole of a person into a community; in parallel, all members of the party lived domestic and professional lives that had their own, discrete characteristics.¹⁹ The many exceptions to the experience of the typical Communist lifestyle in the ranks of the party do not disavow the capacity of the PCCh to produce great self-abnegation in the vast majority of its members. It was unbelievable how the Communists could sacrifice their personal lives in situations of deprivation to create cells and organizations in remote places where no previous infrastructure existed. The party's outreach combined an identification with demands, aspirations, and non-ideological specific problems with a drive to recruit and convert, which bears similarities with the ability of religions to awake vocations. Unions and universities were the preferred grounds for these actions. The Communists created a body filled with a homogeneous language, much more intensely developed than that of any other party and in constant communication with the structure of the party.

The Committee of Membership Control (Comisión de Control de Cuadros) played a fundamental role in the PCCh, organizing the theoretical and ideological formation of the members of the party and prospective members of the committee.²⁰ The historiography of the party has overlooked one very significant aspect in this regard: even though the PCCh carried itself within the boundaries of legality, many of its members held parallel experiences in secret organization, considering the potentiality of clandestine life under conditions of political persecution. Although it is not easy to discern whether it was a spontaneous reaction or a rational decision, this practice had its origins in the conditions of the adhesion of the party to the Third International's instructions to have a clandestine apparatus. Even though it was never formally recognized by the PCCh, the Communists sometimes insinuated that the Law of Defense of Democracy, which banned the party and provoked the persecution of its members for a few years, had shown that the training in secret organization was justified. The forced disappearance of many members, especially leaders of the party in the aftermath of the 1973 coup would tragically attest to the existence of that parallel organization. The party was able to preserve its organization until the 1980s and celebrate some formal meetings clandestinely and later semi-clandestinely.²¹ All

¹⁹ Alfonso Salgado, "Antroponimia Leninista: Santiago de Chile, 1914-1973", en *Seminario Simon Collier 2009* (Santiago: Instituto de historia, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, 2010), 159-200; Rolando Álvarez, *Arriba los pobres del mundo. Cultura e identidad política del Partido Comunista de Chile entre democracia y dictadura. 1965-1990* (Santiago: LOM, 2011).

²⁰ A. Escobar, "La disciplina en nuestro partido (intervención en la XIV Sesión Plenaria del C. C. del Partido Comunista)", *Principios*, 33, marzo 1944; J. Molina, "El trabajo de las Comisiones de Control y Cuadros", *Principios*, 67 (1960), 30-33.

²¹ Rolando Álvarez Vallejos, *Desde las sombras: una historia de la clandestinidad comunista (1973-1980)* (Santiago: LOM, 2003); Javier Rebolledo, *Camaleón, doble vida de un agente comunista* (Santiago: Planeta, 2017).

of this activity was carried out despite the fact that, until the end of 1976, being caught by the secret police of the Pinochet regime meant not only confinement, but also disappearance, which almost always entailed being tortured to death.²²

As in most of modern societies in the world, communism in Chile produced a political language with traits of a secular religion. Influenced by nineteenth-century socialism, especially by Marx's and Engels' combination of eschatological trends with contents with a scientific aspiration, communism created a 'subjective' dynamic that would be as strong as or even stronger than 'objective' reality. The anti-systemic left already established a close relationship with a particular language by the turn of the twentieth century, in the cultural environment of a country where the majority of the people were still illiterate.²³ The Russian Revolution gave a great boost to the prestige of Marxism, specifically to the strain identified with the works of the founders and the Marxist parties of the nineteenth century, in which the 'correct' interpretation of historic patterns played a primordial role, which in turn required of great intellectual and doctrinal capacities. In sum, in organizational terms – and this goes beyond the Communist Party – Marxism in Chile would entail the assumption of a "culture of the book" of sorts, as an integral part of the formation and the practice of the membership.²⁴ As a result, the foundational texts would become continuous and reiterated points of reference.

Thus, the works of Marx, Engels, and Lenin early became a fundamental triad that would keep its relevance within the left until 1973 and for Chilean communism until the end of the 1980s.²⁵ In a second and changing tier were the names of Trotsky, Stalin, and Mao – with their respective rises and falls. Then came the secretaries general of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union during their tenures and occasionally those other communist countries. In a third tier were communist leaders from non-communist countries, some communist intellectuals, and those whom their critics called philo- or crypto-communists. Of course, the word of the secretary general and the Political Committee – the equivalent of the Politburo – of the PCCh had absolute authority and was for many an object of quasi-veneration, more spontaneous than what occurred in

²² The issue of the Communists having a military apparatus is still a matter of political debate in Chile. I have discussed the matter in my book *La revolución inconclusa*.

