



Vol. 7, No. 2, Winter 2010, 1-51
www.ncsu.edu/project/acontracorriente

Social Class and Popular Mobilisation in Chile: 1970 -1973¹

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The Popular Unity (UP) government of President Salvador Allende in Chile from 1970 to the coup of September 1973 attracted international interest. The UP government was a rare example of an attempt to combine structural reform with institutional and constitutional legality. It offers a case study of the problems attendant upon a process of profound economic, social and political reform intent upon transference of state power from one class to another. The questions provoked by the UP experience touch upon central issues of political debate. How far and how fast can a political system absorb profound change and yet remain a parliamentary and

¹ This article was originally written in the 1970s. For a variety of reasons it was not published at the time. It seemed to me worth presenting now as a tribute to the important research carried out in Chile during the years of the Popular Unity government. It does not take account of recent important research on the subject such as the excellent account in Julio Pinto ed. *Cuando Hicimos Historia: la Experiencia de la Unidad Popular* (LOM Ediciones: 2005) or Claudio Rolle ed., *1973: la Vida Cotidiana de Un Año Crucial* (Planeta: 2003) to name but two. It has, however, been revised, and modified. I would like to thank Juan Luis Ossa, Joaquín Fernández, Susan McRae, and as always, Samuel Valenzuela for their comments.

constitutional democracy? How do social classes react under conditions of economic crisis and political stress? Is it possible for a radical government to win over the hostile middle sectors in order to gain majority support?

Very rarely has the relevance of a class system to political behaviour been as obvious as in those turbulent years in Chile. The attempt at basic reform, the debate it provoked, and the crisis it caused, threw the Chilean class system into sharp relief. Both government and opposition mobilised those social classes where their support lay, and both attempted to win the support of the middle sectors in order to move from a minority to a majority share of the electorate. Political conflict has rarely in Chile been posed in such clear class terms.²

It is not my intention here to consider general explanations of the UP government's behaviour, nor of its fall. Instead, this article will examine important issues in the process of political and social change and will draw attention to the important research published during this period in Chile—research that has often been overlooked in later writings on the UP period.³ The purpose of this article is to examine the behaviour of key groups in the struggle for power in Chile, and to assess government policy towards those groups. These will include the middle sectors, the trade unions, women, the inhabitants of the shanty-towns—the *pobladores*, the rural sector, and the committees set up to secure the distribution of basic goods to the poorer sectors. Attention will be paid to the role of the media and the difficulties that the government encountered in attempting to reach a mass audience

² The experience of the UP government gave rise to a lively debate on the relationship between social class and the state. See, for example, Joan Garcés, *El Estado y los problemas tácticos en el gobierno de Allende* (Buenos Aires 1974), and a special issue of the *Cuadernos de la Realidad Nacional* (Santiago), No. 15, December 1972 entitled, “Revolución y Legalidad: Problemas del Derecho en Chile.”

³ Many interpretations ignore a great deal of the very valuable research conducted in Chile during the UP government—partly because much of it appeared in the form of unpublished documents or journals difficult to find. Two useful general surveys published soon after the coup are Jarina Rybacek-Mlynkova, *Chile Under Allende: a bibliographical survey*, Discussion Paper 63, Woodrow Wilson School, Princeton University, 1976; and Arturo Valenzuela and J.S. Valenzuela, 'Visions of Chile', *Latin American Research Review*, vol. X No. 3, Fall 1975. Two important books published soon after the fall of the UP are Manuel Castells, *La Lucha de Clases en Chile*, (Argentina 1974) and Stefan de Vylder, *Allende's Chile: the Political Economy of the Rise and Fall of the Unidad Popular* (London 1976).

with its message. The final sector will look at the popular mobilisation set off by the bosses' strike of 1972.

The first issue to be considered is the political behaviour of the middle sectors. Who were the middle sectors? How did they behave politically? The numerical size and political importance of this group made its support, or at least neutrality, a vital political factor in the strategy by which Allende intended to convert his electoral base from the minority vote he received in 1970 into an irresistible majority.

The basis of support for the UP came from the working class and the poor. Key roles were played by organised labour and by the inhabitants of the shanty-towns—the *pob1adores*. What was the policy of the government to these groups- and how did they respond to the appeals made by the government? The UP also wished to gain support from women. Men were more likely to have radical political beliefs than women although women suffered much more from the various forms of discrimination that were characteristic of Chile (and most other countries) at this time.

Rural unrest intensified the opposition of the right to the government. But it is far from the case that the newly unionised sectors were all supporters of the UP. The government was unable to enact more radical agrarian reform given the obstacles in its path. One initiative it did take was to create Price and Supply Committees (*Juntas de Abastecimiento y Precios*) in the poorer areas of Santiago especially. The success of these committees served to underline the commitment of the UP to improving the condition of the poor, but though they mobilised local committees, their overall political impact was limited.

The UP struggled to publicise its ideological message. The way that the opposition dominated the media made this very difficult if not impossible. Nevertheless, despite the control of the media by the Right, and uncertainty within the UP of quite what message it intended to transmit, both municipal elections in 1971 and congressional elections in 1973 showed the ability of the UP not only to hold on to its electoral base but even to increase it.

Political conflict reached its most intense level with the bosses' strike of October 1972. This produced the most radical form of popular

mobilisation in this period—the *cordones industriales*—the community and industrial organisations in the working class districts that formed a ring around Santiago. But impressive as these organisations were, they were largely responses to a crisis, and lacked clear and consistent support from important sectors of the UP government—exacerbating the uncertainty of the government as it entered the last year of its life.

One theme of this article is that the UP analysis of social class, and of the social groups considered here, rested on a rather mechanical application of Marxist ideas on the subject. The writings of politicians of the left tended to be rather abstract and derived from theoretical assumptions rather than empirical observation. Until the development in the late sixties of movements like the Left Revolutionary Movement (MIR) and the United Popular Action Movement (MAPU), the ideological debate on the left was largely between the Socialist and Communist parties.⁴ Much of that debate was conducted, and fiercely so, about the theoretical postulates of Marxism and the interpretation of the experiences of the USSR, Cuba, China or Yugoslavia, rather than the examining the meaning of socialism in the Chilean context.⁵

The parties of the left viewed society through the prism of their own interpretation of Marxism—and they were divergent interpretations. When the UP came to power, those differences were not only *not* resolved, but there was hardly any agreement amongst the various parties of the UP of the need for, or the way to win over, sectors of the middle class, or how to react to the processes of social change that were taking place at all levels. The UP government consisted not only of the Socialist and Communist

⁴ My book, *Politics and the Labour Movement in Chile* (London 1972) deals in detail with the relations between those two parties. Alain Touraine, *Vida y Muerte del Gobierno Popular* (Buenos Aires, 1974) has much perceptive commentary on the parties of the left – and indeed on the right.

⁵ As an example of such mechanical interpretations see Luis Corvalán, the secretary general of the Communist party, who wrote as follows: “The bourgeoisie of course are not homogeneous and there are antagonisms between their various groups. There is the top bourgeoisie, the monopoly type section linked with North American imperialism and the landed oligarchy. This sector is reactionary. But there is, in addition, the petty bourgeoisie which act with the proletariat, and the middle, wavering and unstable bourgeoisie, hovering around the centrist parties and at times siding with the working class and at others taking a reactionary stand. We are working to get the middle bourgeoisie to join the anti-feudal and anti-

parties—usually at odds in their long history since the 1930s and at best uncomfortable allies—but also contained other groups such as the MAPU, which had its own particular interpretation of Marxism and others like the Radical Party, which was not Marxist. And outside the formal coalition was the MIR, admiring the policies of Castro’s Cuba and wishing to incorporate the armed struggle into Chilean politics. With such divergent views it was hardly likely that there would be a consistent and a coherent view about the pace, direction and aims of the popular mobilisation seen necessary to make Chile a firmly socialist country.

The Politics of the Middle sectors

The term middle sectors is often preferred to the more usual middle class, as the *capas medias* as they are called in Spanish, consisted of a large number of groups with very little in common in terms of occupation, education, or lifestyle. But during the turbulent years of the UP they came to have more in common politically and in some senses could be seen as acting as a class.⁶ In Chile the middle sectors included those employed in the professions, white-collar workers in the manufacturing sector, most of those in the commercial and service sectors, and small and medium employers in a variety of occupations. Politically these groups had voted in the past for the Radical Party though many had shifted their allegiance to the Christian Democrats following the electoral success of that party in 1964. They were seen as hostile to the collectivist aims of the UP government. Yet they were also seen as vital to the aim of the UP to become a majority movement. But who were they—how numerous were they and what were their political allegiances?

Size and structure

The active labour force in Chile in 1970 has been estimated at 2.6 million. Of this total, 21% worked in agriculture, 16% in manufacturing

imperialist movement.” “Strengthening the National Liberation Front,” *World Marxist Review* (April 1959): 43-4.

⁶ Hence I have used both terms in the subsequent analysis.

industry, 12% in commerce and 27% in services.⁷ A large sector consisted of white-collar workers (*empleados*) who enjoyed many financial and legal privileges denied to blue-collar workers (*obreros*), had a separate system of union organisation, distinct political allegiances, and usually saw themselves as a superior social stratum above blue-collar labour (even if their wages were not necessarily higher than those of skilled manual labour).⁸ In manufacturing industry, white-collar workers made up 24% of the labour force: in the commercial sector, 29%: and in the service sector, 49%.⁹

The industrial structure was characterised by a large number of very small enterprises, and a relatively small number of very large oligopolistic concerns. Most industrial employment therefore was generated by companies with a very small workforce indeed; in 1960, 46% of the labour force in manufacturing worked in enterprises classified as artisanal, that is employing five workers or fewer. This sector was declining in importance. Compared with 1957, when there were an estimated 70,000 small and artisanal enterprises, by 1969 there were 28,700 (the decline being most marked in the artisanal as opposed to the slightly larger concern).¹⁰ But what was the class position of the employers of these small enterprises? Can they be called part of the bourgeoisie, with an assumed identity of interest with employers many times larger than them? Or could they be assumed to occupy an antagonistic position vis-à-vis monopoly capital, as Allende believed, and hence be won over to the UP camp?

Finally, the employees of the state itself were numerous and most had professions that placed them in the middle class. In 1970, 313,800

⁷ These are official census figures. See the detailed interpretation of the Chilean occupational structure in Castells, *Lucha*.

⁸ These points, and references to the literature on it, are contained in Angell, *Politics*, Chs. 3 & 4. See also Roberto Sánchez, "Las Capas Medias y la coyuntura política actual en Chile," *Nueva Sociedad* (Costa Rica), No. 15, (November-December 1974).

⁹ Sánchez, 57-80. As Samuel Valenzuela has pointed out, it is not quite so simple as this. Empleado unions were formed not only white-collar workers for privileged blue-collar workers sometimes managed to change their status to enjoy the higher benefits (better pensions and severance payments amongst others) enjoyed by the empleado unions. Moreover the sindicato profesional could be formed of workers who shared a common occupational definition (bakers for example).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 78.

people were employed directly by the central government and another 109,900 by various state enterprises.¹¹ Amongst the largest groups were the 73,000 teachers and educational administrators and the 55,000 health employees.¹² Although legally debarred from forming unions, in fact public employees circumvented the law and created very militant if not politically radical unions. Politically their allegiance was given normally to the non-Marxist parties (at first to the Radicals, but later to the Christian Democrats) and it was far from certain in 1970 that the employees of the state would assist in the transference of state power from one class to another.

