



In 1931-32 the world depression wracked Chile. The moderate Radicals assumed control in November 1931. Six months of strikes, several revolutionary attempts such as a naval mutiny turned abortive soviet, and continuing economic crisis ensued. On June 4, 1932, a coalition of leftist military officers and representatives of several small socialist parties took over and proclaimed a Socialist Republic of Chile. For two weeks an Air Force colonel reigned, followed by the 100-day regime of Carlos Davila, former ambassador to the US. The "Socialist Republic" was overthrown by a Center-Right coup, but the socialists went on to form the Chilean Socialist Party (which four decades later in 1970, gained power under Salvador Allende's Popular Unity coalition).

The labour movement now consisted of four principal sections, the Socialist CNSL, the Stalinist FOC, the

Trotskyist CNSL, and the Syndicalist CGT. This latter was the Confederation General de Trabajadores, established in 1931 by the re-marriage of the now resurgent coastal IWW and the anarcho-syndicalist FORC. The CGT was strong among port workers, printers, shoemakers, construction workers, painters, carpenters and electricians.

In the go-slow strikes of 1933, the government once again sent troops. Hundreds were killed, the strike leaders deported. The CGT came under anarcho-syndicalist control. In December, 1936, they participated in a massive labor convention of Communist and Socialists, but at the last moment they decided against joining the amalgamation of unions. From 1938 to 1941 the CGT entered the Popular Front government of President Cerda, along with the Socialists, Communists, Democrats, and Radicals. This did not stop the CGT printers strike of 1939. The CGT found itself slowly sapped to death.

In 1950 the shoemakers, the printers, and a few other unions still remaining in the



CGT joined the Communist controlled CUTCH. After a fruitless opposition to the Communists, the anarcho-syndicalists, in 1951, withdrew to organise a rival union, CNT. In 1960 CNT and a few maritime unions joined the anti-communist KFTU and the Pan-American ORIT. Like its predecessor, the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, ORIT was a US front put together by the AFL-CIO and funded secretly by the Central Intelligence Agency.

It was a singularly disgusting end.

From it, however, we gain valuable lessons. Firstly, to never trust opportunism. Secondly, to distrust all alliances with Communists and Socialists. Thirdly, to never let our anti-communism become pro-Americanism. Our course of action must remain direct, independent, and the leftist of the left.



... the ever-present fear of arrest and torture'. A worker in the hands of the Chilean army.

## SYNDICALISM IN PRACTICE

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SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT

REBEL WORKER  
AN INJURY TO ONE IS AN INJURY TO ALL  
ANARCHO-SYNDICALIST PAPER

# 3. CHILE: The I.W.W. & F.O.R.C.

In the last edition of "Rebel Worker" we issued a special supplement on Argentine anarcho-syndicalism, focusing on the FORA. This, the third of the special supplements looks at the history of Chilean anarcho-syndicalism. In particular, it examines the histories of the two major Chilean syndicalist union centers, the IWW (an affiliate of the IWA) and the FORC. The period under discussion is the rise of the anarcho-syndicalist movement during the WWI period and the 1920's and its decline in the 1940's and 1950's. This supplement consists of two articles. The first was originally published in the September 1983 edition of the "Black Flag" quarterly magazine and the second was written by G. W.

## CHILE Anarchism and the Workers Movement

*The anarchists must enter the working-class unions, first of all to carry on anarchist propaganda there, and then because it is the only way in which - on the day we all hope for - we may have at our disposition groups who are capable of taking over the direction of production; we must enter the unions, finally, to struggle energetically against that detestable state of mind that makes the syndicates disinclined to defend anything but special interests.....*

Malatesta

The Chilean workers movement is one of the oldest organised workers movements in Latin America. From its early mutualist origins it quickly assumed a truly revolutionary character and constantly fought for the transformation of Chilean society through the destruction of not only the capitalist system but of the State itself, which it saw as an instrument of repression and domination. Throughout its long history it has also persistently fought for its autonomy and integrity despite continued attempts by political parties, especially the Communists, to utilize and manipulate it for their own ends.