²³ Literacy in Chile reached 28.9% according to the census of 1885; 31% in 1895; and 40% in 1907. Comisión Central de Censo, *Memoria Presentada al Supremo Gobierno por la Comisión Central del Censo* (Santiago: Universo, 1908), 1273.

²⁴ Alfredo Riquelme Segovia notes that the PCCh integrated into a "global ideology," structured as a "science of revolution" with knowledge about how to realize the passing of power from the capitalists on to the communists; Alfredo Riquelme Segovia, *Rojo atardecer. El comunismo chileno entre dictadura y democracia* (Santiago: DIBAM, 2009), 42.

²⁵ For the Communists' ideology in the twentieth century, see Riquelme, *Rojo atardecer*.

totalitarian countries, as it happened in an open society. Occasionally, heroes from other parties were recognized, insofar as they were in line with communist policies. There were few specifically communist intellectuals, but the world that surrounded communism – where men and women, at the crossroads of choice, opted for ‘anti-anticommunism’ – boosted its legitimacy in large segments of society.

II. Neruda, Culture and Intellectuals

The case of Pablo Neruda warrants special attention.²⁶ Although he formally joined the party only in 1945, Neruda was in fact within its sphere of influence and even complied with instructions or insinuations from it since the years of the Spanish Civil War. The war had a great impact in Chile and provoked polarization in the world of culture and ideas.²⁷ Chilean communism used the Spanish Civil War to acquire relevance in the domestic political debate and Neruda was one of the party’s performers in this task. A famed poet, Neruda was well-known internationally before he won the Nobel Prize in 1971. Though removed from theory, when Neruda argued politically he assumed thoroughly the doctrinal communist discourse, somewhat softened by his writer’s skills – even if his non-political writing was brighter and better. In Chile, he did much for the legitimation of communism in academia, of great importance in the 1950s and 1960s; abroad, Neruda raised awareness of the persecution of Chilean communism as a result of the Law of Defense of Democracy, albeit its harshest part was relatively brief (about a year and a half). Neruda himself was able to return to Chile after his theatrical escape in 1948. A significant cohort of poets and writers accompanied communism until 1973, partly influenced by Neruda, in addition to other fellow-travelers.

Inside the PCCh, however, the definition of the doctrine allowed for less flexibility. This process was directed by a hierarchical organ, the aforementioned Committee of Control, that worked to incentivize the reading of texts in small cells, through courses, and occasionally for wider audiences. The party exercised vigilance over the conduct of its members and, in general, most of them carried a uniform lifestyle. At the base of the social pyramid of the PCCh, through the experience of the cells and indoctrination courses, the party offered a path to education and self-education. Chilean communism’s was the language of a sect that also provided its speakers with tools for political sociabili-

²⁶ Rafael Pedemonte, “La diplomacia cultural soviética en Chile (1964-1973)”, *Revista Bicentenario*, 9 (2010) 57-100.

²⁷ Rafael Pedemonte, “Pablo Neruda, su tiempo y el ‘sentido de la historia’: postura ideológica y creación poética durante la Guerra Fría”, *Revista Ayer*, 98, 2 (2015): 159-185.

ty and a certain degree of distinction. It was widely recognized in unions and universities that Communists from all social origins possessed a similar style of language, sometimes a little cliché, but in any case adorned with a better pronunciation than the language of other people in the same environments. This trait gave Communists tangible advantages in the places where, in accordance with their functions, they found themselves.²⁸

All party education showed a strict intellectual discipline, with an almost Jesuitical quality and different levels of difficulty, depending on the role of the aspiring members, members, functionaries or leaders and according to the place where they carried their political work. Even though hypothetically there were differences between, say, a known university professor and a railroad union leader, both persons, usually men, could find a meeting point in a common language and a few topics. The approach to the foundational texts and the fact that they were considered as immutable points of reference, and the philology that derived from them, or, alternatively, their correct commentary and interpretation, occupied a prominent place in the process of collective formation. Through this process came about the party's explanations of the national situation, its institutional reactions to it, and the policies of the socialist bloc. For Communists, Moscow was like Rome was for Catholics, in a way that no place in the West could match for anti-communists. As a political religion, Marxism, as no other ideological persuasion, was able to combine an organization of reality based on concepts that can be simplified with a high level of intellectual sophistication. However, this dialectical process was always conducted with great care, so as not to clash with the dominant orthodoxy, which in any case evolved from Lenin to Chernenko – practically, not ideologically.

