The 2011 Chilean Student Movement and the Struggle for a New Left

by
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The Chilean student movement that began in early 2011 poses a significant challenge to Chilean neoliberalism and is beginning to reconfigure left politics within the country. Specifically, the movement's demands for free education and public control of strategic domestic industries strikes at the heart of neoliberalism in Chile. In addition, in emphasizing the importance of participatory democracy and mass participation, the movement goes beyond the boundaries of the established left and is now struggling to create a new left capable of furthering its political goals. This emerging left roughly fits within the politics of autonomism. In doing so, it displays a break from the experiences of twentieth-century left politics and is consistent with other recent movements in Latin America. However, the student movement in Chile risks co-optation by the established political class. In addition, the autonomous left remains small and lacks a coherent alternative to neoliberalism with broad appeal. Therefore, the victory of Michelle Bachelet and the Nueva Mayoría in the 2013 elections is unlikely to result in substantial changes to neoliberalism in Chile.

El movimiento estudiantil chileno, que comenzó a principios de 2011, representa un desafío importante para el neoliberalismo chileno y está empezando a reconfigurar la política de izquierda en el país. En concreto, las demandas del movimiento para la educación gratuita y el control público de las industrias nacionales estratégicas toca el corazón del neoliberalismo en Chile. Además, en destacar la importancia de la democracia participativa y la participación de las masas, el movimiento va más allá de los límites de la izquierda establecida y ahora está luchando para crear una nueva izquierda capaz de promover sus objetivos políticos. Esta izquierda emergente se encaja más o menos dentro de la política del autonomismo. Al hacerlo, muestra un quiebre con las experiencias de la política de izquierda del siglo XX, y es consistente con otros movimientos recientes en América Latina. Sin embargo, el movimiento estudiantil en Chile corre el riesgo de cooptación por la clase política establecida. Además, la izquierda autónoma sigue siendo pequeña y carece de una alternativa coherente al neoliberalismo que tenga amplia atracción. Por lo tanto, es poco probable que la victoria de Michelle Bachelet y la Nueva Mayoría en las elecciones de 2013 resulte en cambios sustanciales al neoliberalismo en Chile.

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In the history of neoliberalism, Latin America holds a special place. It was in Chile that the Pinochet dictatorship first introduced this political and economic model in the early 1970s, following the overthrow of the socialist president,

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Salvador Allende. Not surprisingly, Latin America has also been at the forefront of struggles against neoliberalism and its claim that "there is no alternative." Indeed, it was in 1989 that poor communities in Venezuela climbed down from the barrios to protest the neoliberal package about to be delivered by the government. This event, known as the Caracazo, became the first great mass insurgency against neoliberalism in the region. Soon, others would follow: the Zapatistas in Mexico, the water and gas wars in Bolivia, the popular assemblies in Argentina, to name some of the most memorable examples.

In expressing opposition to neoliberalism, these experiences also shared a commitment to think and act outside the boundaries of twentieth-century left politics, which predominantly took two forms. The first was the social democratic path, which relied on technocrats attempting to manipulate the economy from above. The main avenue for popular participation became top-down bureaucratic unions that favored the male breadwinner. At best, this model would eliminate the worst abuses of capitalist markets while providing a degree of economic development. "Cast your vote and leave it to us" was the technocratic message to the working classes. Brazil's Partido dos Trabalhadores (Workers' Party) under Lula is a good example of this model.

The second variant of left politics relied on the revolutionary vanguard party, a tightly insulated political elite that was supposed to lead a transition to a new society. However, as the experience of the Soviet Union showed us, the result was a strictly hierarchical party ruling over a centralized and bureaucratic state (Devine, 1988; Katz, 2004; Wainwright, 1994). Though often providing significant material benefits to the working classes, this model can nevertheless be described as consisting of "vanguard relations of production" (Lebowitz, 2012). Hence, if the technocratic message of social democracy was "Leave it to us," the vanguard's message ended up being "Do as we say." In Latin America, Cuba is most representative of this model.

Departing from the experiences of the twentieth-century left, Latin American rebellions over the past 20 years consisted of communities and workers self-organizing and fighting with their own hands and feet. For example, in Argentina, during its 2001–2002 political and economic crisis, workers and communities organized themselves through popular assemblies in hundreds of neighborhoods across the country, creating barter clubs and even local currencies. In addition, under the banner of "Occupy, Resist, Produce," workers began to take over bankrupted private businesses, turning them into self-managed cooperatives, while the unemployed joined *organizaciones piqueteras* (picketing organizations), helping to establish the country's solidarity economy (Dinerstein, 2013; Larrabure, Vieta, and Schugurensky, 2011; Moreno, 2011; Sitrin, 2006).

Meanwhile, during the gas and water wars in Bolivia between 2000 and 2005, mass organization and mobilization took place through political bodies such as the Coordinadora (the Coordinator), a relatively loose network of resistance that brought together indigenous organizations, radical unionists, and *juntas vecinales* (neighborhood councils), independent neighborhood organizations based on direct democracy. Finally, Mexico's Zapatistas, one of the region's earliest proponents of breaking away from the politics of the old left, emphasize the importance of developing horizontal relations and maintaining autonomy from the

state. The vehicles for achieving these goals include the *caracoles* and the *juntas de buen gobierno* (good governance councils), political spaces that maximize participation and minimize hierarchy. "Líderes fuertes crean pueblos débiles" (Strong leaders make a weak people), Emiliano Zapata's famous principle, popularized by the Zapatistas in the 1990s, perhaps best captures their philosophy, as well as the ethos of many of the region's new movements.