The deep historical roots of the Chilean workers movement can be traced back to the founding of the first mutual benefit society, in 1847, which was the first association of its kind in Latin America. Some six years later, in 1853, the printing workers of Santiago, under the leadership of the Peruvian Victor Laynez, founded the *Sociedad Tipografica* which later became the *Union de Tipografos*. In 1858 workers in the coastal town of Valparaiso created the *Sociedad de Artesanos*, and by 1860 similar groups had been formed in Santiago and La Serena. From then on the number of mutualist societies rapidly increased. By 1870 thirteen such organisations existed, rising to 39 in 1880 and 240 in 1900. The maximum number of 600 was reached in 1925 with a total membership of 25,000. In 1916 the representatives of these mutualist societies formed the *Congreso Social Obrero*

which played an important role until the late 1920's.

In parallel with the mutualist societies whose aims were confined simply to mutual aid, education and the improvement of working conditions for its members, a more radical workers organisation was formed. In 1850 Francisco Bilbao, a veteran of the 1848 revolution in Paris, together with Santiago Arcos and Eugenio Lillo founded the *Sociedad de la Igualdad (Society of Equals)* in Santiago. The aim of the *Sociedad* was 'political sovereignty through a natural and communal life'. Over the next nine years the *Sociedad* became very popular and influential both in workers and intellectual circles. Spreading propaganda through its journal, *El Amigo del Pueblo (The Friend of the People)*, it organised meetings throughout the country. In 1859 mass meetings in the towns of San Felipe and La Serena



Chilean peasants during the Allende government's agrarian reform programme.

called for an immediate social revolution. Governmental response to this potential insurrectionary situation was swift. The *Sociedad* forceably dissolved with brutal repression and Bilbao expelled from the country on a trumped up charge of 'blasphemy' over a book he had written on the Church.

For the next thirty years or so Chilean workers were without any form of radical organisation. This however did not hamper an important and widespread strike of the saltpetre workers of Tarapacan in June 1890, who demanded to be paid in money and not tokens exchangeable at the stores owned by the company. This strike, the first to be organised by Chilean workers, was put down with great brutality on the orders of the Englishman Colonel North better known as the 'King of saltpetre'.

In 1893 the first Chilean anarchist journal *El Oprimido (The Oppressed)* appeared in Santiago, followed in 1900 by *El Acrata*. At the same time the anarchists began agricultural colonies which soon began to send agitators on propaganda tours throughout the country.

The opening years of the 20th Century brought the revival of militant workers organisations. In January 1900, through the efforts of the anarchists, the *Combinacion Mancomunada de Obrero (Combined Workers Association)* was founded in the northern sea port of Iquique. In its short life of barely 5 years the *Mancomunada* had united the majority of nitrate and maritime workers in the Northern sea board towns and cities. Its ideas were spread by its two journals, *El Maritimo (The Seaway)* of Antofagusta, and *El Trabajo (Work)* of Iquique. In addition it organised a whole series of public conferences, its best known speakers being Malaquias Concha and Juan Vargas Marquez. The anarchists were also instrumental in founding, in 1902, the *Federacion de Obreros de Imprenta (Federation of Printing Workers)* in Santiago, which soon had a membership of 7,000. With the decline of the *Mancomunada* due to police repression the anarchists organised *Sociedades de Resistencia (Resistance Societies)* throughout the country. These *Sociedades* soon became very popular due to their direct action approach in confronting Chilean capital, and were especially strong among the miners, dockers and maritime workers. By 1910 it had around 55,000 adherents in 433 active *Sociedades* (when the total population of Chile at the time was 3,200,000 people.)

The early years of the century also saw a series of bloody confrontations between workers and the representatives of State repression. In December 1901 the *Mancomunada* organised an unsuccessful 3 month long general strike of dockers and maritime workers in Iquique. The strike was repressed with much brutality and many workers were deported to the extreme south of the country. In 1902 Santiago tramworkers held a successful 2 week long strike during which tramcars were burnt in the street. In May 1903 striking maritime workers in Valparaiso won an increase in wages from the shipping companies only after company offices were burnt down and a running battle between workers and the police

resulted in 30 dead and over 200 wounded. In October 1905 a mass protest in Santiago, against the rising cost of living and the demand for a deduction in import tax on livestock from Argentina in order to reduce the price of meat, developed into a revolutionary general strike which then became known as the *Semana Roja (Red Week)*. During the ensuing governmental repression over 200 people were killed and wounded by the police and army. In January 1906 a strike of train drivers and footplate workers on the Antofagusta-La Paz railway developed into a general strike. In March the strike was put down by the police with many workers being killed or wounded. In December 1907 a massive strike of over 30,000 nitrate workers took place in the Northern Province of Tarapaca. In the course of the struggle the town of Iquique was occupied by the strikers. What followed was to be the bloodiest episode in Chilean working class history. During the 'liberation' of the town by the army under the command of General Silva Renard over 500 workers were machine gunned to death, along with their families, in the space of 7 minutes in front of the Church of Santa Maria.