Why is all this important? Because around the PCCh revolved great artists and scientists, and brilliant academics, writers, and journalists.²⁹ However, it did not emerge in Chile truly autochthonous Marxist thought nor complete monographic studies that could be considered an enrichment of Marxist thought.

A liminal case was that of Marta Harnecker, who, as a disciple of Louis Althusser, gave a modern hue to Marxist orthodoxy through a wide work of divulgation.³⁰ She dynamized the language of Marxism during the 1960s and early 1970s, even though she was not a creative intellectual nor did she write advanced monographic studies. She was an intellectual of action, oriented toward the Castro model and remained thus until her death in 2019. In the years of the Allende government, Harnecker converged with

²⁸ Fermandois, *La revolución inconclusa*, 241-250. Ernesto Ottone, *El viaje en rojo: un ejercicio de memoria* (Santiago: Debate, 2014).

²⁹ Germán Albuquerque Fuschini, *La trinchera letrada. Intelectuales latinoamericanos y guerra fría* (Santiago: Ariadna, 2011), 26

³⁰ The most renowned work of Marta Harnecker is *Los conceptos del materialismo histórico* (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI, 1975 [original 1971]).

the forces of the far-left, where most of the Socialist Party and the MIR found their place. Harnecker's ideas were, ultimately, a form of intellectual Guevarism.³¹ In general, Communists saw these trends with suspicion, considered them contaminated by bourgeois ideas, and disavowed the use of sophisticated or pretentious language, depending on the circumstance, to speak of the doctrine. This opposition to the type of language characteristic of Althusserian Marxism is the idea at the core of the epigraph at the beginning of this essay, reiterated by the same author in another telling paragraph:

The indispensable condition for a clear and comprehensible language lies in the permanent connection with the masses, in knowing their demands, and above all in awareness of their cognitive and receptive capacities. If these conditions are not met, we inevitably will fall prey to an intuitive, arid, abstract language that will cool the masses off and thus render them alien to the revolutionary seed [...]. We must add that the beauty of the works of the classics and the precision of the documents of the Party and of the brother communist parties are so seductive that pushes certain orators to repeat mechanically their idiomatic turns. The temptation to speak to the masses in a bookish and doctoral language is highly negative for the political purposes of the party.³²

Besides its rejection of the abstruse language employed by various Marxist politicians and intellectuals, the excerpt reflects the peculiar interpretation of the inseparable link between theory and praxis, which joins communism with the activity of the labor movement directed by its vanguard. Fear of 'adventurerism' and 'Trotskyism' underlies this type of critique.

By mid-twentieth century emerged a Marxist school of historical thought mostly oriented toward communism. The most important names of this school were Hernán Ramírez Necochea (Communist), Jorge Barría (Socialist), and, for a brief period, Álvaro Jara. The three of them provided the first historiographic tools for this angle of interpretation. Later they were joined by Julio César Jobet, who occupied a high position in the Socialist Party and was the only renowned Chilean Marxist who, in the years of the Allende government, said that the countries of the socialist bloc were not democracies. Luis Vitale, an Argentine residing in Chile, was close to the MIR and mentored a new generation of Marxist and non-Marxist historians, Gabriel Salazar among them.³³ Marxist historiography did not influence substantially Chilean historiography

³¹ Michael Lowy, *El Marxismo en América Latina* (Santiago: LOM, 2007).

³² Olivares, "El lenguaje dentro del Partido", 93.

³³ Gabriel Salazar Vergara, "La historiografía marxista (clásica) en Chile", *La historia desde abajo y desde adentro*, ed. by Gabriel Salazar Vergara (Santiago: Departamento de Teoría de las Artes Facultad de Artes de la Universidad de Chile, 2003), 47-67; Luis Moulián, "Marx y la historiografía chilena", *Encuentro*

as a whole, but it did have a perceivable impact in the left and those who received indoctrination in the PCCh.

III. A Substitute Home

Undoubtedly, the Communists' living around the word that stemmed from the foundational texts created a special atmosphere, an authentic political subculture. This is the sense of residing in the word of a world charged with ideology and simultaneously connected with some important cultural currents. Those who joined the Communist Party did not see their experience as alienation; on the contrary, the experience of joining the party replaced an atomized life with a life in a community that gave sense to their being. This experience served as a powerful magnet for totalitarian and radical ideologies, heirs of sorts of millenarianism and other sects, fed by the conviction that they represented a moral imperative and, more importantly, the correct interpretation of the laws of history and a supposedly scientific explanation of the qualitative leap that will end the fundamental contradictions of social existence.