Given their diversity, it would be wrong to put these and other similar movements in Latin America into one box. However, it is possible to say that, to a significant degree, they express a set of politics akin to the ideas of many contemporary autonomist Marxist thinkers. For example, Massimo De Angelis (2006) argues that a postcapitalist future can be brought about through "value struggles" whereby capital's spatio-temporal matrix is rearticulated around a new set of value practices that brings with it a new set of subjectivities. This creates a "temporary space-time commons" (De Angelis, 2006: 19) from which those in struggle can assert themselves as being outside capital. Similarly, Sara Motta (2011) highlights the importance of what she calls "prefigurative epistemologies in everyday life," the alternative perspectives and new subjectivities generated through the process of active struggle.

In addition to struggle, democratic practices become crucial in this articulation of a new left. Importantly, these must be inclusive and participatory and therefore go beyond representative democracy within the state and the traditional labor union model. Preferred spaces include assemblies, demonstrations, and neighborhood associations but can also include workplace experiments with direct democracy. For example, Marina Sitrin (2011) highlights Argentina's *empresas recuperadas* (recovered enterprises), arguing that horizontalism and autonomy are new democratic practices through which new social relations based on equality and freedom can be created. The word "autonomy" here means autonomy from the state. Indeed, most autonomists believe that, as John Holloway (2002) argues, one can "change the world without taking power." This means that both traditional parties and the "revolutionary party" are rejected as vehicles for social change. Instead, the strategy is to build "antipower" in capitalism's "cracks." In summary, then, breaking from twentieth-century left politics, autonomists share a commitment to building power from below through active struggle and prefigurative practices such as direct, horizontal, and inclusive democracy.

By the mid-2000s, many of the struggles and demands of social movements had become channeled into the electoral arena, bringing to office several new left and center-left governments. With some important exceptions, including Chile, most of Latin America would soon be swept by this so-called pink tide, and in the cases of Venezuela, Bolivia, and Ecuador calls for "twenty-first-century socialism" would begin to resonate. The arrival of these new left governments complicated the status of grassroots movements, sometimes co-opting them and putting brakes on their militancy and sometimes opening up new spaces for them. In Venezuela, for example, the *comités de tierras urbanas* (urban land committees), neighborhood organizations based on participatory democracy, have become spaces of resistance that often challenge the political boundaries set by the state that helped to create them (Motta, 2011; 2012). Although highly complex and contradictory, the arrival of Latin America's "pink tide"

would soon spark debates as to whether the region was entering a new phase of "post-neoliberalism" (Kaltwasser, 2011).

Parallel to these developments, a reinvigorated right wing has been fiercely fighting back. In some cases, most notably in Bolivia, it has been organizing secessionist movements (Webber, 2011), and in the cases of Honduras and Paraguay successful coups were orchestrated with the support of the United States. The right has also won elections, most notably in Chile, where the government of Sebastián Piñera became one of the leading neoliberal administrations in the region, defeating Michelle Bachelet and the government of the Concertación de Partidos por la Democracia (Coalition of Parties for Democracy) in 2010. A year and a half later, the Piñera government faced its first major challenge and one of the biggest mass movements in recent Latin American history. Sometimes dubbed the "Chilean spring," since May 2011 the student movement has brought both students and workers to the streets. Importantly, this is also a crucial challenge for the Chilean left, which is struggling to reinvent itself while facing the legacies and complexities of the national political landscape.

The Partido Comunista de Chile (Communist Party of Chile—PCCh) is historically the most important anticapitalist political force in the country. Founded in 1912, the PCCh has actively promoted workers' rights for over 100 years and developed a strong base in unions, universities, and working-class neighborhoods. In the 1930s it adopted a Stalinist organizational structure characterized by a vertical model through which the central committee dominated decision making at all levels of the party. The central committee is elected in the national congress by delegates from local and regional branches, not by direct vote of the general membership, and is alone responsible for appointing the secretary-general.

In the 1960s, the PCCh became one of Salvador Allende's key allies in his short-lived socialist government. Following the coup against Allende on September 11, 1973, the PCCh became the target of brutal repression by the Pinochet dictatorship. This ended with the imprisonment, torture, and death of thousands of PCCh members. Thousands of others fled the country in exile. In 1977, the PCCh regrouped and led a clandestine resistance against the dictatorship. In the 1980s, the party went on to become an important figure in the massive anti-Pinochet protests. Since the 1990s, several attempts have been made to reform its top-down structure, but they have all failed.

Parallel to this, a coalition led by Democracia Cristiana (Christian Democracy) was formed in the mid-1980s. This coalition led the successful campaign to end Pinochet's rule in the 1988 plebiscite and subsequently took the name of the Concertación. Also part of this coalition was what Leiva (2012) calls the "permitted left"—the Partido Socialista (Socialist Party), the Partido por la Democracia (Party for Democracy), and the Partido Radical Social Demócrata (Radical Social Democratic Party), "permitted" because they accepted the military's wish to maintain Pinochet's neoliberal framework for the country as a condition for the transition to democracy.

Because of its support for the activities of the urban militia Frente Patriótico Manuel Rodríguez (Manuel Rodríguez Patriotic Front), the PCCh was left outside the Concertación. Nevertheless, it ultimately supported the vote against

Pinochet. In 1989, Patricio Aylwin won the presidential elections, beginning a cycle of four Concertación governments. In the coming years, the Concertación offered no more than to put a "human face" on neoliberal policies, while conducting negotiations in a top-down manner known popularly as *cupulismo* (Carruthers and Rodriguez, 2009).

Throughout the 1990s, the PCCh remained marginalized, running presidential candidates during elections but ultimately supporting Concertación candidates to avoid a victory by the right. This strategy did not, however, prevent the victory of Sebastian Piñera in 2010. Then, in the context of the student mobilizations that began in 2011, the PCCh began to toy with the idea of "a new majority" capable of forming a "new type of government" (something the party began to discuss publicly in 2009). This idea would come to fruition in 2013 with the creation of the Nueva Mayoría (New Majority), the political coalition replacing the Concertación, now including the PCCh as well as other left political parties and individuals. Led by the now president of Chile Michelle Bachelet, the Nueva Mayoría became the country's ruling government in 2014. This is the political context in which the Chilean student movement now finds itself.