During these struggles the employers placed the names of militant workers on 'black lists' which were then circulated amongst the owners of mining and industrial establishments. Once on one of these lists it was almost impossible for them to find employment.

In September 1909 the first national workers union, the *Gran Federacion Obrera Chilena* was founded in Santiago. The aims of G.F.O.Ch, though, were reformist, including the forming of funeral clubs & consumers cooperatives and the encouragement of mutual aid amongst its members. In 1914 the G.F.O.Ch. was legalised by the Government, no doubt due to its moderation. Two years later its main objective was realised when a law was enacted that made employers compensate workers for accidents at work.

While the anarchists were playing an important role within the heart of working class organisations, they continued their independent propaganda work throughout the country, mainly by means of their journals many of which lasted several years. A brief survey of anarchist publications will show clearly the breadth of their activity. It is possible that some of the journals were attached to branches of the *Sociedades de Resistencia*, but as the *Sociedades* had their own collective organ, *El Siglo XX (The 20th Century)* this is by no means sure. *El Obrero Libre (The Free Worker)*, Tarapaca - 1903-1904, *Luz (light)*, the monthly journal of the *hogar armonista Elisio Reclus* - Concepcion 1904, *La Batalla (The Struggle)*, Valparaiso - 1907-1924; *Luz y Vida (Light & Life)* 'workers periodical of libertarian propaganda' Antofagusta - 1908 - 1920, *La Protesta (The Protest)*, Santiago - 1908 - 1912; *Adelante (Forward)*, Puerta Arenas - 1910 - 1912; *El Surco (The Furrow)*, Iquique - 1917 - 1925. Several anarchist centres were also founded, the most influential being the Centro Anarquico de Estudios Sociales - *La Brecha (The Breach)* of Iquique that functioned between 1915 and 1917.

The immediate post war years brought a renewed workers movement, as it did

throughout the rest of Latin America. In December 1919 the by now re-organised F.O.Ch. (it had dropped the *Gran*), held its first congress in the town of Concepcion. Abandoning its former moderation and reformism it proudly declared its new principles - 'the abolition of the capitalist State, which would be replaced by the *Federacion* who would organise production and distribution'. True to its newly found autonomy it also refused participation in, or control by any political or religious party. The radicalism of F.O.Ch. however was shortlived. During its second Congress in 1922, in Rancagua, a group, unknown to the vast majority of delegates, and led by Emilo Racabarren who had recently returned from a six week visit to Moscow, and was under orders from the Comintern to found a Communist Party in Chile, managed to persuade the Congress, despite strong opposition from many authentic delegates to adhere to the Moscow orientated International of Red Trade Unions. With the infiltration of the Communists in F.O.Ch. newspapers and presses owned by the *Federacion* were soon taken over. It also signed, in the short term, its own death warrant as an autonomous organisation, and soon abandoned its direct action approach to the struggle. The decision to adhere to the I.R.T.U. however was not adopted, with unanimity. Over the following years several unions were to leave F.O.Ch. beginning with the *Federacion Obrera Ferroviaria (Federation of Railway Workers)* in 1923. During its short life as an autonomous organisation though, F.O.Ch. did managed to organise and support the massive strike of coal miners in 1920.

In December 1919, as F.O.Ch. was declaring itself a revolutionary union, a section of the Industrial Workers of the World was founded in Santiago, and immediately affiliated 7 syndical organisations embracing well over 9,000 members. Throughout its existence the IWW's main strength lay with the maritime workers of the coastal towns especially Iquique, Valparaiso and Antofagusta. It was also active in organising unions of bakers, bricklayers, shoe and munition workers. Although never having the large membership of the communist dominated F.O.Ch, the IWW was still able to command a considerable amount of influence. In the summer of 1920 it led a 3 month long strike of maritime workers to prevent the export of cereal when its exportation was causing famine and consequently raising the price of available cereal. On July 22nd the Govt. responded by raiding the IWW's headquarters in Santiago and instigating a generalised repression of anarchist workers throughout the country. This repression however did not stop the IWW from organising strikes of maritime workers in the ports of Valparaiso and San Antonio in 1923, and publishing its own journal *Accion Directa (Direct Action)*.