Changes in the composition of the labour force generally worked in favour of the growth of the tertiary sector. The proportion employed in agriculture declined from 30% of the total work force in 1952 to 21% in 1970; and in manufacturing industry from 19% to 16%. But in the same period, employment in commerce rose from 10% of the labour force to 12%, and in services from 22% to 26%.¹³ In the service sector in the ten years after 1960, the labour force grew by 170,000 workers.¹⁴

Political Allegiance

Allende was very clear in his intentions to win the support of these groups and from the outset, Allende called for their involvement in the UP movement. Allende's speeches were full of references to the *capas medias*.

We guarantee that middle and small scale businesses may rely on the close collaboration of the State to ensure the sound development of their activities.¹⁵

We intend to take over 1000 estates this year. But there is nothing for the small and medium scale farmer to fear because we extend the same consideration, the same respect and the same regard to such farms as we extend to their industrial and commercial counterparts in Chile.¹⁶

¹¹ Sánchez, 57.

¹² Castells, 98.

¹³ Lucía Ribeiro and Teresita de Barbiere "La Mujer Chilena: una aproximación a su estudio." *Cuadernos de la Realidad Nacional*, No. 16 (April 1973): 174.

¹⁴ Sánchez, 57.

¹⁵ Salvador Allende, *Chile's Road to Socialism* (London 1973), 65.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 110.

We have never spoken of a republic of workers and peasants. We believe that clerks, technicians, professional people, small and medium scale businessmen and industrialists constitute real social forces which ought to be and are with us facing the great national task which lies before us. The position of these groups is very different from that of sectors of the upper bourgeoisie, the oligarchy allied to foreign capital or the great landowners.¹⁷

Allende recognised the reality was that the task of winning over the middle sectors was difficult (and his difficulties were compounded by the lack of support for his policies from sectors of the governing coalition). Historically, the middle class has a long record of identification with movements that have rejected Marxism. A public opinion survey in 1958 found that 45% of artisanal self-employed and workers identified themselves as right and another 14% as centre (with 23% only supporting the left); small businessmen went heavily for the right, with 48% supporting it, and another 31% professing allegiance for the centre (which included the Christian Democrats); and white-collar workers were only slightly more to the left in their political preferences.¹⁸

The fact is that the UP had very little electoral support from the middle class to begin with—it was not the case that it lost many middle class votes through its economic blunders. Although the Radical party (though not all of it) supported Allende in 1970, by that date the Radicals were a shadow of their former selves, and could not be seen as representing the middle class. By the late 1960s, the electoral base of the Radical party had been reduced to a few agricultural and mining provinces; the party was very weak in the great urban centres of Santiago and Valparaiso.¹⁹ One electoral study found that there was “virtually no relationship between Radical voting in 1969 and Allende voting in 1970. And what relationship exists was a slightly negative one (i.e. the higher the vote for the Radicals in

¹⁷ Ibid. p. 116. This concern was repeated in a statement issued by the UP in 1972 at the El Arrayán reunion; “the UP recognises the legitimate right of wide sectors of small and medium business to a stable and developing role. It has been said, time and time again that our programme is not in conflict with the interests of the non-monopoly sector.”

¹⁸ Guillermo Briones, “La Estructura Social y la Participación Política”, *Revista Interamericana de Ciencias Sociales*, vol. 2, No. 3 (1963): 392-4.

¹⁹ Urs Muller - Plantenberg, “La Voz de las Cifras: un análisis de los elecciones en Chile entre 1957 y 1971.” *Cuadernos de la Realidad Nacional*, No. 14 (Octubre 1972): 158.

1969, the lower the vote for Allende in 1970).”²⁰ It was further weakened by the defection of a right-wing group, the Democracia Radical, in 1971, which took away a third of the party's electoral support. There was a further division of a left-wing group, the Partido de Izquierda Radical, but though this group broke away initially to support the UP it eventually left the UP and joined the opposition in 1972. As a consequence of these divisions, and with the tense political polarization of 1972-3, the Radicals, both those for and those against the government, lost heavily in the congressional elections of 1973 (reduced from 25 deputies to 8).

A careful study of the elections of 1969, 1970 and 1971, concluded that “the urban middle classes counted very little in the electoral support for the UP.”²¹ Robert Ayres study of voting in Chile showed that the presence of what he called the 'administrative lower class' correlated strongly and positively with voting for the Christian Democrats, and negatively with support for the Socialists and Radicals. In the case of the 'autonomous lower middle class' (the petty bourgeoisie) there was a positive correlation with voting for the traditional right (the National party and its predecessors, the Liberals and Conservatives) and a negative one with voting for the Radicals, Socialists and Communists.²²

Even amongst the unionised white-collar sectors there was a marked difference in political affiliation compared with the blue-collar workers. In the national elections for the CUT (the national labour confederation) in 1972, although overall the parties of the UP gained a large majority, in the voting for the white-collar unions, the Christian Democrats took 41% compared with 22% for the Communists, 19% for the Socialists and only 7% for the Radicals. An important part of these white-collar unions were composed of state employees, who enjoyed a very high level of unionisation. Public sector unions in Chile had a history of militancy, but not of identification with the political programmes of the left.

²⁰ Robert Ayres, 'Electoral Constraints and the Chilean Way to Socialism', *Studies in Comparative International Development* (Summer 1973): 142.

²¹ Muller, 170.

²² Ayres, 145-7

Middle sector opposition to the UP

The Chilean middle class has a long history of organisation and indeed of insurgency. The middle classes took to the streets in 1931 in order to overthrow the dictatorship of Ibáñez. From the campaigns of Alessandri, or José Santos Salas in the 1920 or even the Popular Front in the 1930 the middle sectors in some ways were the militants of the political world. After 1970, however, this militancy was directed against the UP government. Middle sector militancy was intensified because of the dependence of many of them on state economic policy. The role of the state as a supplier of credit and of investment was of critical importance for much of industry—small as well as large. Public investment as a percentage of all investment had risen from 28% in 1940 to 71% in 1968.²³ The kind of investment decisions, of credit policies, and of incomes policies, made by the government in Chile directly affected the economic survival of a large number of small and medium entrepreneurs. This group, if persuaded that the policies of the government were adverse to its interests, could be the basis of fierce opposition, as Allende found out.

The attack on the UP government was led by the *gremios* those associations of professional men and businessmen largely identified with the right and to a lesser extent with the Christian Democrats, and who were able to mobilise considerable sectors of the Chilean population, as the “bosses strike” of October 1972 so clearly showed. The small shopkeepers were also organised in a *gremio* of some 160,000 members (claimed to be 90% of the total in the country) and led by a member of the National party. The lorry owners, many of them owning only one or two trucks, could call on over 25,000 members, and their leader León Villarín became one of the most famous opponents of the UP. The confederation of professional *colegios* brought together twenty associations of professional people, such as the 20,000 members of the accountants’ *gremio* or the 7,000 doctors. Although these organisations existed well before the Allende government (the lorry owners’ union dated from the mid-fifties) they grew in number, militancy and organisation in this period. Associations that represented distinct interests—big and small commercial concerns for example—came

²³ Sanchez, 61.

together to make common battle against the Allende government. The professional associations formed a confederation in 1971 (with an estimated 114 affiliated organizations).²⁴

There is no secret that many of the gremios enjoyed funding from the CIA. But foreign funds and the new unity with larger economic concerns should not lead us to minimize the widespread and intense support the gremios enjoyed amongst their members and the Chilean middle class. To regard the smaller businesses as manipulated by big capital underestimates the intensity of feeling of many of their members.

The UP and the middle sectors

Analysis of the UP's treatment of the middle class has criticized the failure of the government to disaggregate the various factions or strata within the capas medias and to devise the appropriate winning strategy for each faction. Castells has argued that the error of the UP government lay in the way in which it grouped all these diverse groups together, and treated them in a uniformly economic fashion instead of separating out those groups whose economic interests were in contradiction with the long term interests of the oligarchy.²⁵ In advice far easier to give than to follow he suggests that the various groups must be related to their role in the productive process, and the ideological interests that the productive process determines.²⁶

Jaime Gazmuri, Secretary-General of the MAPU, whilst actively engaged in the process of trying to understand the failures of the Allende government in order to create a successful resistance movement, rejected the usefulness of the concept of the petty bourgeoisie when applied to Chilean society.²⁷ He argued that a policy of alliance must start from as precise delineation as possible of the social structure, and of the various classes - their formation, economic peculiarities, ideologies, politics and

²⁴ Armand Mattelart, "El gremialismo y la línea de la burguesía Chilena," in various authors, *Económica y Junta Militar*, mimeo (Buenos Aires 1975).

²⁵ Castells, *Lucha*, 30.

²⁶ M. Castells in R. Benítez ed., *Las Clases Sociales en América Latina* (Mexico 1974), 452.

²⁷ Gazmuri was secretary-general of MAPU—Obrero y Campesino. His analysis is contained in an impressive study entitled, *Aprender las lecciones del*

interrelations; adding sternly that this was not an academic luxury but a political necessity.

Allende and the Communist party hoped to divide the large business enterprises from small and medium sized concerns. In the political field they hoped to divide the Christian Democrats, and win the support of its left faction. Was this a forlorn hope? After all, the PDC candidate in the 1970 election was sympathetic to the aims of the Allende government. But increasingly the right in the PDC party became dominant as the political conflict intensified. A large part of the middle class was closely linked ideologically and organisationally with the right, and the substantial religious component of the middle class was offended by the secular message of the UP parties.

The economic expansion of the first year of the UP brought considerable gains to many sectors of the petty bourgeoisie. But while some of them had never been so well off, never had they been so fierce in their opposition to the parties and policies of the left.²⁸ With the JAPs (the supply and price committees) the government created a network of local control over the provision of basic necessities, and many small shopkeepers were involved in this process, which in some cases guaranteed them supplies, which might otherwise have been unobtainable. Yet the fear of the future was stronger than the benefits of the present, and many shopkeepers feared that the JAPs were one step towards eliminating them altogether.²⁹ According to the Radical politician Luis Bossay, the Radicals had to oppose the government, because it wanted to nationalise everything - the trucks, the sewing machines, butchers shops, all land, and even basic agricultural tools. This criticism was even more damaging to the UP as Bossay had initially led a group from the Radical party to join the UP but in 1972 he withdrew his support, objecting to the failure of the UP to set limits to the number of enterprises to be taken into the state sector. Bossay was exaggerating the threat to property posed by the UP, but it was what

pasado para construir el futuro, mimeo n.d., 17 and 45.

²⁸ Gazmuri, 51.

²⁹ Cristóbal Kay, "Chile: the making of a coup d'etat," *Science and Society* (Spring 1975): 9, and Marco Antonio Gamero, "Elementos para el análisis y la investigación del proceso político Chileno," *Revista Latinoamericana de Sociología*, No. 2 (1975): 132.

opponents of the government wanted to be believed, and in the heightened tension of 1972 and 1973 many members of the middle class did believe such propaganda.

The UP strategy of winning over the small business sector consisted of a fairly clear economic policy at the onset of the government. It was assumed that many small and medium sized enterprises were opposed, objectively at least, to the large and often foreign owned firms, and that a policy of guaranteeing the smaller entrepreneurs credits, spare parts and a share of the market would at worst neutralise them and at best win them over.³⁰ But the economic collapse of the UP government after an initial year of apparent success, made implementation of these policies impossible.