In this way, communism had a welcoming element, the spontaneous attraction of modern political religions, the sensation of living in a community that gives sense to individual life, even in its state of subordination. It was also possessed with a conscience of superiority and infallibility that allowed it to castigate and denigrate all enemies, real or presumptive; it condemned mercilessly all those who, having opened themselves to the militant conscience of the party, later abandoned it. In a relatively soft case, Luis Hernández Parker, a famed journalist of the mid-twentieth century, was ejected from the ranks and the confidence of the party for having been detained by the police in Buenos Aires in 1939 and, apparently under torture, confessed some of his and the party's connections; he remained in the spectrum of the left anyway. More dramatic was the case of his contemporary Marcos Chamudes, also a journalist and an intellectual. Chamudes belonged to the generation that crossed all the way over to anticommunism, pushed by the experience of the Stalinist persecutions and the totalitarian atmosphere that, in some cases, made its mark in the Chilean party as well. Not only the Communist but the entire left declared war on Chamudes, condemned him, and mocked him systematically, in line with a practice that became habitual among Communists and Socialists since the mid-1950s.³⁴

XXI, 3 (1997), 119-130; Jorge Rojas Flores, "Historia, historiadores y comunistas chilenos", *Por un rojo amanecer*, 1-80.

³⁴ Marcos Chamudes, *La reincidencia tiene su hora* (Santiago: s/e, 1976); Marcos Chamudes, *Chile una advertencia americana: semimemorias de un periodista chileno que durante 40 años fue actor y testigo de la*

IV. Willful Orientation toward Moscow: from the Immediate Postwar to the Allende Government

Undoubtedly, the Communists attempted to apply Moscow's directions to a distinct Chilean situation; it was not pure obsequence on the part of the Chilean PCCh. It is hard to ascertain what belonged in the realm of a spontaneous application of ideas and projects and what resulted from a willful and fervent subordination to a world authority deemed the vanguard of the universal socialist experience. Communists explained the convergence of these two strains as the perfect union between theory and praxis and, as a result, theirs was an interpretation scientifically superior to any other. In actuality, in a political system like Chile's, an open preference for revolutionary or quasi-revolutionary direct action would have led the party to a sure and swift defeat. Only acting within the institutional framework, which was facilitated by Chile's political evolution in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, could the Communists consolidate a permanent presence in national politics.

The Chilean Communists faced the realities of the immediate aftermath of World War II promoting a "National Union", in faithful observance of the Soviet model, according to which the post-war had to be a continuation and widening of Popular Front antifascism, including bourgeois parties and, thus, being able to exert leadership over a supposedly progressive majority.³⁵ Chilean politics did not allow for the implementation of this strategy and the PCCh had to content itself with the formation of a purely left-wing alliance. That was the way in which the coalition of Communists and Radicals presented itself, even though in fact its course was largely defined by the latter. For a brief period, the alliance expanded toward its right and included parties of the right and the left. Soon thereafter the Chilean Communists had to leave the government, against the backdrop of a continental context in which Communist participation in other Latin American government was in retreat, as a result of mutual distrusts and the changes in the foreign policies of the United States and the Soviet Union.³⁶

The position of the Socialists evolved independently toward a convergence with the Communists. Whereas Communists had their paradigm in the Soviet Union, Socialists found it first in Tito's Yugoslavia, then in Algeria's anticolonial fight, and finally, in a thorough and uncontested manner, in the Cuban Revolution. The Communists took

vida política de su país (Santiago: PEC, 1972). The rebuttal of the journalist to the Communist attacks in Marcos Chamudes, *El libro blanco de mi leyenda negra* (Santiago: PEC, 1964).

³⁵ Carlos Contreras Labarca, *Unión Nacional: Informe ante la XV Sesión Plenaria del Partido Comunista* (Santiago: s/e, 1944).

³⁶ Jody Pavilack, *Mining for the Nation: The Politics of Chile's Coal Communities from the Popular front to the Cold War* (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2011).

a slightly different position with respect to the Cuban Revolution, expressed in their strict adherence to the language of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union regarding international politics. The Cubans attacked Neruda once, which probably was nothing more than a way to criticize the Soviet Union, on which they depended.

