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### CHILE BETWEEN THE LEFT AND RIGHT: EDUARDO'S FREI "REVOLUTION IN LIBERTY"

CHILE ENTRE LA IZQUIERDA Y LA DERECHA: EDUARDO FREI Y "LA REVOLUCIÓN EN LIBERTAD"

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#### Abstract

The article surveys the government of the Chilean President Eduardo Frei Montalva in the period 1964 -1970. He won the elections thanks to his program called "revolution in liberty", which was the alternative to the classic right government of Jorge Alessandri while it also tried to resist a rising left-wing wave in Chile, represented by Salvador Allende. Consistently are analyzed the introduced legislative measures – nationalization of copper, the agrarian and educational reform. Both the successful policies and the negative influences on the Chilean society are traced and the reasons for the successful representation of the Left in the elections of 1970 are outlined.

#### Keywords

Contemporary history - Government - Eduardo Frei - Revolution in Liberty - Chile

### Resumen

El artículo examina el gobierno del presidente chileno Eduardo Frei Montalva en el período 1964-1970. Ganó las elecciones gracias a su programa llamado "revolución en libertad", que fue la alternativa al clásico gobierno de derecha de Jorge Alessandri, resistiendo a la vez una oleada de partidos, movimientos e ideas de izquierda en Chile, cuyo máximo representante fue el socialista Salvador Allende. Se analizan constantemente las medidas legislativas introducidas -chilenización del cobre, reforma agraria y educativa. Se trazan las políticas exitosas y las influencias negativas sobre la sociedad chilena y se esbozan las razones de la exitosa representación de la izquierda en las elecciones de 1970.

### **Palabras Claves**

Historia contemporánea – Gobierno – Eduardo Frei – Revolución en Libertad – Chile

The election of K. Ibanyes in 1952 for President based on a populist program and moral purge meant a transition to the second edition of the social and political pact that had ensured stability of the government by the end of the previous decade. The repeal of the Law of Permanent Defense of Democracy (introduced in 1948 and banning the activities of the Chilean Communist Party) and the inauguration of some reforms aiming at making electoral process more transparent, made it possible for the Chilean democracy to thrive in the period 1958-1970. This was its "golden age"<sup>1</sup>. Ibanyes' populist model failed, which lead to the coming on power of the exactly opposite style of government: Jorge Alessandri, with a conservative program oriented towards the entrepreneurial class. The failure of the "Government of the leaders" on its turn opened the way to E. Frei's "revolution in liberty". Christian Democracy, however, also failed to consolidate and something new came on power- The Bloc of National unity with its proposal to deepen the social changes and the "Chilean road to socialism"<sup>2</sup>. So within twenty years Chile passed through three governments with completely different political views which showed the hesitations of the population.

During the 60s the strife for e more just society in Latin America came definitely to the fore. There was weariness from the political situation and accordingly a desire for a radical change. Supporters of the Left revolutionary ideology appeared in Chile, which in turn scared the Right. For these reasons, the stability of the center of the political spectrum became extremely important.

In the early 60s the strongest centrist party was the Christian Democrats, a movement which had its roots in Europe. In Latin America (the strongest ones being in Costa Rica, El Salvador, Colombia and Venezuela) they combined ideological components both from the Left and Right. Built on the Catholic religiosity, the Christian movement preached the values of community and cooperation between different social groups, rejecting communism and its emphasis on the class conflict. Like the Left, it had collectivist values and emphasis on social justice; but it violently rejected atheism and narcissistic materialism. Some Christian Democrats saw their political philosophy as "capitalism with a human face". CDP was officially founded in 1957 and its leader during the 60s was the extremely popular Eduardo Frei (1911-1982 AD)<sup>3</sup>. The Christian Democratic Party had to be the alternative to socialism and capitalism and to give its "own way" for solving the problems, called "an integral crisis" of Chile. It competed for voters with the right-wing Catholic oriented parties<sup>4</sup>. In view of the party system, CDP took the place of the Radicals in the center which had lost a catastrophic series of elections within the last 15 years. CDP very quickly became a balancer.

In the 60s Chile was experiencing difficulties in the agriculture which had a reflection on the public relations. Unlike most Latin American countries there were strong constitutional traditions here. The typical for the region intervention of the army in politics or any radical revolutionary changes were very rare here. In regard to the economy, the country was still above the average level on the continent; this, however, did not calm the society<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> S. Gres Toso, Bicentenario en Chile: la celebración de una laborosa confrontación política. www.historiapolitica.com/datos/boletin

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> L. Maira, Opciones y retos de la democracia en Chile. In: Chile hacia el 2000, Tomo I (Caracas, 1988), 119-120.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> М. Икин, История на Латинска Америка. С., 2010, с. 341.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> J. Torres Dujisin, La utopía de los 60: una aproximación al quiebre del Sistema democrático en el Chile en el año 1973. www.historiapolitica.com/datos/biblioteca/torres1

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> А. Сивилов, Първият 11 септември. Чили (1973-1993 г.). С., 2013, с. 44.