Outside the IWW there were several other anarchist inspired and led organisations the *Federacion de Obreros en Resistencia Autonomos (Autonomous Federation of Workers Resistance)* whose journal was *Autonomia y Solidaridad (Autonomy & Solidarity)*, and the *Federacion de Obreros*

*de Imprenta (Federation of Print Workers)* who, during their Congress at Tesnino in 1924 approved a declaration of principles demanding 'a future society based on free accord'.

In 1925 a split took place within the Chilean IWW, when some of its strongest unions broke away to form the *Federacion Obrera Regional Chilena (Regional Federation of Chilean Workers)*, based on the Argentinian F.O.R.A. The IWW continued with a greatly reduced membership until 1927. It also reappeared briefly from 1942-1945.

In 1927 Carlos Ibanez, a former army Colonel became the President of Chile. Despite being elected by the popular working class vote on the promise of social reform, Ibanez soon became a tyrant of the worst kind. For the next 4 years he unleashed a relentless campaign of brutal repression against workers organisations. Hundreds upon hundreds of militants were murdered in the streets, tortured or sent into internal exile. Both the IWW and the F.O.R.Ch. were destroyed (as were the Communist unions) and their leaders deported to the islands of Mas Afuera and Aysen. These years, except for the reign of terror instigated by the bloody Pinochet, were the blackest in the history of the Chilean workers movement. Finally, in 1931, a popular uprising, beginning with a students strike and an insurrection by sailors of the Chilean Navy, and ending in a general strike, brought about the downfall of the regime and the exile of 'Paco' Ibanez.

With the downfall of Ibanez workers organisations began to be reformed. The Communists made an attempt to revamp F.O.Ch. without much success. The anarchists though, were more successful. In 1932, what remained of the IWW and F.O.R.Ch. joined forces with a few independent libertarian groups and formed the *Confederacion General de Trabajadores (General Confederation of Workers)*. The C.G.T. which was similar in structure to F.O.R.Ch. varied from the IWW since it adopted the regional federation as its base rather than industry. Some months after its foundation the C.G.T. had affiliated 35 unions including those of the painters, carpenters, electricians and printers, with a total membership of over 17,000. It also began to publish its own newspaper, *La Protesta*, which served as a mouthpiece for various other anarchist groups. Some other anarchist workers organisations remained outside the C.G.T. These included the *Federacion Sindical Libertaria de Estucadores y Ramos Similares (Libertarian Syndicalist Federation of Plasterers and similar trades)*. They also had their own newspaper which lasted from 1935 - 1955.

In December 1934 the communists, socialists and other parties joined forces to create the *Confederacion de Trabajadores de Chile (Confederation of Chilean Workers)*. The C.T.Ch. dominated as it was by political parties, was totally reformist in character and soon became plagued by the rivalry between the Communists and Socialists.

In 1952 Carlos 'Paco' Ibanez, already well known to many older Chilean workers, was elected to the Presidency. This coincided with a significant intensification

of the workers struggle against both the employers and the State; a struggle that was being waged increasingly outside the C.T.Ch. which by now had split into two factions and no longer represented the interests of the working class.

On May 1st 1952 a commission of Labour Unity was formed, which in the February of the following year founded the *Central Unica de Trabajadores de Chile (The Single Central Organisation of Chilean Workers)*. The C.U.T.Ch. included under its umbrella several small independent unions, both fractions of C.T.Ch. and the anarchist C.G.T., and was directed by a national council comprising of representatives of affiliated organisations. The anarchists were represented by 4 counsellors: Ernesto Miranda, Ramon Dominguez, Hector Duran and Celio Poblete. In addition to the national council, provincial, regional and departmental councils were established throughout the country.

At last the unity of the Chilean working class had been realised, at least in the short term, as manual and white collar workers, students, peasants and intellectuals all flocked to join the C.U.T.Ch.