In 1967, after Guevara's death in Bolivia, the Socialist Party decided to abandon the electoral path and assume armed struggle. This shift did not go beyond rhetoric, except for the fact that a handful of members of the party trained actively for guerrilla warfare and even collaborated with Guevara's surviving forces and would later remain in a state of expectancy.³⁷ In parallel, a handful of left-wing activists founded in 1965 the Revolutionary Left Movement (MIR), a small group oriented toward the Castro model, many of whose members were trained militarily in Cuba, which would enjoy a disproportionate influence on subsequent events.³⁸ In 1968 and 1969, an incipient movement of urban guerrilla emerged in Chile. The Communists criticized this attitude and strategy as 'adventurist' and 'Trotskyite', even though some of them also had military training, but apparently not for guerrilla warfare. This difference, however, did not affect the Alliance between Socialists and Communists, which had propelled a true electoral revolution in Chile.

The Cuban Revolution caused some tension at first in the left-wing alliance, but in the end strengthened it through the addition of a mystique that would animate it and would also commit it to a course of action whose language was irreconcilable with that of other political forces that could have joined the alliance. The assumption of a more determined revolutionary language in the aftermath of the Cuban Revolution reduced the left-wing alliance's chances of genuine transactions with other forces reluctant to the Marxists' final goal. The left seemed to have reached the summit of its electoral possibilities in the presidential election of 1964, in which Allende obtained 38,8% of the vote. The result was not good enough to win, however, as the right supported the center-left candidate, Eduardo Frei, who got 56% of the vote.³⁹ Few seemed to ponder the fact that the left had reached almost 40% of the national vote.

³⁷ Bayron Velásquez, "La Organa y la escuela de guerrilla de Chaihuín (1968-1970): Leninización y guevarización del socialismo chileno", *Izquierdas*, 49 (April 2020), 412-431.

³⁸ Eugenia Palieraki, *¡La revolución ya viene! El MIR chileno en los años sesenta* (Santiago: LOM, 2014); Mario Amorós, *Miguel Enríquez: un hombre en las estrellas, biografía de un revolucionario* (Santiago: Ediciones B, 2015); Sergio Salinas, *Memorias de militancia en el movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria (MIR)* (Santiago: Ril, 2014); Sergio Salinas, *El tres letras: historia y contexto del Movimiento de izquierda Revolucionaria* (Santiago: Ril, 2013); Andres Pascal Allende, *El MIR chileno: una experiencia revolucionaria* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Cucaña, 2003).

³⁹ Cristian Gazmuri y Alvaro Góngora, "La elección presidencial de 1964. El triunfo de la Revolución en Libertad", *Camino a La Moneda*, 301-331.

In a country with an incomplete modernization, but with a strong political and institutional tradition, where widespread and visible poverty coexisted with a considerable middle class, for the most part frustrated, and segments of the populations that seemed to live in the World War I, in the 1960s a typical situation of pre-crisis was emerging, in a process similar to situations that have preceded revolutionary moments in modern history.⁴⁰ The center-left adversaries of the revolutionary left, the Christian Democrats, had assumed, in line with the times, a messianic language. They announced the fulfillment of a ‘revolution in liberty’, with unlimited promises. Conservatives spoke in an apocalyptic language, which in a way was a reverse reflection of the positions of the center-left and the left. All this in the context of a society with low levels of political violence, though growing during the 1960. Even social Christian sectors that had adhered to an anti-Marxist position, enthusiastic with social reform, assumed a language inclined toward Marxism, some of them in its most radical version. All of them eventually accepted Castro’s Cuba as a model of a desirable goal. This was the contribution of the global sixties to Chilean politics, which the Communists saw with distrust.⁴¹ A period of polarization was dawning in Chile, underscored by an inflation of political languages in their references to the possibility that an institutional system could open the way toward socioeconomic modernization, alongside a trajectory of modest economic growth that did not satisfy even minimally the most widespread aspirations of Chilean society.⁴²

V. Socialism at Hand: Triumph and Tragedy

The Communists were the main force behind the idea of a Popular Unity, the alliance of the left. They also promoted the idea that those were times of a historic “shift in the correlation of forces between capitalism and socialism”. As a result, the gates for a revolutionary change through electoral means would open.⁴³ The Socialists accepted this ideas and strategy with some reluctance, partly because Fidel Castro did not want

⁴⁰ Ahumada, *En vez de la miseria*.