One of the debates about the student movement is whether it expresses something new in the country's political landscape or is simply a continuation of traditional demands and forms of organization of the historical left. Those emphasizing its traditional elements (see Guzmán-Concha, 2012)[1] remind us that student activism has a long history in Chile and that there is nothing new about student bodies such as the Federación de Estudiantes de la Universidad de Chile (University of Chile Student Federation—FECH) having a prominent role in the country's politics. They also point to the important role that the Central Unitaria de Trabajadores de Chile (United Worker's Central of Chile—CUT), Chile's oldest union central, played during the mobilizations of 2011. Lastly, they stress that the movement's most emblematic leader, Camila Vallejo, is a member of the PCCh and that the memory of Salvador Allende was routinely honored on the streets through a variety of posters and costumes.

Although the student movement is indeed very much the expression of Chile's particular left history, it simultaneously goes beyond it. As we will see, by demanding (among other things) free public education and relying on an organizational approach that emphasizes participatory democracy and horizontal relations the movement stood in sharp opposition to both the Piñera government and the Concertación. Its relationship to the PCCh is more complex, however, at times accepting some of its positions and leaders but at others rejecting them in favor of the Izquierda Autónoma (Autonomous Left—IA). While still emerging, the IA is an organized anticapitalist political current that practices direct democracy and horizontalism and has a significant base in several universities. As such, it is an important player within the student movement. In contrast to the PCCh, which is committed to pursuing the electoral path, the IA and the student movement more broadly have an ambiguous and even contradictory relationship to political parties and the state.

THE NEOLIBERAL EDUCATION SYSTEM IN CHILE

For the past 30 years, the central role of the Chilean educational system has been to expand the accumulation of capital. This has been done through the deepening of the educational model first developed by the dictatorial regime of Augusto Pinochet. Central to this model was the transfer of fiscal responsibility for public elementary and secondary education to the municipal level and the creation of new state-subsidized private schools. This model largely succeeded in expanding private education in the country. For example, in 1981, 78 percent of students attended the public system, a figure that dropped to 50 percent by 2004. This trend continued into the Concertación's last government so that, by 2008, enrollment in subsidized private schools actually surpassed that in public ones (Burton, 2012; Chovanec and Benitez, 2008). This is not surprising given that the Concertación's education policies, though shifting somewhat over the years, nevertheless remained within the bounds of the Ley Orgánica Constitucional de Enseñanza (Constitutional Statutory Law of Education) developed by the Pinochet regime (see Burton, 2012). Sensing a growing discontent with the education system in much of the population, Piñera's right-wing government did what has become typical of neoliberal ideology. Rather than recognizing the neoliberal policies in the sector as flawed and making the appropriate policy changes, the government sought to "reform" them by deepening privatization even further, particularly in primary and secondary schooling.

A similar situation is taking place at the postsecondary level. Here, the ratio between students attending public and those attending private institutions has decreased dramatically in the past two decades. Indeed, by 2010 the number of students attending private universities (305,769) for the first time surpassed those attending public ones (281,528) (Aguayo Ormeño, 2011). In addition, the government has allowed a steady increase in tuition fees, 60 percent in 12 years. In 2011 the average annual tuition was US$6,150.[2] This makes it the most expensive in the world, representing no less than 40 percent of the family income of those in the bottom three quintiles of the income ladder (Fontaine, 2011). At the heart of the problem is that the ratio between public and private spending in education is dramatically tilted toward the latter, especially when compared with the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) average (Confederación de Estudiantes de Chile, 2011). In addition, Chile spends merely 0.5 percent of its gross domestic product on postsecondary education, ranking lowest in the world (Castillo Melgarejo, 2012: 7). Indeed, in a recent comparative study carried out by UNESCO, Chile is singled out for allowing the private sector to have excessive participation in the education system and for failing to meet the standards of "free education" as outlined in Article 13 of the United Nation's International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (Muñoz, 2011).

Deepening privatization has, in turn, opened the door to transnational capitalists, particularly banks, which have been more than happy to provide students with ample debt loads to finance their studies. Currently, approximately 350,000 Chileans hold student loans from private financial institutions, and

debt loads often reach US$30,000 for professional programs such as engineering (do Rosario, 2012). Students can also get government-guaranteed loans from Crédito con Aval del Estado (State-Guaranteed Loans), which, in response to the movement, recently lowered its interest rate from 5.8 percent to 2 percent (interest rates from private institutions are usually around 7 percent). Debt loads can be so high, however, that loans can take several years to repay. Indeed, debt loads reached such a level that Chilean students began to migrate to neighboring countries in search of more accessible education. As a result of this "educational exile," 10,000 Chileans are now studying in Argentina (Marin, 2011).

In addition, the postsecondary system is highly class-divided. At both the public and state-subsidized schools, working-class students receive a second-rate elementary and secondary education. Those who move on to postsecondary studies find themselves in underfunded public universities or in poor-quality private ones in programs that offer highly uncertain opportunities in the labor market. Following graduation, the outcome for these students can often be unskilled, low-wage, and precarious employment, if not unemployment. In contrast, upper-class students attend private schools and universities where they are socialized to internalize the prevailing values of free markets and individual success. These students have a much better chance of obtaining a management position at a large corporation or a prominent position in the public sector.

This education system reinforces one of the most unequal Latin American societies. In fact, Chile is the most unequal country in the OECD, with a Gini coefficient of 0.50 (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2011). Indeed, using UN development indicators, one study shows that while 20 percent of Chile's population has incomes comparable to those in "rich countries" such the United States, two- thirds of the population have incomes comparable with those in countries considered "very poor" such as Angola (Guzmán, 2011). In addition, between 2006 and 2009 the level of poverty increased from 13.7 to 15.1 percent, even as social spending was increased significantly by the administration of Michelle Bachelet (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, 2010; World Bank, 2013). Importantly, all this was happening despite high levels of annual growth in Chile, indeed, the highest in Latin America. Thus, while the so-called Chilean miracle has blessed the rich, it has been a curse for the popular classes, with students being among the hardest-hit.