A series of large scale demonstrations were organised in many parts of the country, and soon workers were confronting both employers and the State in an atmosphere of open war. For once this unified action was taking place independently of political party control. The workers were taking part in the struggle for themselves and no one else.

In the beginning of 1956 C.U.T.Ch. organised several limited strikes in preparation for a total stoppage. Finally, in July 1956 a general strike was called. The strike was remarkable due to the force and capacity of the workers new found revolutionary syndicalism. Chile had known nothing like it before. The strike was absolutely total. For 48 hours nothing

moved. The government began to waver and Ibanez threatened to resign and hand over the responsibility of running the country to C.U.T.Ch. Clearly worried by this situation the leaders of the left wing parties recommended that Ibanez should ask C.U.T.Ch. to convene a commission to present its grievances and at the same time call off the strike. A commission was duly formed, headed by Clotavio Blest, C.U.T.Ch.'s President, and presented Ibanez with their petition. He immediately demanded 7 days to consider the grievances on the condition that work was resumed. After 2 days of violent discussion a solution was reached - with the total agreement of the communists and socialists, the strike was suspended. The 4 anarchist counsellors refused to accept this without consulting their members but they were overruled. In a climate of disorientation the workers returned to work with nothing at all to show for their sacrifice and struggle.

After this bitter experience the unity of the Chilean working class fell to pieces. In 1957 another general strike was called by C.U.T.Ch. to attempt to gain the demands made the previous year but it was a complete failure. Confidence in the leadership was now non-existent. After this the anarchists finally withdrew from C.U.T.Ch. By 1960 anarchist influence in the Chilean workers movement became minimal.

Now under the bloody dictatorship of Pinochet and his band of torturers, the Chilean workers are engaged in a new struggle. The fall of the dictator is not far off, and when this happens, and the workers are again free to organise themselves let us hope many of the past problems and failures will not be repeated.

September 11th 1983  
10 years after Pinochet's Coup.

Paul Albert.



## The IWW In Chile

During the First World War an entirely new labour group was formed in the major ports of Chile. This was the Industrial Workers of the World (known in Chile by its English initials as the IWW), which was established by the merger of some Chilean anarcho-syndicalist groups and the propaganda and organisational efforts of IWW sailors from the United States. By the end of WWI it included virtually all of the nation's maritime and port workers and was already moving into sectors not connected with the maritime-transport industry, such as bakery, masonry, and leather workers.

In 1919 the IWW was founded officially as a federation of industrial unions. Its tactic was direct action, its objective the abolition of wage slavery and the control of production by the workers themselves. At their first congress in Santiago, the Chilean Wobblies declared open war on capital, the clergy, and the government.

The IWW increased its membership from 200 in August 1918 to over 25,000 in January 1920, much due to the fearless work of Juan O. Chamorro of Valparaiso. In 1920 a state of near-war developed between Chile, Bolivia and Peru over a nitrate-rich strip of desert seized by Chile in the war of 1879. Patriotic hysteria gripped the Chilean upper and petite bourgeoisie, and under this cover the government swept down on radical war-dissidents. In the One Big Union Monthly (IWW, Chicago) of January 1921, we read: "The following translation of a letter received from a member of the Chilean IWW is one of the several communications received by us from authentic and reliable sources, giving an account of the almost unbelievable atrocities committed by the Chilean

bourgeoisie during and since the last week of July..."

"Fellow Workers: We are passing through a period of repression which for savage ferocity has never been equalled in this country. The dominating powers and representatives of "order" of "our country", and of "god" even, are reverting naturally and easily to the instincts of the troglodyte.

The watchword seems to be, "wipe out all Syndicalists, IWW's, Anarchists and idealists, be they workers or students; destroy all their publications and print shops, their offices, assembly halls and libraries, etc."...

There are a large number of our comrades and fellow workers in the gaols of Chile: over 100 in Santiago, 25 in Valparaiso, as many more in Conpilla, Punta Arenas and other localities. Many of our fellow workers have been deported for the "crime" of having been born beyond the boundaries of the domains of the nitrate despots, or because of affiliation with the seriously progressive labor organisations, in spite of the fact that many of them have resided in this country for 25 years or more. These comrades have been arrested, subjected to violence and beatings, and abandoned in the desert on the Peruvian boundary...