⁴¹ Patrick Barr-Melej, *Psychedelic Chile. Youth, and Politics on the road to Socialism and Dictatorship* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2017) points to the critical reaction of the Communist Party.

⁴² Rolf Lüders, “El proceso económico”, *América Latina en la historia contemporánea. Chile. La búsqueda de la democracia*, tomo V, ed. by Joaquín Fernandois (Madrid: MAPFRE, Taurus, 2015); Markos Mamelakis and Clark Winton Reynold, *Essays on the Chilean Economy* (Homewood, Illinois: Richard D. Irwin, 1965).

⁴³ Luis Corvalán, “Unidad Popular para conquistar el poder. Informe al XIV Congreso Nacional del Partido Comunista (23 de noviembre de 1970)”, *La Izquierda Chilena 1969-1973: documentos para el estudio de su línea estratégica*, tomo I, ed. by Víctor Farías (Santiago: Centro de Estudios Públicos, 2000), 148.

to become an obstacle in the way of his friend Salvador Allende. The choice of Allende as the presidential candidate of the coalition in 1970 pleased the Communists much more than the Socialists, but managed to gain strength during the campaign. Allende triumphed over his rival of 1958, Jorge Alessandri, by a margin of thirty-nine thousand votes, equivalent to just 1.4% of the total vote. But that victory in the popular election eventually sufficed to give Allende the presidency.⁴⁴ A desperate attempt to provoke a coup by some political and military actors that ended with the murder of the chief of the Army, which caused great commotion in the country, failed to block Allende's road to the presidency and put down the enthusiasm and fervor felt by a large part of the country, and the sense of surprise and dread that took over the rest.

Thus, an extraordinary period in the history of Chile was set in motion, characterized by a global interest in Chilean politics, especially in Europe and the Americas. The Allende government became a sort of international star. Sectors of the democratic left and even some liberals across the world saw with enthusiasm the possibility of pacific transition to socialism, one with a 'human face', seeing parallels between the Chilean experience and the Prague Spring, whose crushing the PCCh had supported with discipline. The Allende government also elicited the sympathy and political support of almost all Marxist or radical revolutionary regimes of the Third World, and certainly those of the Soviet bloc.⁴⁵ It was a kind of modern utopia; anything from the other ideological pole that were to follow it would be, inevitably, an anti-utopia. Through all this process, the Communist Party was considered the moderating force and the Socialist Party the radicalized one. The dichotomy was real, but has been exaggerated by the literature. Both parties differed in their tactics and means, but not in their goals.

The Communist Party, always condemning some excesses of the 'ultra-left', and trying to attract other political forces, kept immutable its goal of a socialist society, modelled after one of the standing Marxist systems, insisting that the Allende government opened a somewhat long period of transition; sometimes they said it would not be so long.⁴⁶ The PCCh's secretary general, Luis Corvalán, maintained that a dictatorship of the proletariat was democratic, and that all political systems, including Chilean democ-

⁴⁴ Alejandro San Francisco, "La elección presidencial de 1970. Sesenta días que conmovieron a Chile (y al mundo)", *Camino a la Moneda*, 333-370; Sebastián Hurtado-Torres, "The Chilean Moment in the Global Cold War: International Reactions to Salvador Allende's Victory in the Presidential Election of 1970", *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 21, 3 (2019): 1-30.

⁴⁵ Tanya Harmer, *El gobierno de Allende y la Guerra Fría interamericana* (Santiago: Ediciones Universidad Diego Portales, 2013); Joaquín Fernando, *Chile y el mundo, 1970-1973: la política exterior del gobierno de la Unidad Popular* (Santiago: Ediciones Universidad Católica de Chile, 1985).

⁴⁶ Luis Corvalán, "Lo más revolucionario es luchar por el éxito del Gobierno Popular. Informe del Comité Central del Partido Comunista (26 de noviembre de 1970)", *La Izquierda Chilena 1969-1973: documentos para el estudio de su línea estratégica*, tomo II, ed. by Víctor Farías (Santiago: CEP, 2000), 491-502.

racy, were dictatorships; in the Chilean case, it was a dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. Did this line of thinking reflect a conviction, a double language, hypocrisy, discipline in the use of an ideological language and loyalty to the only means of liberation? The experience of history shows that a democracy that evolves toward a State that overcomes liberal democracy is no longer democratic. The PCCh tried to intercede with the Soviet Union for more resources.⁴⁷ Some Popular Unity leader and, apparently, Allende himself saw Moscow's refusal to provide more assistance, even though it had aided the UP government to the full extent of its possibilities, as an abandonment of the Chilean left's project.⁴⁸ In actuality, the 'socialist camp' was weaker than it seemed. Until the end of the 1980s, the Soviet bloc rejected any type of 'Eurocommunism'.