Apart from economic incentives, the UP sought to win over the political support of the middle sectors. But ideological persuasion, especially when the opposition controls most of the mass media, was not easy. It has been argued that the government's concentration on the proletariat left no role for the middle sectors and that the very real and distinct cultural, educational and ideological beliefs and aspirations of the middle sectors were brushed aside.³¹ But how could the different aspirations of the middle sectors have been incorporated into the UP programme? There were no clear indications. One of the most perceptive of Chile's political commentators recommended "the integration of the middle class with the destiny of the nation." This involved a process of education and demonstration that the destiny of those who make up the middle class was not that of becoming capitalists, nor of reaching their standard of living, for that was simply not possible for the majority of Chileans. They must be "invited to share and be offered a place in the process of making a more independent, more sovereign, and more developed Chile." A noble vision, no doubt, but the essentially rhetorical level at which this kind of debate was conducted, is exposed by the question he then puts: "the real

³⁰ Julio López, "Sobre la construcción de la nueva economía," in M.A. Garretón ed. *Economía y política en la Unidad Popular* (Barcelona 1975), 158-160. This book is a very useful compilation of articles originally published in the *Cuadernos de la Realidad Nacional*. On this point see also Castells, *Lucha*, 78.

³¹ Gamero, 132.

issue is—how do we do it?”³² Without economic security, it was likely that ideological persuasion, however well planned, would have little impact.

Organised Labour

The UP government wished to bring the unions, and especially the national labour confederation the CUT, into the forefront of the political stage. The intention was to involve the union movement in economic planning from the national to the local level, at least in those companies that formed part of the state sector of the economy (the APS or area of social property). The government had multiple aims. It hoped that through such participation the working class would gain confidence enough to intensify the campaign for the takeover of state power; and that through such participation the government could construct a system of socialist planning, distribute the surplus more fairly, and reduce inflation without reducing consumption. The core of the support for the UP came from the union movement and it was assumed that the unions would play a crucial role in the building of a socialist state.

But time and inherited structures worked against the government. The UP lacked congressional authority to press for an overhaul of the anachronistic labour code. Moreover, a long established industrial relations system creates patterns of behaviour that cannot be transformed overnight or even in a couple of years. Political differences between the cautious Communists and the more radical Socialists were very marked in the labour movement, and this tended to weaken its capacity for united action. The Communists, for example, tended to view industrial relations mostly in terms of increasing production and efficiency.³³ The Socialists, MAPU and MIR were more concerned with increasing the intensity of class conflict. But all parties of the left tended to overestimate the capacity of the unions to support the aims of the UP, and to overlook the extent of political

³² Luis Maira, *Dos años de Unidad Popular*, (Santiago 1973), 14-15 .Maira was a deputy of the small Izquierda Cristiana (Left Christian) party.

³³ “The basis of an effective policy of worker participation of control over enterprises rests in the formulation of concrete plans aimed at increasing labour efficiency, production and productivity, and the profitability of the enterprises.” Luis Barría, “La participación de los trabajadores,” *Principios* (March-April, 1972): 87-88. *Principios* was a communist monthly.

divisions inside the union movement. Moreover, accelerating inflation after the first year was bound to intensify union opposition to government policies of wage restraint.

Size and Political Divisions

The parties of the UP placed excessive reliance on the trade unions to provide core support for the government, and underestimated both the weakness of, and the variety of political opinions inside, the labour movement. According to official figures, the distribution of legal unions in Chile was as follows. In absolute terms the number of unionists was impressive, but that is not the whole story.

TABLE 1

Unions: structure and membership

	No.	Members	Average size
Sindicatos industriales	1,561	202,771	129
Sindicatos profesionales	2,824	247,003	87
Sindicatos campesinos	587	152,532	259
Total	4,972	602,306	

Source. *Memoria del Consejo Directivo al 6 Congreso Nacional de la CUT*, December 1971, 84. The figures refer to legal unions registered up to October 1971.

However, to legal unions we must add those members in public sector organisations, which had no legal status as unions, though in practice they functioned as such. So, adding 300,000 to the original 600,000 and allowing say another 100,000 for the unions formed after October 1971 (this was still happening in the countryside) we reach an approximate figure of one million in unions out of an active labour force of 2.6 million, a relatively high proportion in international terms. Nevertheless, a large part of the urban poor were outside the union structure. These were the self-employed workers (*trabajadores por cuenta propia*) defined as those who do not employ paid, non-family labour. They made up 16% of the labour force in manufacturing; 13% in services; and rose to 42% in commerce. The

self-employed were therefore an important part of the occupational structure in Chile; in 1967, out of a total labour force of 2.4 million, some 570,000 fell into this category.³⁴ A very large part consisted of itinerant street traders; in 1970 almost two-thirds of the labour force in commerce (just over 300,000 in all) was in this category.³⁵

Most unions were small. Almost half of all unions in Chile had a membership of fewer than fifty members; and there were only forty with over two thousand members.³⁶ The number of workers in unions more or less doubled between 1967 and 1972, but most of this increase was either in the rural sector, or the product of a further proliferation of very small unions in manufacturing industry.³⁷ Strong federations (like the copper workers, and some public sector unions) or powerful plant unions (like some textile and metallurgical unions) were the exception; the small weak plant union (the *sindicato industrial*), or even smaller white-collar union (the *sindicato profesional*), was the rule. Although the weakness of unions in Chile was partly a product of a restrictive legal code (and the UP government never had sufficient force in Congress to push through a thorough legal reform), the small size of the unions was also a consequence of the structure of industry. Most of the work force was employed in small or medium sized concerns.

The meaning of such figures is fairly clear. The union movement was very dispersed. There were great internal variations in size, strength and wealth. Compared with the huge powerful bureaucracies of Argentina, the Chilean movement was weak, though it did develop strong links with the parties—but not just the parties of the UP. Nor could initial support for the UP be guaranteed to continue. Commenting on union elections in Chile in 1973, Touraine noted that in the elections for the steel workers' unions in Huachipato, the majority was gained by the opposition, even though previously the UP had a majority. This he attributed to the “economistic”

³⁴ Alejandro Foxley and Oscar Muñoz, “Income Redistribution, Economic Growth and Social Structure,” *Oxford Bulletin of Economics and Statistics*, vol. 36, No. 1 (February 1974): 34.

³⁵ Castells, *Lucha*, 94.

³⁶ The source as for Table 1.

³⁷ Atilio Borón, “La movilización política nacional,” *Foro Internacional* (Mexico), (July-Sept. 1975): 91. He estimates the numbers in unions as 1,068,912

attitude of the highly paid steel workers—that is, the miners voted for the leaders they felt best able to improve wages and conditions.³⁸

The copper workers in Chile, especially in the Chuquicamata open cast mine, were regarded as the least politically committed of Chilean miners, even though historically they have chosen left wing leaders. According to Petras, “workers come to ‘Chuqui’ for one reason: to make money. After a few years many of them leave. There was little community feeling amongst the working class. Geographically apart, socially isolated, uprooted from their normal class environment, in transition toward new occupational opportunities - the copper workers in Chuquicamata are salary-conscious but not class conscious.”³⁹ He quotes a union leader saying that the miners vote for left-wing union leaders because they are more effective negotiators of new contracts. In elections held in 1973 in Chuquicamata for the white-collar union, the Christian Democrats won 3 seats, the right-wing National party 1, and the UP 1; previously the UP had held 3 seats and the Christian Democrats 2. Among the blue-collar workers, the Christian Democrats went up from 1 to 2 representatives on the 5 man union executive.⁴⁰ In the voting for the white-collar union, the Christian Democrats gained 45% of the 2,419 votes cast, and 30% of the 2,754 blue-collar workers. Neither the miners of Chuquicamata, nor those of the El Teniente mine, where in 1973 there was a long and damaging strike, were prepared to moderate their wage demands in the overall national interest (though there is a good deal of evidence that in the El Teniente strike the activists were largely the Christian Democratic white-collar workers who, by that time, in common with many of their party had come to identify the

in 1972, which is an estimated 38% of the active labour force.

³⁸ Touraine, 137-9.

³⁹ James Petras, “Chile: nationalization, socio-economic change and popular participation,” *Studies in Comparative International Development* (Spring 1973): 26. Chuquicamata employed about 5,000 blue collar workers and 5,000 white collar.

⁴⁰ Francisco Zapata, *Ciudades Mineras y Relaciones Industriales en América Latina: El Caso de Chuquicamata: 1971-1973*, mimeo, (Mexico 1974), 17. It should be noted that Chuquicamata's political behaviour had always been somewhat deviant, as it was the stronghold of the dissident Popular Socialist Party. I am grateful to Dr. Zapata for sending me this and other of his unpublished works.

national interest with the overthrow of the government.)⁴¹

It would be a mistake to assume that the attitude of the copper workers and the steel workers were untypical of other sectors of the working class in Chile. A survey comparing the attitude of workers in various occupations found some very un-socialist attitudes amongst the textile workers too, despite the militancy of some of the larger enterprises such as the factories of Sumar and Yarur.⁴² However, it was amongst sectors of the white-collar workers that the UP faced strongest opposition, even though in the past some of those unions had been led by UP militants. In 1972 the Christian Democrats gained a 3 to 2 majority on the executive of the union of the Chilean national airline, LAN Chile, formerly controlled by the parties of the UP. In the Union of Educational Workers (SUTE), possibly Chile's largest union, in the January 1973 elections the Christian Democrats made big gains taking 35,600 votes to the 36,500 for the UP, and increasing their representation on the executive from 3 to 16. In the Health Workers Federation (FENATS) the Christian Democrats and two small anti-UP parties won a plurality with 5,200 votes out of 13,000, partly because the Socialists and Communists were unable to agree on a common list and presented separate lists each gaining about 3,000 votes.⁴³

The biggest test of unionists' political preferences came with the first ever national direct elections for the executive of the CUT in 1972. The results were as follows:

⁴¹ Though there were also Socialist union leaders involved in the strike as well—only the Communists remained loyal to the government.

⁴² Petras, *Chile*, 32. "Few of the workers are members of any political party... the level of consciousness within the plant did not go very far beyond 'economics'—mostly concerned with trade union issues."

⁴³ Henry Landberger & Tim McDaniel, "Mobilization as a double-edged sword: the Allende government's uneasy relation with labour," *World Politics*, July

TABLE 2
Voting in the CUT national election 1972

<i>Manual workers</i>	Votes	%
Communists	113,000	38
Socialists	95,900	32
Christ. Democ.	47,400	16
MAPU	22,000	7
FTR (a MIR group)	5,800	1
Radicals	5,600	1

	291,400	(this includes voting for other small parties)
 <i>White-collar workers</i>		
	Votes	%
Christ. Democ.	61,000	41
Communists	33,000	22
Socialists	29,000	19
Radicals	11,000	7

	146,000	(including minor parties votes)

Source: see footnote 41. Slightly different figures are published by Castells, *Lucha*, 427. But as the counting took about six weeks and was disputed, it was not surprising that such discrepancies exist.

Although UP candidates took over 70% of the total vote, the Christian Democrats were dominant in the white-collar sector. Moreover, the Christian Democrats had a plurality in Central Santiago with 35,000 votes, compared with 30,000 for the Communists and 25,000 for the Socialists, and they were able to control the regional branch of the CUT for Santiago province. In many white-collar unions, like the teachers union, the opposition parties had a majority, while in such working class unions as the coal miners less than a tenth voted for the opposition, (and only an eighth

in the case of the construction workers). It is also interesting to note the almost complete lack of support for the Frente de Trabajadores Revolucionarios (the Workers Revolutionary Front), which followed the political line of the ultra left MIR.