For example, 83 percent of students attending the public municipal schools live in households in which the average monthly income is less than 180,000 pesos (US$330), but two out of three students attending paid school were supported by an average family income of 1,526,000 pesos (US$2,700). In 2004, 64 percent of the highest scores in the standardized university admissions tests came from students enrolled in the paid secondary schools. However, 93.2 percent of students attending municipal high schools failed to obtain grades high enough to be accepted to traditional universities. Not surprisingly, only 10–20 percent of young Chileans belonging to the poorest 40 percent are currently enrolled in postsecondary education.

STUDENTS FIGHT BACK

Neoliberal education in Chile has led to growing consciousness among secondary and university students that the entire educational system needs to be radically changed in favor of a more inclusive and democratic public one. The first signs of this growing unrest occurred in 2006, during the secondary student rebellions against the neoliberal education law originally created by Pinochet and maintained by the Concertación governments. Importantly, these took place in the context of wider social unrest, in particular environmental and antimining mobilizations led by citizens' groups and Mapuche indigenous communities (Carruthers and Rodriguez, 2009; Webber and Gordon, 2008) but also subsequent mobilizations by subcontracted workers and public transit activists (Ruiz, 2012). The student movement or "penguin revolution" (a reference to the students' uniform design) caught most by surprise, including many Chilean intellectuals who argued that the youth in the country were only interested in parties and soccer (Valdebenito, 2009).

The students began with a modest demand: a free bus pass to get to school. They organized themselves through the Asamblea de Estudiantes Secundarios Metropolitana (Metropolitan High School Student Assembly), based on direct participation and the use of rotating spokespeople who were tasked with voicing the assembly's decisions. This is very different from the traditional way democracy is practiced in the institutions of liberal democracy such as congresses, parties, and unions, in which, once elected, political leaders can make decisions without consulting the base. In addition, the assemblies brought together students of diverse political backgrounds, allowing competing political visions to coexist (Chovanec and Benitez, 2008; Valdebenito, 2009). These organizational features of the movement, which strongly expressed the politics of autonomism, were to continue during the mobilizations that began in 2011.

As the movement developed, students expanded their demands to include consideration of education as a right rather than a commodity and an end to the subsidiary role of the state in its provision and delivery. To this end, 500,000 students participated in a general strike that combined street mobilizations and high school seizures, shaking the Bachelet government. Eventually the movement faded, as its leadership became trapped in negotiations with the government. Nevertheless, the students forced the Bachelet administration to recognize the crisis in education as real and the deeply authoritarian character of the education laws inherited from the military.

In 2011, the second phase of the movement got under way. This occurred in the context of growing social mobilization by different sectors of the Chilean working class struggling against low wages, labor flexibilization, the firing of civil servants, and mining development. In addition, people angrily voiced their opposition to the construction of hydroelectric, coal-fired, and nuclear power plants that threatened their health and the environment. On January 11, in the southern province of Magallanes, communities declared a civil strike to protest the abrupt hike in gas prices decreed by the Piñera government. On this opportunity, 24 social organizations created the Asamblea Ciudadana de Magallanes (Magallanes Citizens' Assembly). The assembly, another expression of the politics of autonomism, took direct control of the main cities,

blocking highways, building urban barricades, even declaring a curfew on vehicles, and demanding that the government annul the price increase. For seven days it operated independent of political parties and was able to mobilize 30,000 people on a daily basis, asserting itself as the real government in Magallanes. This forced the Piñera government to reduce the price hike to 3 percent and increase gas subsidies for poor families.

Adding to the momentum, on May 12 secondary and university students called a national day of protest against the poor quality of the education system. Coordinating through their respective student bodies and the social media, they took to the streets in the main Chilean cities from Arica to Punta Arenas. The mobilization received the support of the CUT, the Colegio de Profesores de Chile (Teachers' Association of Chile), the main university student federations, and the Asociación Nacional de Empleados Fiscales (National Association of Public Servants). In Santiago alone, 30,000 demonstrators voiced their demands: an end to "market education," reduction of student debts, increased funding for public universities, and the democratization of educational institutions. It has been estimated that more than 100,000 students and supporters across the country participated in this day of protest.

Tired of waiting for a meaningful response from the government, the students proceeded to call a national strike for June 30. The mobilizations on this day showed high levels of militancy. Secondary students in Santiago seized more than 100 high schools, some of which continued to operate but under the democratic management of teachers and students. In the capital alone, more than 100,000 people took to the streets while another 100,000 did the same in the rest of the country. It quickly became clear that the movement's political consciousness was growing. For example, when government officials asserted that there simply were not enough funds to meet the students' demands, Camila Vallejo, president of the FECH and a PCCh member, responded by saying that if transnational corporations were stopped from stealing the country's natural resources the government would have enough money to finance not only free public education for all but also free health care.

It was at this point that Vallejo became the leading voice of the movement, garnering wide international recognition. She was even named "person of the year" by the influential British paper the *Guardian*. Her leadership role involved a complex relationship with the movement and the PCCh. The more she distanced herself from the PCCh and its traditional practices and politics, the more acceptance she received from the movement, and the closer she moved to the PCCh the less credible she was considered. Therefore, at the height of her popularity she often refused to take ownership of the movement and even publicly criticized the PCCh's leadership for sending condolences to the North Korean government on the death of Kim Jong Il. The distance she maintained from the party would prove difficult to sustain.

In a matter of months, then, a struggle to improve education had quickly evolved into a movement that struck at the heart of the neoliberal model in Chile—its natural resource industries, which unambiguously favor foreign corporations (Webber and Gordon, 2008). The student movement achieved its first victory when Piñera was forced to change his education minister, Joaquín Lavín, a former junior minister in the Pinochet governments and a member of

Opus Dei, whose personal popularity had declined to just 8 percent. Lavín was supposed to be the next presidential candidate of the right-wing alliance still in office at the time.