The necessity of a new approach in the state government emerged on the foreground. The municipal elections held in 1963, showed that the traditional parties had retained positions, but the new electoral gave their preference for FRAP or the newly established Christian Democratic Party. Separately, the two parties received an almost equal number of votes, but this created conditions for a strong Left representation or even a Left president or coalition of socially oriented movements<sup>6</sup>. The efforts put in overcoming the aftermath of the earthquake (including the preparation and holding of the World Cup in 1962) exacerbated the political situation on the eve of the presidential election in 1964. The Right gave its support to the CDP candidate - Eduardo Frei, who won the majority of "two of the three thirds" - 56% of the votes – a rare case in the electoral history of Chile. The victory was definite; behind the new president stood an impressive majority which expected the inauguration of the much-needed changes.

Frei's victory was of great importance to the Left: it lost for the third time. This lead many people to believe that the armed struggle was preferable because the institutional way was worn out<sup>7</sup>. His victory could also be seen as a response to the growing popularity of S. Allende.

The effects of the Cuban revolution in Chile were felt in the increasing political radicalism and, at the same time, in the activation of its opponents and those who defended the status quo. The public, however, gave preference to moderation, i.e. the centrist positions.

Between 1964 and 1970 the country experienced, in the words of E. Frei, a "revolution in liberty". He made reference to the alternative of the revolutionary program of the Chilean Left. Actually he initiated a process of a thorough transformation and modernization, but entirely within the existing legality and democratic approach.

The "revolution in liberty" was seen by the US government as a democratic alternative to the armed revolution of the Left in Latin America. Frei had strong support (both explicit and implicit from USA) during his campaign and cabinet<sup>8</sup>. At that time, Washington was adhering to the launched by the President Kennedy program "Alliance for Progress". Its purpose was to promote reforms in the countries of the region and to bring them closer to the standards of Washington. Therefore CDP and the President Eduardo Frei were supported by all sides. Firstly, by the ordinary people who were hoping for an improvement in their lives, secondly, by the traditional elite, who were striving to prevent the Left from coming to power, and finally by the United States, according to which the situation in the country could be improved by neutralizing the Left threat and strengthening the positions of Washington in the economy of Chile through new investments<sup>9</sup>.

Frei's government was generally supported by only one party. In fact, CDP acted virtually as a federation of tendencies, which is very close to a political coalition within which happened changes and twists<sup>10</sup>. This would lead to deepening contradictions and consequently would reduce solidity and power.

<sup>8</sup> М. Икин, Цит. Съч., с. 342.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Пак там, с. 45-46.

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> J. Nercesian, Cambio social, modernización y surguimientos de la lucha armada en Brasil, Chile y Uruguay (1950-1970) Pol His. Año 5, Num. 10, II sem., pp. 215 www.historiapolitica.com/datos/boletin

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> А. Сивилов, Цит. Съч., с. 46.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> L. Maira, Opciones y retos de la democracia en Chile... 120.

With no need of coalitions and supported by his own party (a fact without precedent in the Chilean politics) Frei's cabinet enjoyed social stability. His administration was oriented towards strictly implementing the program, which had presented his candidacy. Its slogan - "Revolution in liberty" - provided the key aspects of Frei's political project. The program offered deep social, economic, political and educational changes aiming at correcting the imbalances in the Chilean society and all those aspects that had their origin in different structural situations. Hence the name "revolution" complemented with "liberty", implying the idea to implement reforms within the existing system<sup>11</sup>.

Frei's cabinet wanted to introduce the social-Christian democratic model in the country which was different from capitalism and Marxism. It was welcomed very well by the middle class, which insisted on a successful government. Once they had seized power, the Christian Democrats removed employees associated with the Radicals and the Right, with the clear aim to intensify the process of changes included in Frei's government program<sup>12</sup>. On a national scale the plan consisted of three main parts: agrarian reform, nationalization of copper and social promotion, measures that, in order to be implemented, there should be a positive Congress. The party concentrated its efforts on the parliamentary elections from March 1965. The results were definitely in favor of the government; CDP received the 43.6% of the votes; FRAP- 23.4%; RP - 13.7; LP - 7.3%; CP - 5.3%<sup>13</sup>. The society was directed towards projects for change.