The unions and worker participation

The government signed an agreement with the CUT in December 1970, on a number of major points. Most were concerned to improve the wages and conditions of the unionists, but there was a major departure from the past in a new system of worker participation in management of their enterprises.⁴⁴ The new measures in the overall agreement did not meet all the demands of the CUT. There was nothing on the reorganisation of the labour movement to create powerful industry-wide federations, nor any reference to the abolition of the distinction between blue-collar and white-collar status, though these two issues were long standing aspirations of the trade union movement. The agreement concentrated largely on economic issues, an emphasis that was even more marked in those parts put into practice.⁴⁵

However, the introduction of worker participation in management was a departure from the previous subordinate status of the union movement. The government concentrated its efforts on involving workers in participating in the state owned industries of the APS as laid down in the first point of the CUT-Government agreement. The Government-CUT agreement laid down a detailed blueprint for participation. Factories were to be run by Administrative Councils, consisting of one government appointed president, five representatives of the workers and five of the state. Though this gave the government the majority, the workers could demand the recall of any government representative by vote in the general

⁴⁴ Francisco Zapata, *The Chilean Labour Movement under Salvador Allende*, mimeo, Mexico, 1974, 12. Other proposals were for the representation of the beneficiaries of the social security organizations on the board of directors; reform of books three and four of the Labour Code; legal recognition of the CUT, and an obligatory dues payment from unionists of 0.5% of their salaries; an overall salary rise, with more for the lowest paid; increased family allowances; food allowances; an 100% pension increase; greater job security; and reduction of unemployment.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 37.

Workers' Assembly. There also existed a host of other committees and councils for worker participation in the factories. In practice the blueprint was seldom copied in detail; the role of the Administrative Council was often very weak.⁴⁶ At the most central level the integration of the CUT into planning mechanisms hardly worked at all.⁴⁷

Had all the establishments in the APS run participation schemes, then something like 200,000 workers would have been involved.⁴⁸ But given the small proportion that in fact operated schemes, the numbers involved were probably about 60 to 70,000.⁴⁹ But most workers in industrial concerns were outside the APS and hence would not be beneficiaries of schemes of worker participation.

The exact role of trade unions in this new scheme was rather uncertain and became a great source of friction. In theory, it was supposed that unions would concentrate less on their traditional material functions, and more on overall political and educational tasks, and in aiding the struggle to increase production. The unions were suspicious that their role would be superseded. The worker representatives on the various participation institutions were uncertain of their functions and their power, and were often not well-equipped to play a part in taking complex technical decisions. The tensions grew as inflation accelerated. Traditionally, unions fought for wage increases at least equal to the rate of inflation; whereas the representatives in the participation institutions might be under pressure from the government to seek for increases less than that rate, especially when inflation became a serious problem.

There is one excellent study of a specific factory that illuminates the many difficulties.⁵⁰ In this factory the application of the procedure for

⁴⁶ de Vylder, 154. Participation according to the norms only existed in about 60 factories. Michel Raptis, *Revolution and Counter Revolution in Chile* (London 1974), 32.

⁴⁷ This lack of participation was very marked in the rural sector. As Barraclough and Fernández write "Peasant participation, one of the fundamental points of the agrarian reform programme, has been weak, not to say non-existent" (148).

⁴⁸ Zapata, *The Chilean Labour Movement*, 15. Though most of the enterprises were in industry, there were some in other sectors of the economy—in transport, commerce, and fisheries.

⁴⁹ Castillo et. al., 14

⁵⁰ Manuel Barrera, Gustavo Arranda, Jorge Díaz, *El cambio social en una*

worker participation was delayed because the local union resisted it as an imposition from above that would reduce its power. The workers' representatives played a minor role in the Administrative Council of the factory, and the power of the General Administrator (appointed by the government) was greatly strengthened. Labour discipline relaxed and there was an increase in the number of unproductive hours. Worker participation at most levels was low; workers stressed that they simply didn't have enough time to participate as many of them were working overtime or studying in the evenings. Moreover, the opposition parties (until 1972 the Christian Democrats controlled the white-collar union) had every interest in seeing the experiment fail. Workers' leaders stressed that the training given by the government and the CUT for the new tasks was totally inadequate (one weekend training school). Nevertheless, those surveyed did stress their overall support for the transference of their factory to the APS. Their jobs were more secure, their pay better, they felt freer in the factories, and at the shop floor level they felt that they were contributing something to the running of the factory. Interestingly, in the elections for the executives of the unions in 1972, both the manual and white-collar unions swung to the left (with only 1 Christian Democrat remaining compared with 5 previously); and in the October 1972 crisis the factory responded to the call from the government and the CUT to keep production going.

Two of the major problems of this factory were general in the APS sector. The first was the great power concentrated in the post of General Administrator. Although there were five elected representatives on the Administrative Council, only three represented blue-collar workers, (and they could not be union leaders). The technical staff elected one, as did the white-collar workers. But the real power was exercised by the General Administrator. Secondly, the production committees and the unions saw themselves very often as performing contradictory roles. Indeed in some cases unions refused to allow into the factories representatives of the CUT

empresa del APS. Instituto de Economía, Universidad de Chile, 1973. The factory produced metallurgical goods and was located on the outskirts of Santiago, employing 593 workers. There are also references to the failure of the participation experiment in Chuquicamata in Zapata, *Ciudades mineras*, 12-14.

to explain how to implement the participation procedures. Moreover, participation was limited to the factory level. There were no regional or central organisations to give a wider view. Though workers were represented at sectoral level planning in the Chilean Development Corporation (CORFO), this was secured through the unions and not through the participation organs.

At best on government plans, ten percent of the labour force in manufacturing would be brought into the state sector by the policy of nationalising the large monopolies; for the remainder of the work force outside the APS, little more than increased wages and social security benefits were offered.⁵¹ The government argued against the spread of worker participation to the private sector on the grounds that this would mean the incorporation of those workers into the capitalist system and therefore weaken their determination to pursue the class struggle.⁵² As de Vylder indicates, this amounted to trying to nationalise some two-thirds of the whole industrial capital with the active help of only about twenty percent of all industrial workers. The remaining eighty percent should vote for socialism and defend the government in confrontations with the Right, and support the struggle for production, but they should not undertake any militant actions against their own employers who were, in theory, allies of the working class. It did not and could not work this way.⁵³

Although the government wished to increase popular mobilisation for the aims of the UP, it wanted to do so in a gradual and controlled way—but it discovered that a process of mobilisation once begun is very difficult to control. Hence, while it was not opposed to strikes as such—on the

⁵¹ Rui Mauro Marini, *Dos estrategias en el proceso chileno*. Mimeo CELA, Mexico, 1974, 11. The author draws the parallel with the countryside, where the bulk of the work force - the landless labourers and the subsistence farmers—were similarly neglected in favour of that small proportion incorporated into the reform sector.

⁵² Oscar Garretón, “Concentración Monopólica en Chile,” *Cuadernos de la Realidad Nacional*, No. 7 (March 1971): 159. Garretón held a post in the Economics Ministry in the government. He added later that the principal problem of incorporation of the working class to power lay not so much in the enterprises but rather more at the level of the state, the government, its dependent organisations, and the political parties.

⁵³ de Vylder, 152. See also Sergio Bitar and Eduardo Moyano, “Redistribución del Consumo y Transición al socialismo,” reprinted in Garretón, *Economía Política*.

contrary it could only have welcomed some of them—it was hardly in the government's design for the strike level to rise to the heights that it did. The number of strikes in the private sector rose from 564 in 1964 to 2377 in 1971 and 2474 in 1972. In 1971 and 1972 over a million man days were lost. Even in the public sector in 1972 there were 815 strikes and close on half a million man days lost—even though strikes in the public sector were strictly speaking illegal.⁵⁴ These figures on strikes give some idea of the way in which the working class was not responding to the pleas for labour discipline made by the government, and especially by the Communist Party. In similar fashion, the actual number of workers within the state industrial sector was much greater than the government had planned because many workers occupied factories and demanded their incorporation into the APS, even against the wishes of the government. The number of firms under state ownership increased from 31 in November 1970 to 165 by May 1973; and by mid-1973, 120 more firms were in the process of incorporation into the state sector—many more than were originally planned.⁵⁵

The dominant group imposing the kind of participatory model of industrial relations adopted by the UP was the Communist Party, with its constant emphasis on the need to increase production and to curb labour indiscipline. But production did not increase (though factors outside the factories such as the lack of spare parts were more important factors explaining this) and labour indiscipline was not curbed. Allende was preoccupied with these problems and publicly criticised, for example, the copper workers of El Teniente (who mounted a prolonged strike against the government) and the textile workers at the large Sumar factory in Santiago. In his presidential message in 1973 Allende stated that “the workers must make a decision: they must say whether we continue with an economic policy whose symbol is El Teniente or if we go toward the sacrifice of having less money for the sake of greater progress and more prosperous development.”⁵⁶ Yet some members of the government criticised Allende

⁵⁴ Landsberger, 623, using the official figures in the *Mensajes* of the President.

⁵⁵ de Vylder, 149.

⁵⁶ Cited in Landsberger, 624.

and the Communists for offering the working class in practice not much more than economic incentives.⁵⁷ The government did introduce into congress in early 1972 a bill that would have altered the balance of power in the APS between workers and management. In particular, it sought to strengthen the power of the Workers' Assembly and to give it greater power of recall over members of the administrative council. It sought also to increase the proportion of workers on the administrative council. But the bill was rejected by Congress.⁵⁸

The production and vigilance committees

The production and vigilance committees were formed to involve workers in the private sector of the economy. They were to consist of an executive of five to ten members elected in a general assembly of the workers. The function of these committees was to keep up production levels, to prevent sabotage by the owners, to inform on the level of utilisation of the plant, on the supply of materials to the factory and its type of production.⁵⁹

In practice they functioned in a variety of ways. In some cases they were little more than an appendage to the union, and so had little life or role (there were even examples of the committees being appointed by the unions). Moreover, the tasks they were asked to undertake were often difficult technical ones, complicated enough even with the support of the management, and virtually impossible in opposition to it. But in other cases the committees had to assume virtual responsibility for the running of factories when they were abandoned by their owners, or when particularly fraudulent management practices had led to conflict. In 1972, these factories organised themselves into a Federación de Empresas y Brigadas de Trabajadores, which consisted of eighty enterprises employing 10,000

⁵⁷ See for example, the criticism of MAPU in *El Segundo Año del Gobierno Popular* (Santiago 1973). In the A.P.S., for example, participation doesn't exist—or is understood in a purely bureaucratic or administrative fashion (154). See also the interesting article by Gonzalo Falabella, *Clase, Partido y Estado: La CUT en el Gobierno Popular*. Publicaciones Premias No 10, CISEPA, (Lima: Catholic University of Peru, 1975).

⁵⁸ Raptis, 37-80.

⁵⁹ Jorge Larraín y Fernando Castillo, "Poder obrero y campesino y transición al socialismo en Chile," *Cuadernos de la Realidad Nacional*, No. 10

workers. This federation was known as the Social Area of the Poor, for many of the factories were unprofitable and old, a factor which made officials of the APS resist including them in the state sector, even though this was the intention of the federation.

Perhaps of most importance was the role these committees played in paving the way for the large number of factory seizures and the eventual development of the *cordones*. Most of the concerns in the APS were there by the will of their workers rather than by government design. In some cases the committees had created a situation of dual power inside their factories, which led eventually to its incorporation into the APS. These factories formed the basis for working class mobilisation in 1972.

Women and the UP

Women in this period in Chile participated in the economically active labour force far less than men, and even when employed had a lower rate of participation in unions. Women voted in higher numbers for the parties of the centre and right. Women especially those from the upper and middle classes were active in their demonstrations of opposition to the UP government—the first mass demonstration against the UP was the famous *carcerolazo*, when women took to the streets banging pots and pans in protest at the shortages in the shops. And the last mass demonstration against the UP was that of women demanding stronger intervention against the UP from the military.⁶⁰

The economic role of women in Chilean society contrasted sharply with that of men. Of the active labour force in 1970, 77% was male and only 23% female (in 1952, the proportion was slightly higher at 25%).⁶¹ Of an

(December, 1971): 183-4.