... They have destroyed and sacked the offices of the Students' Federation of Santiago and Valparaiso. The majority of the prisoners are of the latter organisation, and they are being tried or are awaiting trial in Santiago and elsewhere for the "subverting of law and order". Those detained for trial in Santiago comprise practically the entire membership of the Regional Administrative Council of the IWW in Chile...

... In the face of the acquiescent police, a mob of clericals and patriots, made up of students of religious colleges and military in

civilian clothes, with the national flag and the portrait of the president at their head, proceeded to destroy all that stood for enlightenment and freedom for the workers and producers. They beat up our fellow worker Juan Gandulfo, a student most cruelly, because he would not obey their demands that he kiss the flag they were carrying... In Valparaiso the same acts of barbarism took place, the IWW hall being raided by police and soldiers, who entered the hall, revolver in hand, while fellow workers were holding a special business meeting and began to beat them right and left, until a couple of our comrades opposed their cowardly brutality and defended themselves with chairs, and then the majority of those present were taken to gaol, including the most active members of the Valparaiso unions, while other police and soldiers "miraculously" "found" dynamite and firearms of different kinds in the hall.

The hall and offices of the Magellan Workers' Federation, including their printing establishment... were stormed shortly after midnight, while the workers were assembled inside.

The soldiers attempted to enter the hall but were refused, and upon being closed out fired several volleys into the hall at close range, killing some thirty workers and wounding about fifty. The mob, made up of the Catholic Federation, the Patriotic League of Chile, and military and civilian officials, including the governor of Magellan, set machine guns at street corners surrounding the building, and set fire to the workers' hall at several different places at the same time, burning it to the ground... Afterward, according to the version of the same worthy governor, there were



found in the ruins the charred remains of the five victims of the assault and fire. Those who succeeded in escaping from the burning building were seized. Some of them were shot in the plaza without further ado.

... As we are placed at a tremendous disadvantage in our struggle against the perpetrators of these terrible crimes, we ask for solidarity from all workers the world over. We suggest... protest meetings be held... We also ask that you endeavor to carry out a boycott on all that comes or goes to Chile...

Fellow workers: let solidarity be the watch word!

Against the criminal tyranny of the Chilean bourgeoisie let us oppose the international solidarity of the proletariat! — The IWW and Anarchists of Chile, Valparaiso, Chile September 28, 1920.

Further deportations followed the massacres of 1920, many prisoners were stranded on barren islands off the Chilean coast. But the IWW survived and reorganised. In December, 1922, 20,000 strong, its

delegates helped found the International Workers Association in Berlin—the revolutionary and anarcho-syndicalist union federation which included FORA in Argentina (200,000), FAUD in Germany (120,000), CGT in Portugal (150,000), USI in Italy (500,000), SAC in Sweden (32,000), NSF in Norway (20,000), and later the CNT in Spain (2,000,000 members by 1936). Only the Chilean IWW affiliated with the international, the remainder of the IWW remaining independent.

Throughout the '20's Chilean bourgeois "democracy" was marred by a series of military coups d'état, brought on by rising worker unrest. Attempting to undercut labour militancy, the government sponsored a series of "legalisation" acts, sanctioning certain "respectable" unions. The IWW, anarcho-syndicalist, and communist trade unions refused respectability, arguing that legal recognition meant extensive government control under the powers granted to determine union jurisdiction, supervise finances and elections, oversee collective bargaining.

In 1924, the military seized power. Of all the radical groups in Chile, only the IWW openly opposed the coup. The Communists, as always equivocated. After four months the military brass installed a civilian government, which in the following year of 1925 crushed a series of strikes in the North with the brutal intervention of army troops. That same year the anarcho-syndicalist element in the IWW pulled out to form the FORC. The government itself was beset by internal dissension that culminated in the seizure of the state in May 1927 by the Minister of the Interior, Colonel Carlos Ibanez, who ruled as dictator until September, 1931.

Ibanez immediately cracked down on the IWW, anarcho-syndicalists, and Communists. Many leaders were gaoled or exiled, others went into hiding. The IWW was disbanded, its leaders deported. Only the intellectual and student wing lingered on, reduced to educational work, organising cultural centres, libraries, and popular theaters.