In the first year of its government Frei's administration acted decisively: changes in the foreign policy and establishing diplomatic relations with the socialist bloc; emphasis on Latin American solidarity; inheritance tax and other transformations in the tax system. After that and almost coinciding with the death of the main ideologist of the Frei's platform, the economist Jorge Ahumada, the government slowed pace and perceived alternative moves, originating from the Right. The most advanced sectors within the party responded with a program for deepening of the social transformations called "non-capitalistic way of development." The cabinet refused to go in this direction and in the coming years strived to remain moderate<sup>14</sup>. These hesitations would turn out to be disastrous for the fulfillment of the goals and winning the next presidential election in 1970.

Aiming to gain more popularity and to improve the state economy, the cabinet offered a program called "nationalization of copper." It was one of the pillars in the government program. Frei believed that the ownership of the mines had to be changed, i.e. the state had to have a share in the large enterprises – producers of copper in Chile. More specific objectives were to increase the volume of production, to participate more actively in the trade on the international markets and to improve the situation of the workers in this sector<sup>15</sup>. The reform envisaged the purchase of shares from the companies that owned the main mines. Buying part of the mines, however, only worsened the relations of the state with the companies "Anaconda" and "Kenkot". The state invested 489 million Dollars but gained control over only 1,5% of copper exports. At the same time the taxes received from these companies drastically decreased. The rising of the prices of the copper increased the profits of US corporations three times. The profit of "Anaconda Copper Mining Company" in 1967 was 90% from its investments in the country, and in 1968 it increased up to 110%. In fact,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> www.biografiasyvidas.com

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> www.archivochile.com

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> www.archivochile.com

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> L. Maira, Opciones y retos de la democracia en Chile... 120.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> www.archivochile.com

the state bought 51% from the shares in rather adverse conditions<sup>16</sup>. The same was the situation in Argentina under Peron's nationalizations.

One of the first measures of Frei was Law N. 15,720 proclaimed on September 30, 1964. It established the Junta for school support and scholarships, aiming to implement measures for social support of students in difficult situation to have equal access to education<sup>17</sup>. In fact, the educational reform expanded in the first place the basic education to eight years (duration); the second stage, i.e. high school lasted four years and was divided into two spheres: academic-humanitarian and technical vocational. The educational plans and training programs were updated, a pre-school education was introduced and establishment of kindergartens by a separate law was launched. This effort gave as a result a significant increase in the number of students and teachers, especially in the rural areas; all this was complemented by a program for literacy of the adult population, which reduced illiteracy from 16 to 11%<sup>18</sup>. The government believed that education was a means of social mobility and therefore acted with vigor and targeted investment of financial resources in the sector.

Among the priorities of E. Frei was to improve the quality of life of Chilean society. First, the Ministry of Housing and urbanization was established, which had to reduce the housing deficit in the country. Health platforms were also important such as the creation of programs for care of mothers and children which included mainly supplies. Fifty six new hospitals were built, doubling the number of beds; a law on insurance for occupational accidents and diseases was passed. A program for family planning was introduced. This contributed to mortality to be reduced, especially infant mortality. A great impetus to organizing communities was given-neighborhood communities, centers for mothers and youth<sup>19</sup>. These achievements, however, failed to affect greater part of the population. Much longer time than a six-year presidential mandate would be needed.

The process of reforms in the agriculture continued. Law N. 16,640 established limitation in the acquisition of land to a maximum 80 hectares; lands that exceeded this amount had to be expropriated and redistributed. It established a three-year period for expropriation of poorly cultivated lands<sup>20</sup>. It also allowed the confiscation of lands that were abandoned; or plots of land to be expropriated for residential building. Expropriation was the first step of the reform for redistribution of property among the peasants. Its goals were different. Among the main objectives was to increase production, which was hindered by the outdated methodology in this sector and by the relations between owners and workers. At the same time it aimed to integrate the peasantry socially, politically and economically<sup>21</sup>. In this relation, a law was passed in 1967 that allowed the formation of trade unions unifying agricultural workers. So the peasants could organize themselves to improve their working conditions and had the right to strike (prohibited only during harvest, as it could cause serious economic difficulties)<sup>22</sup>. The aim was the destruction of the clientelist relationships that dominated in the province.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> А. Сивилов, Цит. Съч., с. 46-47.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> www.historiapolitica.cl

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> www.biografiasyvidas.com

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> www.biografiasyvidas.com

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> www.historiapolitica.cl

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> www.archivochile.com

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> www.archivochile.com

The proclaimed agrarian reform and expropriation of the land of big landowners did not reach the planned level. Till 1969, instead of 100 000 families only 28,000 were provided with land<sup>23</sup>. The resistance to change in this sector was extremely strong. The landlords, the majority of which belonged to the traditional parties (liberals, conservatives and radicals) vehemently opposed to the agrarian reform. The peasants, in turn, led by the political leaders started taking over power, often with blood. The reigning fear in the agriculture and the drought from 1967-68 caused a decline in the production which did not meet the expectations of the government. The establishment of the so-called "asentamientos" (a form of cooperative property) aimed to improve the production and the organization of collective rural property. By 1970 the expropriation comprised 1264 fields with a total area of 3.4 million hectares. Unionization in 1970 reached 114,000 workers, bound in 413 trade unions. These figures were much lower than expected<sup>24</sup>.