⁶⁰ Michele Mattelart, "Chile: the feminine side of the coup, or when bourgeois women take to the streets," *NACLA Latin American Report*, vol. IX No. 6 (Sept. 1975): 15. General Leigh, a member of the military junta, paid this tribute. "The women really taught us, the men, a lesson. They never lowered their heads by accepting something they did not want; they proved themselves unyielding, ready to defend what was just. They met every challenge with resistance. We want them to participate in the administration of this country. The women will play as important a role as the trade associations, the armed forces and the political parties," quoted in Mattelart, from *El Mercurio*, September 23, 1973.

⁶¹ Lucía Ribeiro M. y Teresita de Barbieri, "La mujer obrera Chilena: una aproximación a su estudio," *Cuadernos de la Realidad Nacional*, No 16 (April

adult female population of 4.5 million in 1970, only 13% were economically active, compared with 44% of men. Relatively few women worked in the manufacturing sector (18%). Most women were employed in the services sector (53%), with just over a quarter of all women employed as domestic servants, though the real number was probably higher as an estimated 45% of domestic servants were not registered by their employers for social security benefits.⁶² Less than 3% of the female labour force was registered as employed in agriculture, and most female labour in agriculture was unpaid familial work on small plots.⁶³

In its report to the CUT Congress in 1971, the national executive stated that “work on the feminine front is undoubtedly one of the weakest areas of the CUT's activities. This was basically due to a lack of concern on the part of the CUT itself, and its federations and base unions.”⁶⁴ One survey in 1972 found that the traditional attitudes of the male employers towards their women workers were generally shared by workers themselves.⁶⁵ The attitude of women workers towards their unions was described as passive; and the problems that women faced at work were seen as individual ones, rather than as group problems capable of collective solution.

It was hardly surprising that women's electoral behaviour was markedly more conservative than that of men. Historically women voted in higher numbers for the right and centre than did men. However, there is some evidence that gender differences were lessening in favour of class differences by 1972. In the process of popular mobilisation, as local communities rather than just the factories became involved in the defence of their interests, women played a more active role. Comparing the 1971 municipal elections with the 1970 presidential ones, support for the UP rose 6.5% amongst men, but 7.9% amongst women; and support for the right dropped 10% among men, but 13.7% amongst women. Women were

1973): 175. Subsequent statistics in this section come from this article.

⁶² Mattelart, 22.

⁶³ S. Barraclough y D A Fernández, *Diagnóstico de la reforma agraria chilena*, (Buenos Aires 1974) contains information on women's role in agriculture. In a survey of union membership of seven provinces in central Chile, on average only about 5% of members were women (179).

⁶⁴ CUT *Memoria*, 38.

presumably responding favourably to the policies of income redistribution of the first year of the UP government. But the gap between male and female voting was still marked. In the March 1973 elections, 61% of the female vote went to the opposition, compared with 51% of male votes.

Traditional methods of political mobilisation through unions reached only a small part of the female population of Chile. Redistributive measures might have won support, but such support would be conditional upon a successful economic policy, which the UP could not sustain. How then could women have been won over to the UP? It is enough to pose the question to realise its complexities. Ideological and cultural conditioning over a very long period of time was hardly tossed aside overnight, especially when the mass media, with US help, remained in the hands of the opposition. That the UP aspired to give Chilean women dignity and an actively participatory role in the new society was not in doubt. But little advance was made. What was more noticeable and more politically important was the fierce opposition aroused amongst the middle and upper class women to the policies of what they perceived to be a dogmatic Marxist government.

The Pobladores

The major cities of Chile, especially Santiago, were surrounded by a ring of *campamentos*, (roughly translated as shanty-towns). The reason for the creation of these settlements was the lack of affordable housing. Most state housing provision was simply too expensive for the urban poor. Hence, the poor took the solution into their own hands and seized land designated for housing and constructed their own dwellings. It is usual to distinguish between the *campamento* and the *población*. The *campamento* was the product of a land seizure by the homeless. The social organisation that arranges the land seizure, and the subsequent administration of the *campamento*, is the product of the would-be inhabitants and an external political agent, often the left wing MIR, though seizures were also encouraged at times by the Communist party and by the Christian Democrats (when the UP was in power). The *población* was the product of

⁶⁵ Ribeiro, 175.

state planning and a more orderly occupation of a site and distribution of lots or houses. But the social composition of the two types of community was very similar and the inhabitants of both were referred to as *pobladores*.⁶⁶ Some campamentos and poblaciones were well-organised and developed local systems of justice for example; others were very disorganised, unpoliticised and with high rates of crime.

There were 275 officially recognised campamentos up to the end of May 1972 and there more *tomas* (land seizures) later in the year. They formed a large circle around Santiago, and housed some 83,000 families, or 456,000 people, which was an estimated one-in-six of the inhabitants of Gran Santiago.⁶⁷ There were *tomas* before the UP came to power, but the number increased greatly in 1969 and 1970—the last year of the Christian Democratic government, and the first year of Allende partly as the pressure on land was increasing, but mostly because those organising the *tomas* no longer expected the brutal opposition from the police and army that had occurred previously. The number of *tomas* increased from 8 in the country as a whole in 1968 to 220 in 1970, and 175 in the first half of 1971.⁶⁸ The number of *pobladores* had grown nationally to 800,000 in 1972. In 1966 just under half of the families in large cities lacked sufficient income to rent minimum accommodation (defined as 36.7 sq. metres) and another 27% could afford only the minimum. The housing deficit of 400,000 dwellings in 1966 grew to 585,000 in 1970.⁶⁹ But the *pobladores* were not a group apart from the urban working class. Contrary to the assumptions of many on the left, they were not recent rural migrants; they were not largely employed on the fringes of the tertiary sector; and they were not some kind of lumpen-proletariat totally lacking class consciousness and wide open to manipulation by urban caudillos.⁷⁰

In fact, the social structure of the campamentos was similar to that

⁶⁶ Oscar Cuellar et. al “Experiencias de justicia popular en poblaciones,” *Cuadernos de la Realidad Nacional* No. 8 (June 1971): 155-6.

⁶⁷ Ignacio Santa María, “El Desarrollo Urbano Mediante los Asentamientos espontáneos: el caso de los campamentos Chilenos,” *Revista EURE* (April 1973): 105.

⁶⁸ Castells, *Lucha*. 271.

⁶⁹ Manuel Castells, “Movimiento de Pobladores y Lucha de Clases en Chile,” *Revista EURE* (April 1973): 9.

⁷⁰ Rolando Franco, “Sobre los supuestos económicos y sociales de la

of the working class in general. There were no more recent rural migrants, in fact slightly fewer, in the *campamentos* than in Santiago as a whole. Their occupational distribution consisted of a high proportion of industrial workers, again slightly higher than in Santiago as a whole but most of those employed in the secondary sector from the *campamentos* worked in the poorly paid construction sector or in the small and medium sized plants of traditional industry. So their income levels were lower than the average of workers in secondary sector as a whole. The *campamentos* included a higher proportion of very poor in such occupations as itinerant street vendors than the *poblaciones*, nevertheless, in both types of settlement the core of employment was typical of the working class in Santiago as a whole.⁷¹ And sizeable groups of white-collar workers and employers of small enterprises also lived in these settlements.⁷²

There was a great deal of investigation of the social composition and political attitudes of the *pobladores* during the UP period, which point to considerable variations of political allegiance and social attitudes inside the *campamentos*.⁷³ There was certainly no uniform set of attitudes that distinguished the *pobladores* from the rest of the population. Several surveys pointed towards the prevalence of an economic attitude towards political involvement, but this was hardly surprising given the deprivation that they, along with the mass of the Chilean population, were suffering, nor did such attitudes distinguish them from the rest of the population.

One experiment which showed the opposition facing the UP was the attempt to set up *brigadas de trabajo* (work brigades) to organise the building of houses in the *campamentos*, preferably in association with small building firms. The idea was potentially fruitful on several fronts; it would help towards the solution of the housing and unemployment problem; it would create a spirit of self-confidence amongst the *campamento* dwellers and help them to organise; and it would create links between the poor and the small construction firms, hopefully severing

marginalidad," *Desarrollo Económico* (Buenos Aires), No. 55 (1974): 522-3.

⁷¹ Castells, *Movimiento*, 18.

⁷² See Castells, *Lucha*, 253 for a detailed examination of the occupational structure of the *campamentos*.

⁷³ Much of it conducted in the *Centro Interdisciplinario de Desarrollo Urbano* and published in the review *EURE*.

those firms from their dependence on the large construction companies organised in the *Cámara Chilena de la Construcción* (the Chilean Chamber of Construction).⁷⁴ However, the CCC threw its weight against the government's housing programme, especially those parts that fixed low quota repayments on housing to encourage the poor to buy their homes, that encouraged small enterprises, that sought to expand the role of the state in housing and, of course, they opposed the work brigades.⁷⁵ The large companies still retained their dominant position in the construction industry, including their privileged access to state credit.⁷⁶ The government's achievement in building houses was rather creditable,⁷⁷ but two important aims—the splitting of the big companies from the smaller ones, and the development of work brigades—were defeated by the political opposition and the power of private capital.

The social changes that took place in the *campamentos* were complex, and it is difficult to know how widespread they were. For example, there were a number of experiments in the administration of popular justice, heralded on the left as an important ideological advance in the creation of a rival popular system of justice over the dominant bourgeois one.⁷⁸ That such experiments did exist (and that the existing judicial system did exhibit a notorious class bias) was undoubtedly true, but they were limited to a small number of the *campamentos*.

The overall organisation of the *pobladores* and their relations with the government were not entirely free from the state paternalism practised by the previous Christian Democratic government, and the politics of such organisations were certainly not free from the political infighting that weakened the UP. The government set up the *Oficina Nacional de Pobladores* and the *Central Unica de Pobladores*, and the function of both was to stimulate popular participation. In practice, though, like the JAPs it

⁷⁴ An excellent detailed study of the politics of housing in Chile is Peter Cleaves, *Bureaucratic Politics and Administration in Chile*, (Berkeley 1974).

⁷⁵ Castells, *Movimiento*, 27.

⁷⁶ 60% of the smallest enterprises received less than 2% of investment from the government programme of investment in private sector construction. *Ibid.*, 28.

⁷⁷ A record 73,000 housing units were constructed in 1971—40,000 of them with public finance. *Ibid.*, 28.

⁷⁸ Oscar Cuellar et. al., “Experiencias en poblaciones de justicia popular,” *Cuadernos de la Realidad Nacional*, No. 8 (June 1971).

obviously helped to train a considerable number of local leaders, the relationship between the government and the pobladores tended to become bureaucratised. The government did not find it possible, for example to solve the problem of distribution of houses and building plots without the occasional violent clash between the police and the pobladores.⁷⁹ The Socialists and the Communists disagreed over the role of such organisations, and the Socialists withdrew from the Communist dominated Central Unica de Pobladores, arguing in favour of a much greater extension of *poder popular*, and also for the development of organisations of pobladores at the regional and provincial level (where such organisations were very weak: a similar problem of the JAPs and the APS). Although many of the pobladores were manual workers, they were not often employed in the large concerns that formed part of the APS, so that their experience in worker participation was limited. Only in the October crisis of 1972 was the radical potentiality of the poblaciones made apparent, and then only for a short time.