MORE THAN A STUDENT MOVEMENT

Since the return of liberal democracy to Chile, the country has witnessed what some have called "the neo-liberalization of solidarity" (Dockendorff, Brugnoli, and Sprovera, 2010), meaning that the concept and practice have been progressively linked to the interests of the private sector via corporate social responsibility schemes and "social marketing." In the light of this, another crucial achievement of the student movement has been its ability to go beyond itself and garner support from broad sectors of the population, helping to rearticulate solidarity as a public and working-class value. Parents, teachers, and copper miners openly and actively expressed their support, recognizing that all their grievances against the neoliberal regime were being expressed in the student strike. In other words, the student struggle soon became the vehicle through which broad-based popular dissatisfaction became articulated.

The government responded quickly by threatening to declare an early winter break to the school year and even its possible cancellation. In addition, the corporate media began a demonization campaign against the students, using isolated incidents of violence conducted by *los encapuchados* (the black bloc) to delegitimize the whole movement. Responding to these attacks, Vallejo asserted that, although these violent provocateurs did not represent the collectively agreed-upon tactics of the student movement, their actions were driven by their marginalization from the system and their rage had to be understood as a reaction to their future-less position at the bottom of the neoliberal ladder. At the same time, she added, government infiltration of some of these groups could not be ruled out. Indeed, adding to the suspicion, about 100 encapuchados were found attempting to torch the central offices of the Colegio de Profesores, a staunch ally of the student movement.

On August 9 and 18, gigantic demonstrations took place in Santiago and in the main Chilean cities. Between 150,000 and 200,000 marched in the capital to express their support for the students' decision that dialogue with the government was not possible until it accepted the main elements of their proposal. Families with small children, artists, teachers, and workers expressed their commitment to be part of this democratic movement demanding a democratic society and the end of 30 years of neoliberalism in the country. Even elite private secondary high school students joined the movement.

At the height of the movement, it was estimated that out of the 4 million students in Chile, 500,000 actively participated in the struggle. However, it is clear that many layers of society were also actively involved. For example, the movement's call for people to show their solidarity by banging pots and pans (*cacerolazos*) at night was taken up by entire neighborhoods, which mobilized in public squares, streets, and highways, bringing back memories of the anti-Pinochet struggle in the 1980s. Further proof of the movement's wide appeal was evident during a meeting held by "families for education" on August 21 in

Santiago's main central park. The meeting attracted 1 million people in support of the students' demands.

The next wave of actions unfolded on August 24 and 25 and led to the movement's first national strike, called by the CUT. The strike was supported fully by the students, as well as teachers, civil servants, human rights organizations, intellectuals, artisans, artists, shantytown dwellers, and physicians' associations. In addition to their more traditional demands for better salaries, a new labor code, and an end to precarious jobs, the CUT also demanded free and quality education. The demonstrations were some of the largest yet, bringing together 600,000 people across the country. The strike affected 15 Chilean regions and 90 cities. Despite heavy police repression and mass arrests, the organizers of the demonstrations called the events a great success and promised further actions if their demands were not met. The strike was particularly significant because it took the CUT out of the relatively narrow scope of action it had settled into since in 1988, the year it was refounded to fit the Concertación's political goals. At the same time, the strike had a bureaucratic character, lacking the creativity and audacity of the students, which shows some of the CUT's limits in supporting the student struggle up to this point.

Demonstrating a high level of intergenerational working-class solidarity, when the leaders of the student movement were asked by the media why they supported the CUT, they simply explained that many of the CUT's members were the students' parents. The simplicity of this answer begins to make sense when we look back at the start of the movement. As Chovanec and Benitez (2008) note in their case study in the province of Arica, the sudden reemergence of social action in Chile during the first phase of the student movement in 2006 can be attributed in part to the intergenerational learning that took place as a result of the women's movement, which fought against the Pinochet dictatorship and passed on a "critical social consciousness" to the new generation.[3] In other words, although tensions between the younger students and the older generations may not completely be avoided, a thread of solidarity runs through the movement, in part explaining the broad-based support for it. Empowered by this support, the students began to intensify their demands, calling for a constituent assembly through which to do away with Pinochet's education law and strengthen the state's role in the provision of education.

THE STRUGGLE FOR A NEW LEFT

One of the key features of the movement is its disdain for preestablished elite political institutions, demonstrating its desire to create a politics that goes beyond the traditional modes of organization and resistance of the traditional Chilean left. For example, during the mobilizations, students occupied the headquarters of both right-wing and socialist parties. In addition, consistent with the deeply democratic and participatory history of the movement, students debated and discussed through assemblies, and the leadership remained closely aligned with the demands of the base. Through these assemblies, students planned protests and articulated their demands using a combination of consensus and voting. Importantly, the assemblies brought together students

of different political stripes and even party affiliations, helping to break down sectarian tendencies. Assemblies were held not on fixed schedules but whenever they were deemed needed by the movement; during periods of particular importance, several assemblies might be held in a single week. Although this format allowed for large numbers of people to participate in decision making, it had some disadvantages. First, it required a great deal of stamina in the participants, something that might not always be available at a given point in the struggle. Second, the locations where the assemblies were held (tilted toward city centers) tended to exclude people living in the peripheries.

Another example of the students' search for a new left is evident in their reworking of the historic chant "El pueblo unido jamás sera vencido" (The people united will never be defeated) to "El pueblo unido avanza sin partidos" (The people united advance without parties). Indeed, later in the struggle the students engaged in a successful antivoting campaign, once again expressing their distrust of electoral politics. The editor of *Le Monde Diplomatique Chile* perhaps best captured the sentiment: "The youth trust only in their own strength" (de la Fuente, 2011: 5). The distaste for the political class went beyond the student population, however. At this stage in the conflict, surveys showed the popularity of Piñera, his government, and all major parties at an all-time low. Not surprisingly, students rejected calls for dialogue from politicians of the Concertación, as well as the reform proposals presented by the minister of education. Faced with these attempts at co-optation, the students reiterated their demand for a radically different educational system linked to an alternative development model based on the recovery of national resources and tax reform.