VI. Nadir and Survival

After the coup, the PCCh went through an extraordinary phase. From the underground and exile, the party responded with an old theme of the ideological tradition of the twentieth century: the antifascist front. Its military apparatus virtually did not respond to the coup; the mobilization of workers was almost null. In addition, the military had acted supported by societal opposition to mobilization, which was probably majoritarian. The clandestine apparatus of the PCCh elicited the fury of the military, which were in any case trained in counterinsurgency methods, modelled after what they imagined to be Marxist insurgency techniques.

As in no other instance in Chilean history, the ordeal of the dictatorship revealed the sense of community of communism. About a thousand members of the party were either executed or disappeared; most of the latter were tortured to death. The party, however, managed to survive through a constant succession of members of the Central Committee, even as they kept falling under the net of the dictatorship's secret police. The existence of a clandestine apparatus, understandable after the banning of the party in 1948 and which responded to directives from the Komintern issued as early as 1919, was an element of latent instability for democracy. In any case, the ability of the party to survive and the self-abnegation of the majority of its members was outstanding. Even the exiles complied with the orders of the party and came back to Chile, on many occasions just to be caught by the DINA, Pinochet's secret police. The dynamic lasted

⁴⁷ The Soviet support of the PCCh is studied by Olga Uliánova and Eugenia Fediakova, "Algunos aspectos de la ayuda financiera del Partido Comunista de la URSS al comunismo chileno durante la Guerra Fría", *Estudios Públicos*, 72 (1998): 113-148.

⁴⁸ Corvalán, *De lo vivido y lo peleado*, 108.

until the end of 1976, when the DINA caught and made disappear the entire Central Committee.⁴⁹ Pinochet dissolved the DINA in mid-1977 and, for a while, violent repression let up and Chile stabilized into a ‘normal authoritarianism’.

Throughout the years of the dictatorship, the higher echelons of the party stuck to a strict orthodoxy, whose main tenets were antifascism – a broad coalition strategically directed by the Communists – anti-imperialism and adherence to the Soviet bloc as model of socialist society. Chilean Communists reconciled fully with Castro’s Cuba and, in the first years, marched alongside the Socialists, even though the latter did not see favorably the prospect of an alliance with centrist sectors that had supported the overthrow of Allende. Within Communist ranks there was no public dissent. Instead, a number of Communists began to leave the party by the end of the 1970s and the early 1980s, either because of the influence of the political and intellectual atmosphere of Western Europe or because of the disillusion caused by their direct experience of living in countries of the Soviet bloc.⁵⁰

In 1980 Chilean communism made a strategic shift of historic relevance oriented by the idea that the party had to embrace “all forms of struggle”, which fundamentally meant armed struggle.⁵¹ As a result of this shift, the party created the Manuel Rodríguez Patriotic Front (Frente Patriótico Manuel Rodríguez, FPMR). It is not entirely clear whether the creation of the FPMR responded to a Soviet-Cuban plan or emerged from a segment of the leadership of the PCCCh – not everybody within the party agreed with this strategy.⁵² In part, the creation of the FPMR resulted from the views of a younger generation of party members, in some cases children of the disappeared, who were angered by repression and imbued with a militaristic spirit of armed rebellion. Some of them had participated in the Sandinista fight against Somoza. A relatively powerful urban guerrilla movement grew in Chile. It received some support from some sector of Chilean society and became strong in a few poorer urban neighborhoods. All this against the backdrop of an acute economic crisis that provoked massive protests and

⁴⁹ Olga Uliánova, “El exilio comunista chileno 1973-1989”, *Estudios Ibero-Americanos*, 39, 2 (2013): 212-236.

⁵⁰ Mariana Perry, *La dimensión internacional del pensamiento político chileno. Aprendizaje y transferencia en el exilio* (Leiden: Tesis doctoral de la Universidad de Leiden, 2016); Eugenio Ortega Frei, *Historia de una alianza política: el partido Socialista y el partido Demócrata Cristiano* (Santiago: tesis para optar al grado de licenciatura en Historia Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, 1992).