The various parties of the UP had distinct attitudes towards the campamentos. They were a centre of the MIR's strength (along with its presence in the universities) with the aim of "from the seizure of land (*toma del sitio*) to the seizure of power." Few poblaciones were as well organised and as highly politicized as the MIR dominated Nueva Habana settlement in Santiago. Contrasting the attitude of the other left parties with that of the MIR, one of their spokesmen said that

the traditional left wing agencies organize the squatters until the next elections, when they introduce lighting, water etc. MIR rejects elections in principle - we work continuously with the squatters. The leaders of the settlements of the UP do not live in the settlement; they come in a car twice a week to attend meetings. The absentee leaders are not present to execute the programme. MIR leaders are totally integrated in the settlement. We work because we believe in the revolution.⁸⁰

The contrast with the other parties was not as complete as the MIR claimed. Many other settlements exhibited high degrees of solidarity and organisation, and the Communist party had been active in the poblaciones

⁷⁹ Alvarado et. al., 65.

⁸⁰ Petras, 50.

since the 1950s (though the core of its activities remained the labour movement). And not all the organised poblaciones were associated with the parties of the UP.⁸¹

The level of social and political organization in the campamentos was high. An estimated 60% of the inhabitants belonged to the Juntas de Vecinos (Neighbourhood Committees); in 1972 there were at least a thousand that had secured legal recognition; and there were twenty-two associations at the commune level uniting numbers of Juntas.⁸² The question facing the UP was how the pobladores could be mobilised as part of the overall alliance. But the overall strategy of the UP seems to have been based, at least initially, on the assumption that the inhabitants of the campamentos were qualitatively different in their occupational structure and political behaviour from organised labour. In other words, the central axis of UP policy revolved around the organised industrial work force. The MIR, in contrast, realised rather than a conflict of interest between these two sectors, there was a community of interests. They argued that the people living in the campamentos were victims of a housing crisis, but only by a drastic reform of the dominant economic system could the housing problem be solved.⁸³ A pre-condition for a success of the conquest of state power, according to the MIR, was the fusion of the demands of the pobladores and those of organised labour, into one overall political strategy. But once again it is much easier to state the problem than to offer solutions to it.

The Juntas de Abastecimiento y Precios (JAPs)

Economic difficulties and a growing black market gave rise to concern in many poorer sectors of society about the supply of basic

⁸¹ For example, one study of twenty campamentos found the following situation either of identification with, or domination by a political party; in 7 with the Christian Democrats, in 4 with the MIR, in 3 with the Communists, in 3 with the Socialists, in 1 with the Radicals and in 1 with the MAPU. In some campamentos one dominant party was challenged by a well-organised minority party. Equipo de Estudios CIDU, *Reivindicación Urbana*, 1973, 80.

⁸² Fernando Castillo et. al. "Las Masas, el estado y el problema del poder en Chile." *Cuadernos de la Realidad Nacional*, No. 17 (April 1973): 10. Women in the campamentos were organised in *Centros de Madre* (Mothers' Centres). The centres increased from 800 in 1970, to 4,000 in 1972.

⁸³ Castells, *Movimiento*, 230.

foodstuffs. This concern was shared by Allende's first Economics Minister, Pedro Vuskovic, and he met with the worried housewives in June 1971 to discuss methods of dealing with the problem. The outcome of the discussions was the formation of the JAPs, which though they spread throughout the country, remained strongest in Santiago. They were formed largely in working class districts on the basis of representation of the neighbourhood committees, mothers' centres and other local organisations, and of the small shopkeepers. The aims of the JAPs were to combat price speculation and hoarding, and to act as a distribution agency. They grew rapidly, and by mid-1972 there were about a thousand of them nationwide (of which 675 were in Santiago), and there were also ten JAPs at the wider commune level. Collaborating with the JAPs were an estimated 8,000 small shopkeepers. In Santiago something like 60% of all meat and 30% of poultry was distributed through the JAPs and the various state distribution agencies collaborated closely with them.

According to Minister Vuskovic, the JAPs were to form part of the process of building *poder popular*. Opponents of the government were extremely hostile towards an experiment, which they saw as the first step towards widespread nationalisation even of shopkeepers and small traders. Such statements as those of Minister Vuskovic fuelled these suspicions, but for most of the recipients the central function of the JAPs was to secure delivery of basic goods. It was not clear how this primary function would correspond, except perhaps in some very long term sense, with a broader political strategy of taking over state power. Given the close relationship between the JAPs and the state, it was more than a possibility that the relationship would end by stressing the dependence of the JAPs on the state and the associated bureaucratisation of their operation.⁸⁴ In some cases too, the local JAP was taken over by the small shopkeepers or by a political party and used as a further instrument of patronage. However, the JAPs served to train local leaders, giving them experience of responsibility in taking decisions. Although it is difficult to make any firm generalisations, the presence of local Communists as organisers of the JAPs was often noted

⁸⁴ Raptis stresses the danger them of being "turned into transmission belts for state policy and dominated by the political and administrative bureaucracy" (105).

by observers, and this kind of organization was more to the liking of the Communist party than the less controllable cordones. However, the JAPs did increase the social and political incorporation of sectors of the population (especially women) who were outside the scope of more orthodox forms of mobilisation through parties and unions.

Peasant and Rural Organisations

The Allende government inherited a fairly advanced agrarian reform law from the previous administration. To a large extent the UP was the prisoner of that reform law, and of the process of rural mobilization that had started under the Christian Democrats as that party attempted to create a loyal rural political clientele. As the quotation below from Minister of Agriculture Calderón indicates, the UP's attempt to redirect the direction of rural change was far from successful.

When the Socialist Minister of Agriculture, Rolando Calderón was asked which form of organisation in the rural reform sector you think ought to be promoted he replied as follows:

There is one form of organisation that ought not to be promoted, the *asentamiento*. (These were the transitional collective forms of organisation preparatory to transfer to individual ownership of the farms started by the Christian Democratic government of President Frei). All the peasant organisations agree that on the *asentamientos* there exist no incentives for the workers; that irresponsibility, alcoholism and absenteeism develop there; that they are a failure from the point of view of production, and that the *asentados* start exploiting their own class brothers. Secondly, frankly speaking, I do believe that the UP creations—the *Comités Campesinos* and the CERAs - are to large extent armchair products. In practice you go to a CERA and you notice that it works in much the same way as an *asentamiento*.⁸⁵

The UP government accelerated the changes that had started under the Frei administration. By the end of 1972, virtually all large estates over 80 basic hectares had disappeared.⁸⁶ But not all had passed into the reform sector. Many had been subdivided in anticipation of the law and to avoid it by

⁸⁵ Interview published in *Chile Hoy* (July 1972) and cited in de Vylder, 196.

⁸⁶ Estates larger than this were defined as *latifundia* and hence subject to expropriation. 80 basic hectares was the measure for the fertile central valley; the poorer the land, the larger the permitted size.

transferring land to relatives, so that by 1972, 27% of arable land was held in estates of between 40 and 80 hectares (and another 25% in farms of 5 to 40 hectares) and the government did not have the power in Congress to lower the level appropriate for expropriation to 40 hectares. So even after the virtual elimination of the *latifundia*, two-thirds of all productive land in Chile remained in private hands.

Land seizures had increased from 9 in 1967 to 1278 in 1972, often in anticipation of the process of expropriation. There were local *tomas* organised by the Mapuches in Southern Chile demanding the restitution of lands lost in the nineteenth century. But the widespread picture of rural anarchy depicted by the right was far from the truth. In some ways what was striking about the reform were its limitations. Only 20% of the rural labour force was direct beneficiaries of the reform, and many of them organised in state-supported *asentamientos* fiercely resisted the spread of the benefits outside the limited group of those who were entitled to participate in the distribution of expropriated properties (largely permanent and resident estate labourers). The large number of *minifundistas* (an estimated 100,000 owning on average one-tenth of the land of an *asentamiento*) and the even larger number of landless labourers (an estimated 350,000) did not benefit from the reform process, except in some cases from higher wages. However, the number of peasants organised in trade unions grew rapidly in this period.

Apart from the spread of unions, however, other groups, mostly opposed to the UP, also organized in the countryside. The Confederation of *Asentamientos* allied with the Christian Democrats, was a powerful source of opposition to the government, and they made common cause with the medium-sized farmers. Developments in the Chilean countryside have attracted a great deal of investigation,⁸⁷ so the point which needs attention here is simply that the UP's efforts to create alternative socialist forms of

⁸⁷ The basic work is Barraclough and Fernández. See also René Billaz & Eugenio Maffei, "La reforma agraria chilena y el camino hacia el socialismo," *Cuadernos de la Realidad Nacional*, No. 11 (January 1972); Wilson Cantoni, "Poder popular en el agro chileno," *Cuadernos de la Realidad Nacional*, No. 11, (January 1972); and Eugenio Maffei y Emilio Marchetti, "Estructura agraria y Consejos Comunales campesinos," *Cuadernos de la Realidad Nacional*, No. 14, (October 1972).

TABLE 3
Political Affiliations of the Rural Trade Unions

		1969		1972
Union	Members	%	Members	%
Ranquil (Communist-Socialist)	31,000	30	132,000	48
Unidad Obrero Campesino (MAPU)	---	---	41,000	15
Total pro UP	31,000	30	173,000	63
Libertad (Christian Democrat)	23,000	22	39,000	14
Triunfo Campesino (Christian Democrat)	48,000	46	61,000	22
Other opposition	2,000	2	4,000	38
Total anti-UP	73,000	70	105,000	38
Total in unions	103,644		277,895	

Source: de Vylder, 209.

rural organization such as the CERA's (the Agrarian Reform Centres) or the various peasant councils were not very successful. The CERAs, which were supposed to be organised on a more socialist basis than the asentamientos, partly by absorbing nearby landless labourers, were few in number and differed little from the asentamientos. There were only 150 created up to mid-1972, whereas 318 asentamientos had been created in this period to join the 628 created by the Frei government.⁸⁸

The Consejos Campesinos were created to promote the development

of *poder popular* in the countryside. But most of them were essentially promoted by the state rather than locally, and many were taken over by opponents rather than supporters of the government. Of the 260 set up at commune level by mid-1972, only 10% were created as a direct result of local pressure, whereas 65% had been set up as a result of government decree and the rest by a combination of decree and local pressure. But less than half of them functioned with any degree of life (and only 10% of those set up by decree did so). They appeared to have most meaning in the Mapuche areas, where they served to aid those groups in their drive to retake land.⁸⁹ The fear of some members of the UP that the *consejos* would create a situation of dual power in the countryside was not realised. The Consejo Nacional Campesino, which was supposed to unite the local and provincial *consejos*, was in fact controlled by opponents of the UP (and hence rarely summoned). The really strong *consejos campesinos* existed where a powerful commune level union, dominated by one party, could control the local rural situation, but in those circumstances the *consejo* was least needed.⁹⁰ The landless labourers did not find in the *consejos* the vehicle that they lacked in the prevailing union structure (which involved largely the resident permanent estate labour force, the *inquilinos*).

The conflicts that took place in the Chilean countryside are difficult to analyse in simple class terms. In the Central Unica Campesino, formed in December 1971 to coordinate the opposition in the countryside, were represented members of *asentamientos*, small proprietors and rural labourers. The opposition of landowners was fierce, powerful and well-financed. If it was true that the level of mobilisation in the countryside was indeed impressive when compared with its long history of political backwardness, a great deal of that mobilisation preceded the UP, some was in opposition to it, or was related to simple economic grievances that would not necessarily lead to a greater level of support of the UP. Moreover, the specific organisational form chosen by the UP, the *consejo campesino*, had very limited success. The aim of the Christian Democrats was to create a powerful rural middle class and strengthen the institution of private

⁸⁸ Barraclough y Fernández, 55.

⁸⁹ Castillo, et. al., 12.

⁹⁰ Maffei y Marchetti, 131.

property in rural areas. A more radical agrarian reform in line with the general policy of the UP would have required a government with much more time, power, ruthlessness and popular support than it enjoyed.