The movement also displayed a remarkable degree of tactical creativity. For example, as a response to the government's declaration of early holidays, the students took to the streets in bathing suits and snorkel equipment (in the middle of winter!). The movement turned whole sections of cities into surrealist carnivals that even the mainstream media could not resist. A search on YouTube produces videos documenting some of the students' most memorable performances, including *el gagazo*, a dance-a-thon to the music of Lady Gaga in the capital's central square, *el besatón*, a mass kissing marathon, and flash mobs of mock suicides. Some of these actions were coordinated with the help of the social media, for example, through the use of instructional dance videos. Lastly, in response to the media's incorrect depiction of the movement as essentially violent, the students collected hundreds of tear gas canisters and used them to form giant peace signs on the streets. Some students even took the time to repaint houses damaged during the protests and collect funds to compensate individuals whose cars had been torched by the encapuchados. These were tactics that, of course, were completely foreign to the union movement as well as the political parties, including those on the left.

By September 2011 the movement had begun to face stronger co-optation attempts by the government. The government agreed to meet with the Colegio de Profesores, the Consejo de Rectores de las Universidades Chilenas (Council of Chilean University Rectors), the national confederation of secondary students, and the Confederación de Estudiantes de Chile (Student Confederation of Chile—CONFECH), the student body representing the country's public universities, to initiate a round of talks. However, the dialogue proved that the

government had no serious intention of considering the main demand of the students, free public education for all, making the ludicrous argument that it would be unfair if the taxes paid by the poor went to financing the education of the rich. Fearing that a huge hole might be opened in the neoliberal edifice, Piñera offered instead to increase the number of grants the state guarantees for student loans, write off low-income students' debts, and increase funding for public universities. The students left the negotiating table feeling that the government was not negotiating in good faith. By persistently rejecting the students' demands, the government attempted to prevent an avalanche of new related demands, such as the "renationalization" of the copper industry (which since 1992 has featured extensive participation of multinationals through joint ventures and other mechanisms), tax reform, and a constituent assembly, all of which had begun to enter the public debate as a result of the student movement.

The opposition, the PCCh included, soon entered into Piñera's negotiation tactics, submitting a counterproposal demanding free postsecondary education for only part of the student body, which was not what the CONFECH was demanding. In other words, the opposition attempted to co-opt the movement by presenting a watered-down version of its demands. By negotiating with the opposition, the government succeeded in temporarily weakening the movement. According to Camilo Ballesteros, a prominent student leader and member of the PCCh, the party's strategy or "formula" consisted of using all the political spaces available, even those initiated by the government. Not part of the formula, he explained, was the creation of parallel political forums, the approach preferred by the IA.

Whatever one may think of it, the PCCh's willingness to negotiate with the government and attempt to represent the students' demands was far from the sentiment on the streets. This sentiment was nicely captured by Cristián Cuevas, former president of the Confederación de Trabajadores del Cobre (Confederation of Copper Workers) and PCCh member,[4] who noted that what was new about the movement was that it expressed people's desire to do away with political mediators and be protagonists of their own history (Cuevas, 2011: 18). With this in mind, it is not surprising that, in a joint declaration, CONFECH, the Asamblea Coordinadora de Estudiantes Secundarios (Coordinating Assembly of Secondary Students—ACES), and the Coordinadora Nacional de Estudiantes Secundarios (National Coordinator of Secondary Students—CONES) rejected both government and opposition proposals. This was an important moment of unity for the movement, especially for the two competing secondary education bodies.[5] However, it was starting to be evident that the student movement was unable to break the stubborn, dogmatic ideology of the government. Piñera's government went on the offensive by sending a bill to the congress that would make it more difficult for people to protest freely on the streets, obviously seeking to restrict student activism. Piñera's strategy relied on the natural erosion of the already long student mobilization, which had become trapped in routine tactics, was facing the end of academic year, and had split in its position toward the congressional commission discussing the budget.

In addition, university student federations traditionally enter into an election period at the end of December. The fact that several of the most prominent student leaders belonged to different political parties or groups, sometimes with contradictory visions of how to continue the struggle, generated deep tensions within the movement. These tensions came to the surface in the 2011 elections at the emblematic Universidad de Chile (University of Chile). In the 2010 elections, united leftist groups had won the majority in the FECH, electing Camila Vallejo president.[6] This demonstrated the capacity for various left currents to cooperate, an approach that the movement greatly favored over the traditional sectarian approach of the left. However, in December 2011 the Juventudes Comunistas de Chile (Young Communists of Chile—JJCC) decided to present Vallejo's candidacy for the presidency in a separate bid from that of their former leftist allies. This was an attempt to capitalize on Vallejo's popularity, which they thought would bring them certain victory in the elections. In other words, the JJCC attempted to take ownership of the movement, a move that ignited infighting among all the leftist groups. Reverting to its old practices, the left went into the election divided into seven separate slates.

In a surprising result, Vallejo was defeated in the second round by Gabriel Boric, a member of the IA. She settled for the vice presidency. Furthermore, the JJCC was also defeated in Universidad de Concepción (University of Concepción) and Universidad de Santiago (University of Santiago). Revealing of the tensions that exist within the movement, in our interview Camilo Ballesteros played down Boric's victory, noting that the PCCh nevertheless received the majority of the votes. Furthermore, he described the IA as an elite minority that was generally not well regarded by the popular classes.