Among the economic achievements could be distinguished the annual GNP growth of 5% and the end of the endemic fiscal deficit. The government put efforts to improve the infrastructure - construction of road network, opening of the tunnel on the road Santiago-Valparaiso; a railway network in the capital was built, as well as a new international airport in the close vicinity<sup>25</sup>.

The anti-inflationary stabilization plan was successful in the period 1964-1966, reducing the annual rates of 38.5% to 17% due to the improved international trade and the increased in production of consumer goods. After that, however, efforts were put in another direction which caused a massive inflationary wave<sup>26</sup>.

Around 1967 the government experienced a change. The expectations put on it were much higher than what was done. The social and political agitation began to increase and the opposition from the Left and Right strengthened its positions. Not only political parties and trade unions began to manifest themselves in the political arena, but also the army became a new and significant player<sup>27</sup>. Military interventions were not typical for Chile; the army respected the constitutional foundations of the state.

Since the second half of the 60s the army was facing various problems such as lack of materials, equipment, infrastructure deficit, and especially low salaries. This protest was expressed in the many resignations of officers from the military academies on May 1, 1968. The real crisis occurred in the spring of 1969, when general Viaux began a struggle to increase the military salaries. The state authority reacted in the usual way - with his removal. The rebellious general did not accept to go on reserve and his garrison began to organize resistance. Loyal to the government parts were sent against the garrison and at the same time the electricity and water supply in the buildings was cut. The negotiations lead to an agreement that envisaged increase of the salaries, but also the withdrawal of the general<sup>28</sup>. This rebellion took the authorities by surprise, because similar actions of the army were not typical for Chile. At the same time fear appeared, because back in time such a rebellion, aiming to raise the military salaries, led to a radical transformation of the state institutions and the new Constitution of 1925.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> А. Сивилов, Цит. Съч, с. 46.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> www.archivochle.com

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> www.biografiasyvidas.com

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> www.archivochlie.com

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> www.biografiasyvidas.com

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> El Tacnazo (Chile, 1969) www.patrimonio.bligoo.cl/content/view/1015980

The last problem that the government failed to solve was the rate of inflation and the impoverishment of the population. The opposition managed to take advantage of the failures of CDP and the society started turning significantly to the Left. With the approaching presidential election a search for new options for coalitions began<sup>29</sup>. The unification of the Left was not new, Chile was the only Latin American country where the formula "Popular Front" had won elections and had governed the country.

At the beginning of his government Frei relied on the enthusiastic support of the whole party. Over time, however, criticism appeared within CDP. The majority supported the measures the president, but the "rebels" demanded more radical reforms. In 1969 this group separated from the party and established the *Movement* for *Unified* Popular *Action* (MAPU)<sup>30</sup>. This weakened the ruling party; Frei was forced to comply with his critics. The political climate favored profound changes which provoked rapid growth of social demands.

Although there was a clear majority on the presidential elections, the Congress remained fragmented into three parts - Right, Center and Left. MPs and senators from the Right and Left often voted together to block Frei's reforms. Both political movements expected victory on the elections of 1970 and acted together in order to hinder the Christian Democrats<sup>31</sup>. Yet Christian Democrats retained their influence, remaining on centrist positions. They were relatively calm since they were still the largest party after the parliamentary elections of 1969 (They lost absolute majority, however. Some of the votes went to BNE, which received 44%.). The Left, however, faced a real challenge. The possibilities were either unification or failure, so negotiations for a coalition started<sup>32</sup>. It had not ruled for almost twenty years, while the Right was not satisfied with what was done under Frei's government.

E. Frei had lost political power and energy, especially after the split, while the initial commitment to the Right was also a hindrance. S. Allende's victory in 1970 was not explicit, but showed a clear trend of society's turning to the Left, caused by the failure of the Centre to carry out the necessary reforms. The scales tilted in favor of the Left, especially after the withdrawal of MAPU. In fact, BNE continued the policy of E. Frei, but with much more radical approach to meet the expectations of the society. The coup of 1973 was carried out by the army and the Right and so the cycle in the political arena was closed.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> А. Сивилов, Цит. Съч.с. 47.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>30</sup> www.archivochile.com

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>31</sup> Икин, М. Цит. Съч., с. 342.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>32</sup> Сивилов, А. Цит. Съч., с. 47.

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