The media and ideology

One of the criticisms frequently levelled at the UP was its lack of attention to the role of the media and of ideology. It has been argued, for example, that this inattention laid the way open for the systematic ideological assault of the right, portraying the government as engaged in a sinister plot to impose a Marxist dictatorship, Cuban style. Opposing this message of the opposition was difficult for the government given the domination of the mass media by the opposition. Six right-wing dailies circulated to an estimated 540,000 people compared with the 312,000 reached by the five pro-UP newspapers; in the provinces the right controlled 41 out of 61 leading newspapers, the left only 11; and of the 155 radio stations (which reached many more people than the newspapers) 115 were against the government and only 40 supported it.⁹¹ The figures for periodical publications were even more strongly biased against the UP, with the opposition reaching an estimated readership of 2.7 million compared with 20,000 for the government.⁹² Many of these magazines were aimed at housewives or teenagers, and were far from predominantly political. Nevertheless during the Allende government they were constantly used to carry an anti-marxist message. The majority of print and radio media, and the most powerful and popular, were controlled by three major domestic economic groups. But they received powerful financial backing from the US government, which if it may not have affected greatly the content of their message greatly improved their ability to increase their coverage. The leading opposition newspaper was *El Mercurio*. According to the report of the Senate Committee on Covert Action in Chile, local CIA controlled groups placed CIA inspired editorials almost daily in *El Mercurio* and, after 1968, “exerted substantial control over the content of that paper’s

⁹¹ Michele Mattelart y Mabel Piccini, “La prensa burguesa—no será más que un tigre de papel?,” *Cuadernos de la Realidad Nacional*, No. 16 (April 1973): 253-4.

⁹² Armand Mattelart, “Los medios de comunicación de masas,”

international news section.”⁹³ In the words of that committee report, the agency coordinating US policy towards Chile, “authorised US \$700,000 for *El Mercurio* on September 9th 1971 and added another US\$ 965,000 to that authorization on April 11th 1972. A CIA project renewal memorandum concluded that *El Mercurio* and other media outlets supported by the agency had played an important role in setting the stage for the 1973 military coup.”⁹⁴

But what was the government to do to counter opposition control over the media? It was politically dangerous, if not impossible, to censure such newspapers as *El Mercurio*, for one of the guarantees that Allende gave the Christian Democrats in return for their support in the Congressional vote necessary to ratify the popular vote when no one candidate has an absolute majority in the Presidential elections, was precisely freedom of the press. Moreover, the government hoped to persuade, not coerce the Chilean people along the road to socialism, so it had to be careful in its dealings with the mass media.

Criticism of the UP, from within its own ranks, viewed the ideological battle as indispensable to the task of transforming the state from a capitalist to a socialist one.⁹⁵ Yet they saw the ideological policy of the UP as at best defensive, at worst non-existent, with the government's dailies attempting a vain circulation struggle with the opposition popular dailies by concentrating on the two staples of the reading public—sex and violence. Not until too late did the UP leadership take seriously the question of political persuasion through the mass media. But the political parties, which should have led the ideological offensive, never had an agreed policy. As a result they tended to concentrate on trivialising issues,

Cuadernos de la Realidad Nacional, N. 3 (March 1970): 37.

⁹³ Staff Report of the Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with respect to Intelligence Activities, *Covert Action in Chile 1963-1973*, U.S. Senate, Washington, D.C., 1975, 20.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁹⁵ For two such examples see Fernando Castillo, Jorge Larraín, y Rafael Echeverría, “Etapas y perspectivas de la lucha ideológica en Chile,” *Cuadernos de la Realidad Nacional*, No. 13 (July 1973); and Armand and Michele Mattelart, “Ruptura y continuidad en la Comunicación: puntos para una polémica,” *Cuadernos de la Realidad Nacional*, No. 12 (April 1972). There is a useful collection of articles from this review in Manuel Antonio Garreton et. al., *Cultura y Comunicaciones de Masas* (Barcelona 1975).

such as attacks on the personal integrity of Christian Democratic leaders (which served only to drive those leaders closer to the National party and the extreme right). Yet it is not difficult to understand why a government facing serious economic and political problems should neglect the remoter concerns of ideology, given the ideological disunity inside the UP.

Many of the cultural critiques made against the government from the left seemed to assume that it was only necessary for a few intellectuals to hand the people their correct ideology to redress the situation.⁹⁶ Other writers stressed that the people must evolve their own ideology; but how was this possible without government control over the opposition's means of communication and without a strong government lead in the first place? On his visit to Chile, Castro remarked that the right had learnt more than the left from the first year of the UP government. But the Chilean government, unlike the Cuban, faced a whole range of institutional opposition, and lacked the enormous wave of popular support that Castro enjoyed after his victory.

It might be argued that the government, after all, was not doing so badly in persuading people to support it. In 1973, for example, it gained 44% of the vote, which was higher than Allende's vote in 1970, though lower than the municipal vote in 1971 (when the UP enjoyed a higher Radical vote and when the economic situation was much better). If ideological commitment was best derived from direct popular action, then the events of October 1972 were perhaps as important in the creation of such commitment as any government control over the means of communication. Insofar as the development of class consciousness under the pressure of events such as the October 1972 crisis was seen to be a serious threat to the existing order, the right had even more need to urge the military to stage a coup.

Mobilisation and Protest: the Cordones Industriales

Social and political change took place at an increasing rate even before the election of the UP government. For example, the urban labour

⁹⁶ See the interesting comments of Hernán Valdés in the introduction to Garretón et. al. *Cultura*. "Unfortunately, these studies (mostly those of Mattelart) never went beyond a purely superstructure level."

force in unions doubled in the six years of the Christian Democratic government, and peasant unions grew from practically nothing in 1964 to over 120,000 members by 1970. Perhaps most spectacular of all was the expansion of the electorate. The proportion of registered electors as a percentage of the total adult population grew from 36% in 1952 to 80% in 1970, or in numbers from 1.1 million to 4.5 million in 1973. Female voting grew in number after women gained the right to vote in the 1952 presidential elections; and a 1962 law made registering to vote and voting obligatory. Hence the number of votes cast rose from 957,000 in 1952 to 3.7 million in 1973. The left received just over a third of a million votes in 1958; in 1973 this had risen to 1,589,000.⁹⁷ To the already large number of urban sector strikes one must add their rapid growth in the countryside too, where the 3 strikes of 1960 had increased to 39 in 1964, to 648 in 1968 and 1,580 in 1970.⁹⁸ Seizures of farms, urban land sites and factories also increased. In 1968, 16 farms were invaded by their workers; in 1970 the number had risen to 368. In the same period the number of urban land seizures rose from 15 to 352; and the number of factory seizures from 5 to 133.⁹⁹ The pace of reform under the Christian Democratic government from 1964-1970 was bitterly opposed by the right. But when the UP government accelerated those changes especially in the industrial sector, the intensity of opposition reached new heights and even led the Christian Democrats to make an uneasy electoral alliance with the right-wing National Party.

The key moment came in October 1972 with a strike by the truckers in Chile against the government's economic policy. The strike spread to include other organisations of professionals and small businesses, and became known as the "bosses' strike." However, what was remarkable was not just the extent of the strike, but popular mobilisation in support of the government against it, leading to the widespread feeling that popular power (*poder popular*) had risen to such heights that it was no longer just a challenge to the dominant order, but could have been the basis for a socialist state. The political choice in 1972-73 was seen as between further compromises with the centre parties and politicians and an effective end of

⁹⁷ Borón, 84-8.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 98.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 99, using a report presented to the Senate by the police.

the hope of creating socialism, or the further development of popular power as the only guarantee of irreversible progress along the road to socialism.¹⁰⁰

But what did “popular power” mean and what forms did it take? The most limited definition came from the Communist Party, anxious to keep such movements within the bounds of legality, and the control of a disciplined centralised state and party apparatus. For example, they discouraged tomas by the landless, and on several occasions the police were used, sometimes with violence, against the squatters. This was in line with the overriding importance that the Communist Party gave to creating an alliance with the middle class, but obviously it encouraged a formal notion of political mobilisation in which, for example, political mobilisation of the peasant base meant little more than the organisation of a mass meeting.¹⁰¹ Although the MIR and the left of the Socialist Party held much more aggressive views on the need to promote popular power, it was not until the last few months before the fall of the government that the Socialists backed grass-roots movements.

The government itself was also cautious. In its electoral programme, for example, the UP had stated that the local UP committees (the CUP's), would “above all prepare the way for the exercise of popular power.” In practice, however, the CUPs never overcame the differences that divided the parties, and they mostly fell into inactivity.¹⁰² This was a serious setback to the plans for popular mobilisation.

In Concepción in July 1972, several parties of the UP organized a People's Assembly. The resulting confusion over this episode indicated the ambivalence of the government and of the parties to such initiatives. Allende and the Communist Party feared that the intention was to by-pass congress, and create a separate de facto popular legislature. Originally the local Communist Party had supported the proposal, but they withdrew and the local Communist provincial *intendente* prohibited a planned street demonstration. Even the national committee of the MAPU disavowed the participation of the local MAPU. In practice the Assembly seems to have

¹⁰⁰ Hugo Zemelman, “Significación del poder popular,” *Cuadernos de la Realidad Nacional*, No. 17 (July 1973): 199.

¹⁰¹ Ian Roxborough, *Agrarian Policies in the Popular Unity Government*, Occasional Paper No. 14, 1974, Latin American Institute, University of Glasgow, 16.

been much less of an ultra-leftist plot than the Communists feared, and much more a serious debate over the alternative paths of popular mobilisation then developing at the grass roots level.¹⁰³

Partly in response to these kinds of pressures from below the UP leadership was forced to revise its policies. At the El Arrayán meeting in mid-1972 it laid more emphasis on popular mobilisation and stated that “the delays and inadequacies in this area constituted one of the principle criticisms and self- criticisms made at the meeting.”¹⁰⁴ That meeting stressed the need to involve people who were not members of the UP parties, and it was emphasised that people must be given a real share in the taking of decisions at the local level. There was neither time nor authority left to put these proposals into action and they remained as aspirations rather than achievements.

One general vein of criticism of the UP was that the relationship between the government and the masses was lopsided. Although there was plenty of evidence of a desire for popular participation the channels for this were inadequate. Involvement was limited to economic activities, and there was little opportunity to share in political power.¹⁰⁵ One indication of impatience at the government's slowness was the large number of firms that were taken into the state sector as a direct result of worker pressure rather than government plans. In June 1972 the major entrepreneurial group, the SOFOFA (Sociedad de Fomento Fabril), presented a report to Congress stating that there had been 26 factories intervened and taken into state ownership, employing 185,000 workers and contributing 5% to gross industrial production, and that most had been intervened because of labour conflict.¹⁰⁶ The government's ideas about the extent of the APS were more limited than those of the workers.¹⁰⁷ It was not until June 1973, however,

¹⁰² Maira, 79.

¹⁰³ Castells, *Lucha*, 432.

¹⁰⁴ Cited in *Nueva Sociedad*, 48.

¹⁰⁵ Castillo et. al., 4.

¹⁰⁶ Zemelman, 200. According to Raptis (52), there were also 100 “people’s enterprises,” that is, small factories taken over after being abandoned by their owners. They employed about 5,000 workers.