The result of these elections is less surprising, however, once we recognize that, in contrast to the PCCh, the IA is in touch with the student movement and understands its desire for a new left politics. Francisco Figueroa Cerda, member of the IA and former vice president of the FECH, demonstrates this in his criticism of what he sees as the PCCh's simplistic nostalgia for Allende and its willingness to participate uncritically in the "political system." For him, Allende lives in the building of a new politics adequate to the times, not as part of a sad wax museum that no longer represents those on the streets (Figueroa Cerda, 2011).

Indeed, the IA once again captured the FECH presidency in 2012, this time with Andrés Fielbaum, demonstrating that its antisystemic and antiparty stance has strong appeal in at least the university sector. As had Boric, Fielbaum emphasized the need for continued struggle and reaching out to students in the private universities, a task that continues to prove a challenge. Tellingly, the victory of the IA over the JJCC came at a time when several communist student leaders, including Ballesteros, decided to pursue the electoral path in the municipal elections of October 2012. In addition, Vallejo had already begun to move closer to the PCCh traditional practices. For example, in April 2012 she was part of a delegation that traveled to Cuba for the fiftieth anniversary of the country's Unión de Jovenes Comunistas (Young Communists' League), where she was part of a three-hour meeting with Fidel Castro. Not surprisingly, soon after she announced her congressional candidacy with the PCCh in the elections in November 2013.

Despite some of the movement's challenges, one thing was clear at this point: the movement had inflicted strategic blows on the Piñera government, challenged the system of inequalities, and in so doing attracted the support of the majority of Chileans. Never before had a social movement autonomously directed by democratic assemblies from below developed with such success. The question then became whether the movement could take advantage of its momentum while avoiding co-optation by the Concertación. Indeed, signs of unrest persisted. In the Patagonian region of Aysen, citizens organized themselves in the transversal movement called Tu Problema Es Mi Problema (Your Problem is My Problem). In 2012 they temporarily paralyzed the region, demanding from the central government a 20 percent reduction in fuel prices, a minimum regional salary of 250,000 pesos (US$300), higher pensions for retirees, citizen participation through binding consultations, higher quotas for artisan fishermen, subsidies for electricity and drinking water, a regionalized food basket, and a high-quality public university for the region.

In addition, important changes began to take place within the CUT. On August 23, 2012, it elected Barbara Figueroa as president, the first woman to hold that position. Figueroa is a PCCh member and one of the leaders of the teachers' college. She is therefore well versed in the issues students are dealing with and has played a highly supportive role throughout the demonstrations. In addition, she recently proposed a major change within the CUT—that future elections be conducted by the direct vote of the membership rather than the current delegate system. She has also described as urgent the need to increase union membership while building a strong, autonomous, and independent union movement (Becerra, 2012).

These proposed changes are very much in the direction of the active and participatory democracy being practiced by the students. Indeed, on June 26, 2012, the copper workers and students successfully organized a national strike demanding the nationalization of the copper industry and free and quality education, an event supported by the CUT. At the same time, however, Figueroa, following the PCCh's strategy, went on to support Bachelet's candidacy for the Nueva Mayoría even before knowing her platform. Therefore the question remains whether Figueroa's affiliation with the PCCh will at some point generate distance between her and the movement, as was the case with Vallejo, or whether it will lead to democratic renovation within the PCCh.

CONCLUSION

Beginning in May 2011, the Chilean student movement presented the neoliberal administration of Sebastián Piñera with a major political challenge. Its demand for free and quality education aims to overturn the neoliberal educational model first developed during the Pinochet dictatorship, but it goes farther than this. By proposing the renationalization of the copper industry as a way to fund public education, the movement strikes at the heart of Chilean neoliberalism, anchored in foreign control of natural resources industries. In addition, the student movement has developed a new sense of power that cuts across broad sectors of society, reestablishing solidarity as a popular, working-class value

rather than the neoliberal version that had developed over the past 20 years. Lastly, the movement is actively trying to articulate a new left politics in the country, one that highlights the necessity for active struggle, participatory democracy, and new political alliances as engines of social change.

Many obstacles and uncertainties remain, however. The student struggle is going on its fourth year now, and it is hard to say how much stamina it has left. Certainly the full support of organized and unorganized workers is crucial. In this respect, the direction the new leadership of the CUT takes in the coming months and years will be decisive. Furthermore, divisions over tactics persist, particularly when it comes to the encapuchados. Another danger is evident in public statements made by government officials insinuating that, as in the early 1970s, violent repression may be the only solution to continued mobilizations. However, the most recent municipal and congressional elections suggest that avoiding co-optation by the political system may be the movement's biggest challenge.

The winner of the 2012 municipal elections was the Concertación. It defeated the Piñera-led coalition by almost 6 points, 43.21 percent to 37.52 percent, while winning 106 of 345 municipalities. PCCh candidates managed to win only 6 municipalities. The loss of 21 municipalities forced Piñera to shuffle his cabinet. However, the real story of the elections is that absenteeism reached a dramatic 57 percent. This can partly be explained by the antivoting campaign organized by several student bodies, expressing, once again, their rejection of the established political class, including the PCCh, which, once again revealing its disconnection from the movement's base, simultaneously engaged in a campaign to get out the vote. In other words, the outcome of the election reflects the movement's commitment to extraparliamentary politics and the Concertación's ability to capitalize on the anti-Piñera sentiments of the voting population. In short, it is clear that the student movement was unable (or unwilling) to crystallize its demands and ambitions into a new political organ it could trust, and, as a result, the neoliberal Concertación gained ground.

Another important development is that the IA, after boycotting the June 30 primaries, decided to run three candidates in the 2013 congressional elections: Francisco Figueroa (Ñuñoa), Daniela López (Valparaíso), and Gabriel Boric (Magallanes). The three candidates were nominated at the organization's general meeting in January 2013. However, they were technically running as independents, since the IA is not a party but a political organization. Nevertheless, this reflects a major shift in the IA's politics. It also reflects the organization's ambivalence about its relationship to the state and political parties. On the one hand, the IA promotes a politics that is vehemently independent from the established "political system" and based on direct and participatory democracy. Therefore it refuses to work with the Nueva Mayoría and has endorsed only one of its candidates, Cristián Cuevas, one of the PCCh's most left-wing members. As Boric (2012) puts it, "Nothing that is born out of the Concertación is born with life." The IA also publicly criticized Ballesteros for cheerleading Bachelet's candidacy in the 2013 primaries, revealing increasing tensions between it and the PCCh.