⁵¹ Riquelme, *Rojo atardecer*, 109-145; Luis Rojas Núñez, *De la rebelión popular a la sublevación imaginada: antecedentes de la historia política y militar del Partido Comunista de Chile y del FPMR 1973-1990* (Santiago: LOM, 2011); Ricardo Palma Salamanca, *Una larga cola de acero: historia del FPMR, 1984-1988* (Santiago: LOM, 2001); Cristóbal Peña, *Los fusileros: crónica secreta de una guerrilla en Chile* (Santiago: Debate, 2016).

⁵² Cristián Pérez, *Vidas revolucionarias* (Santiago: Universitaria/CEP, 2013).

offered a favorable stage for the new Communist strategy.⁵³ The most spectacular feat of the FPMR was an attempt on the life of Augusto Pinochet in September 1986 that nearly killed him.⁵⁴

The failed attempt on Pinochet's life, however, would be a kind of swansong for the armed struggle strategy of the PCCh. Some sectors of the left, converted to European-style social democracy and enthusiastic about the gradual end of the military regimes that ruled Latin American countries during the 1980s, rejected decidedly the strategy of armed struggle.⁵⁵ It was not just tactics, but a convinced defense of the Western democratic model. Most of Chilean society also rejected the insurreccional path, which in the end served to galvanize Pinochet's followers.

Above all, in the second half of the 1980s some cracks in Chilean communism became publicly visible due to some of the same factors that had influenced the political shift of the Socialists: the influence of Western critiques of Marxism, disillusionment with real socialism, and the new realities brought about by Perestroika and the other Gorbachev's reforms. At first, Chilean Communists supported Gorbachev's reforms in a reflection of their automatic loyalty to Moscow; they changed track when these reforms in fact disavowed the Leninist model. The PCCh could not accept this and kept its ideological core principles unaltered. However, by the end of the 1980s and until 1990, the year of the end of the Pinochet dictatorship, a great number of members, especially from the intelligentsia, left the party, for at that point not only did they reject the armed struggle strategy but they also adhered to the traditional democratic paradigm.⁵⁶ The PCCh had rejected the strategy of the center-left since 1985. It initially refused to participate in the plebiscite that eventually ended Pinochet's rule – the Communists joined the call to vote only a few days before the referendum – and to join the alliance that carried Patricio Aylwin to the presidency in the foundational act of Chile's new – they also called to vote for Aylwin a few days before the election. Their own candidates in the congressional election suffered a hard rejection from the electorate.

⁵³ Ascanio Cavallo, Manuel Salazar Salvo, and Oscar Sepúlveda Pacheco, *La historia oculta del régimen militar* (Santiago: Grijalbo, 1997), 332-340; Carlos Huneeus, *El régimen de Pinochet* (Santiago: Taurus, 2016), 459-504.

⁵⁴ Cavallo, Salazar, and Sepúlveda, *La historia oculta del régimen militar*, 428-436; Rafael Otano Garde, *Nueva crónica de la transición* (Santiago: LOM, 2006), 29-40.

⁵⁵ A "popular rebellion at the polls" became an objective of the PCCh by the end of the 1980s, thus abandoning the armed struggle strategy to overthrow Pinochet; Riquelme, *Rojo atardecer*, 165-198.

⁵⁶ Alfredo Riquelme Segovia and Marcelo Casals Araya, "El Partido Comunista de Chile y la transición interminable", *El Partido Comunista de Chile. Una historia presente*, ed. by Augusto Varas, Alfredo Riquelme Segovia, and Marcelo Casals Araya (Santiago: Catalonia, 2010), 366.

Unlike what happened in Europe, the end of the Cold War did not result in the end of the Chilean Communist Party. It survived first oriented toward the Cuban paradigm and, since 2000, supporting neopopulist movements in Latin America. Some Communists have also made expressions of support for the North Korea's regime and, as a spontaneous echo of a tradition stripped of its ideological connotations, have sympathized with Putin's anti-American attitudes. The survival of Chilean communism after the fall of the Berlin Wall – considering how important the paradigm of East Germany was for the Chilean left – demonstrated that it was not a mere conditioned reflex of the waves sent out by the Russian Revolution, but that it was inscribed in a possibility of Chilean politics, whose actors assumed, at least formally, the language of modernity. However, the PCCh lost its power of mobilization and recruitment and, in general, its electoral strength has been roughly a third of what it was before the 1973 coup, but it still has a disproportionate weight in Chilean politics and culture. As a protagonist of a battle for memory, based on the sacrifice of its members under Pinochet's dictatorship, the PCCh still possesses considerable, but limited strength.