¹⁰⁷ As was also shown by worker hostility to the proposal of the Communist Minister of the economy, Orlando Millas, to return 123 factories to their owners, just before the March 1973 elections. Eventually, facing strong hostility in the Socialist party, the government backed down. Raptis, 72-3.

that the CUT decided to lend its full weight to such activities and to advocate by-passing Congress and creating an overall coordination structure for the workers in the APS.¹⁰⁸

Santiago was ringed by an industrial belt where the majority of the poor, some but by no means all organised into unions, lived and work. It was in these areas that were concentrated most of the JAPs, the campamentos, and the unions, and where the parties of the left, not least the MIR, were active in a variety of community organisations. In response to the bosses' strike of October 1972, commune-wide organisations—the cordones—came together to organise support for the government.

The French sociologist Alain Touraine, writing at the time of their formation, was very impressed by the development of the cordones. In his words,

Whatever else happens, Chile has given to the revolutionary movement an original form; the *cordones industriales*. Factory workers, generally from the social sector, organize on a territorial basis and a few dozen factories form the starting point of a *cordón*, such as those of Cerrillos, Vicuna MacKenna, Macul, Mapocho, Santiago Centro etc. The city was surrounded and penetrated by the cordones. At times it has moved to a higher stage, the *comando comunal*, the beginning of local dual power structure that prepares the way for poder popular. It was a class movement.

But he also pointed to the tension between the cordones and the government.

The very Communists and the CUT leadership recognise the autonomy of the cordones at the same time as they feel threatened by a movement that rejects the centralised and bureaucratic nature of the CUT. This class movement tends to create a territorial organisation based on the commune for lack of trust in the government, because of the antagonism of other parts of the state, and of the armed forces that often intervene with extreme brutality in the name of the law over arms control.¹⁰⁹

The first cordón to be established, the Cordón Cerrillos-Maipu has fortunately been studied in detail and it is possible to trace its origins, development, problems and achievements.¹¹⁰ The cordón had its origins in

¹⁰⁸ Zemelman, 208.

¹⁰⁹ Touraine, 12-13.

¹¹⁰ Maria Cristina Corden, Eder Sader y Mónica Threlfall, *Consejo Comunal de Trabajadores y Cordón Cerrillos Maipu: 1972*. Documento de Trabajo, no. 67,

a Comando Coordinador, formed in June 1972 to press for the inclusion of several of the local industries engaged in strikes into the APS. Although the initiative was initially welcomed by the Socialist party, the party changed its mind after the initial June mobilisation and the Comando Coordinador was left with only the support of the extreme left parties (basically the MIR, and two revolutionary communist parties). The transformation of the local organisation (and its imitation in other parts of Santiago) came with the October crisis, when the problem of ensuring the supply of basic necessities meant organisation on a communal rather than a factory level (though the Cordón Cerrillos was slower undertaking this task than its imitators). The problems that the cordones faced were not simply those of work; rather, they were a combination of factors that interrelated to create a situation of deprivation. In the case of Cerrillos for example, one considerable problem, and one which brought sectors of the opposition (mostly the Christian Democrats, but even groups further to the right) into local organisation was that of inadequate public transport. The cordón also included local peasant groups that had been engaged in land tomas.

However, the core element of the cordón that remained most consistently active were the organised unionists engaged in the process of taking their factories into the APS, and organised in the Comando Coordinador de los Trabajadores del Cordón Cerrillos Maipu (though sometimes it was called the Comité Coordinador de Luchas de la Comuna). Faced with the slowness of the government, and the opposition of the Communist Party, the workers of some thirty industries decided to take matters into their own hands; though many of them were members of the

CIDU, 1973. I am grateful to Mónica Threlfall for the loan of this document. The summary of the development of the Cordón in the text is taken from this document. The Commune of Maipu was at that time an important producer of capital goods (the fourth largest in Santiago)—though it also included several districts that are predominantly rural. Of the estimated population of 105,210 inhabitants, 12.4% worked in industry, though of the active labour force, industry, which employed 35% of that force, was the single largest source of employment. The commune was an important supplier of market garden products for the large Santiago market. Though only 5% of the population lived in the rural districts, many more worked there (and lived elsewhere). The dominant unions in the area were the metallurgical ones—of the 15 unions of more than 300 members in the commune, 11 were metallurgical. 20% of the unions locally were created in 1971-2. There were also 3 rural unions in the commune—2 of them with more than 400 members each. There were 22 campamentos in the commune, with 3,178 families.

Socialist Party they did not receive the full support of that party. The pressure of the workers of the cordón on the government led to a change of policy about incorporating the factories of the area into the APS; and this success of grass-roots pressure led to the formation of similar movements elsewhere. The local CUT was notable for its almost total absence from these events.¹¹¹

The movement superseded party affiliations. There were even attempts to stop the parties making capital out of the workers' successes, by, for example, prohibiting the distribution of party literature at meetings of the workers. The solidarity created in the factories during the October strike was impressive; that in the commune as a whole less so. Nevertheless, the experience was important in demonstrating the potentialities of united action of all the inhabitants of a given area— industrial workers, peasants, pobladores—and in cutting across the gender and party divisions that were the normal characteristics of Chilean political life. But one must not exaggerate the uniformity of class consciousness in the cordón. The struggle to take the factories into the APS united workers, temporarily at least, above parties, but the same degree of integration was certainly not characteristic of other activities in the commune. Neither the agricultural workers nor the pobladores ever achieved the level of activity and integration in the overall Cordón Cerrillos that the industrial workers achieved in their organization. Moreover, the presence of many white-collar workers and some pobladores provided a strong electoral base for the opposition. In the 1971 municipal elections of a total vote of 26,301, the largest single party was the right-wing National party with 8,265 votes, followed by the Socialists with 7,575, the Christian Democrats with 4,799 and the Communists with 4,061.

If the popular mobilisation in October 1972 was impressive, and even if the figure of perhaps 100,000 workers active in the cordones was not much of an exaggeration, one must be cautious in assessing their significance. They were after all very short-lived organisations, responding

¹¹¹ Even at the time of the October strike the provincial CUT arranged a meeting the agenda for which contained no reference to that strike. Corden et. al., 34.

to a crisis that threatened to bring down the government. The degree of organization of the industrial workers was always higher than that of other sectors. The comandos comunales intended to unite all the grass roots organisations in an embryonic popular power were not significant numerically and did not develop. Nor indeed were the cordones ever in a position to assume the basis for the seizure of state power. Their activities in many ways were defensive rather than offensive, taking over the role of unions when these failed to defend the interests of their members.¹¹² The cordones served more as coordinators of the activities of local trade unions than as a vanguard of revolution.

In any case, the cordones would have needed to work with the support of the government, the political parties and the official union movement in order to have formed part of a successful overall political strategy. But the government was anxious to stop the process of factory tomas, the Communists not at all keen on the cordones, and though local Socialists often took the lead in the establishing them, the attitude of the party as a whole was ambivalent. The CUT favoured the policy of returning factories to owners and in some areas it was alleged that the CUT tried to organise parallel cordones.¹¹³ Not until a few months before the coup did the CUT fully accept the existence of the cordones and start coming to terms with the strategy that acceptance implied. But the politics of those last few months were incredibly complicated and bitter, and it was hardly the time for an abrupt change of policy by the government. Touraine's initial comments on the cordones may exaggerate their originality, but the cordones were a remarkable demonstration of the potentialities of working class unity, for once superseding the normal partisan divisions of the Chilean left.

Conclusion

¹¹² Castells, *Lucha*, 13-140; Zemelman, *Significación*, 205.

¹¹³ T.V. Sathyamurthy, "Chile: parliamentary socialism and class struggle," *Economic and Political Weekly* (Bombay, India), vol. X (April 1975): 62. He writes that 'the strategy adopted by the CUT to undermine the rank and file cordones was to organise its own cordones with a view to creating a Congress of Cordones in which the CUT would be able to control policies by ensuring a majority in its favour' (63).

The reasons why the UP experiment failed became the topic of intense international debate, but the debate concentrated on overall explanations for the fall of the UP without much consideration of the nature and extent of social change within Chile. Indeed, most foreign commentators extracted from the Chilean experience precisely those lessons that it suited them to extract.¹¹⁴ The debate inside the UP coalition over the reasons for the coup was fierce, and it was not really until the mid-1980s that the majority of the former UP coalition resolved its differences and entered into a pact with the Christian Democrats.

It is not the intention of this work to look at general explanations of the failure of the UP. The focus is rather to look at the social changes of the key groups of the UP in this period. The UP embarked upon a radical programme of social transformation—of unions, of rural workers, and of *pobladores*; and also attempted to bring into the UP alliance sectors that were initially hostile above all the middle class but also women. Another aim of this article is to draw attention to the important analysis of those changes made by academics and others at the time—research which has too often been ignored or indeed lost in the dramatic purges that followed the coup.

In some ways the crucial group that could have determined the fate of the UP government was the middle class. Could the government ever have won over substantial sectors from the middle class? The problem was that while some sectors of the government—not least of all President Allende—were genuine in their efforts to reassure these sectors and win them over, other parts of the government were not, and opposed any policy that appeared to compromise the radical aims of the UP. On such divisions it was impossible to base a consistent and coherent strategy.

This division of opinion and of strategy was also apparent in the attitude of the various parts of the UP alliance to the question of popular

¹¹⁴ The French and the Italian Communist parties drew the conclusion that they must continue with the united front tactics. The Italian CP journal *Rinascita* commented on September 21st, 1973 that the “democratic present and future of our country depends on overcoming the rift between the policy of the Communist party and the Christian Democrats.” The Argentine Communist Party argued that “it is better to go slowly.” In its view alliances with the bourgeoisie and even with

mobilisation. Popular mobilisation developed from below without following a clear path laid down either by the more moderate or more radical sectors of the UP. Popular mobilisation took place in terms of the community rather than of the work place. The cordones showed how a crisis could unite the inhabitants of an area in common defence of their interests. Such movements were important and novel because they cut across union divisions, workplace divisions, even, to some extent party differences.¹¹⁵ Apart from mitigating the differences between the UP parties, the cordones also drew in some members of the Christian Democratic Party. This importance was potential rather than fully realised, but the cordones were a new method of political action in Chile, and the fear that they aroused on the right is testimony that the opponents of the government realised the extent of the threat that they presented to the dominant order.

Yet the experience of mobilisation in Chile, impressive as it was, also showed the limitations of such a process when it does not enjoy wider political support and when it lacks the means to transform a response to a crisis into an assault on state power. One reason for the instability of the cordones was the absence of institutions between the local grass-roots organisations and the apparatus of central government. This lack of intermediary structures was general to all popular mobilisations undertaken during the UP government and underlines a gap between that mobilisation and the politicians and the government. However, surely a greater gap was that between the policies of the government—or at least of Allende because by this time the government itself was divided—and the aims of those involved in popular mobilisations. At the same time as the government was attempting to moderate its economic policy and seek alliance with the Christian Democrats, and even involved military officers

the military were still necessary and possible, but the vital question was “who should lead this great coalition of forces?”

¹¹⁵ The parallel with the Italian *camera del lavaro* is a suggestive one. The *cameras* “provided a centre for all the local unions and workers institutions of a particular commune or district... Union members were always a minority among workers, union dues irregular, organisation often sketchy. Unions had to lead a non-union ‘mass’ The *camera* tended to breed a populist and communal, sometimes a class rather than a trade or craft mentality. It embraced a much wider range of workers.” Gwyn Williams, *Proletarian Order: Antonio Gramsci, factory councils and the origins of Communism in Italy* (London 1975), 23-4.

in the cabinet, popular mobilisation was moving in an opposite and more radical way. The tensions involved weakened even further the already fragile authority of the government.

Chile under Allende was unique in trying to create a socialist state at the same time as allowing unhampered freedom to its opponents to discredit the government. The efforts of the Allende government to persuade the Chilean nation to support the project of his government aroused both strong loyalty and strong opposition. But in the end the opposition had more power and weapons than the government.