At the same time, the IA became open to electing candidates tasked with "representing" the organization in the "political system." This ambiguity in its

political identity is also expressed in its own documents, which display a heterodox Marxist approach with a degree of affinity for a number of political figures whose ideas are not easily reconcilable, including Che Guevara, Subcomandante Marcos, and Antonio Gramsci. Therefore it is not surprising that its demand for the formation of a constituent assembly remains vague and rests somewhat uneasily with its proposal for political decentralization. Of the three congressional candidates it ran in November 2013, only one, Boric, was victorious. Three other student leaders were elected: Vallejo (PCCh), Karol Cariola (PCCh), and Giorgio Jackson of Revolución Democrática (Democratic Revolution).

Overall, the results of the election were positive for the PCCh, which doubled its seats in congress, going from three to six. However, the big winner was the Nueva Mayoría's Michelle Bachelet. Receiving 62.16 percent of the vote during the second round of voting, Bachelet comfortably defeated Evelyn Matthei of the right-wing Alianza (Alliance). However, abstention was even higher than in the 2012 municipal elections, reaching 58 percent. This again shows widespread dissatisfaction with the political system. Nevertheless, it is clear that Bachelet managed to capture the imagination of the voting population with a message of change.

Bachelet's campaign promised reforms in three key areas: education, the constitution, and the taxation system. In the area of education, Bachelet promised to eliminate profit at all levels of the public education system. This means that only nonprofit educational institutions will receive government funding. In addition, education would become the responsibility of the national government rather than individual municipalities, and postsecondary education would be free within six years. In the area of the constitution, Bachelet's most notable promise was to change the electoral system from the current binomial system developed by the dictatorship to proportional representation. This change would have to be approved via a referendum. Importantly, she specified that any proposed changes to the constitution would have to come from the National Congress, making no mention of a constituent assembly. Finally, she promised to reform the tax code so as to increase the public funds available for social programs, in particular, reforms to the education system. Specifically, the reform would raise total tax revenue by a sum equal to 3 percent of the country's GDP (Bachelet, 2013).

It is clear that these promises go some way toward meeting the demands of the student movement. However, it is important to highlight how they fall short. Free education is granted but it is pushed six years into the future—two years past Bachelet's current presidential term. This can only leave a high degree of uncertainty as to her commitment to carry out reforms during her current term as president. What will happen to education reform if the Nueva Mayoría is not reelected in 2018? In addition, the person responsible for leading the proposed changes to the education system is Nicolás Eyzaguirre, recently designated by Bachelet as minister of education. Eyzaguirre is a former director of the International Monetary Fund and was the architect of the Crédito con Aval del Estado, the student loan system that, as mentioned above, was partly responsible for the mushrooming debt loads of Chilean students.

Bachelet's promises in the areas of taxation and constitutional reform are also problematic. She promises to raise taxes to pay for education, certainly a step in the right direction. However, this leaves out the students' more radical proposal for funding free education: nationalizing the copper industry. Similarly, her proposal for constitutional reform is focused on electoral reform and gives the initiative to the congress. All citizens would do in the end is approve or reject the proposal it comes up with. The student movement's more radical proposal is for a constituent assembly through which citizens themselves can develop a variety of proposals for constitutional change. This is important because one of the students' key demands was to do away with the current education law. Bachelet's proposal for constitutional reform would leave this law intact.

We will soon see how the student movement responds to Bachelet and the Nueva Mayoría. What is clear is that Chilean neoliberalism has so far largely withstood the challenge presented by the students, workers, and communities that have struggled since the summer of 2011. Although many on the left will likely welcome the Bachelet government into debates about post-neoliberalism in the region, in our view it is unlikely to produce substantial reforms. The more likely outcome is a form of rearticulated neoliberalism—neoliberalism "with a human face." Nevertheless, the student movement has made its mark. For example, Gabriel Boric and Giorgio Jackson recently proposed a 50 percent reduction in salary for elected representatives, sparking fierce debates about the elite character of the Chilean congress. In addition, at a recent congressional homage for Jaime Guzmán, a former senator and key ideologue during the Pinochet dictatorship, Camila Vallejo alone remained seated in protest. It is by combining these acts of dissent in the congress with a new cycle of dissent outside it that a new Chilean left can continue to grow and more profound inroads into Chilean neoliberalism can be made possible.

NOTES

1. This article compares the Chilean student movement with recent movements, including Occupy Wall Street, the *indignados*, and the Arab Spring.

2. Tuition fees vary only slightly between private and public universities. For example, minimum and maximum tuitions at the public Universidad de Chile are approximately US$4,400 (arts) and US$9,100 (medicine), while at the private Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile they are US$4,000 (arts) and US$10,700 (medicine). Some universities do offer specialized programs at lower tuition, such as social work at the Universidad Internacional SEK, which costs approximately US$1,380 (Ministerio de Educación, 2013).

3. As Chovanec and Benitez suggest, this phenomenon is not to be taken as a full explanation for the reemergence of social action in Chile, but it does provide important clues for the continuity of social movements in the country.

4. That Cuevas is also a prominent PCCh member highlights the real tensions within the party with regard to the way it understands and relates to the movement, tensions that the PCCh publicly plays down or denies.

5. CONES coordinates the "prestigious schools" and is usually favored by the government, while ACES coordinates the more radical "underprivileged groups" (Pousadela, 2012).

6. Although the Universidad de Chile and the FECH are perhaps the most important organs of the student movement, there are other important student organizations that contain their own political dynamics and therefore need to be looked at in close detail.

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