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La Identidad de Los Carabineros de Chile: The Evolving Identity of Chile’s National Police Force and the 1973 Military Coup

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Carabineros and soldiers fire on the Moneda in Santiago as the air force bombs it during the military coup on September 11, 1973.

La Identidad de Los Carabineros de Chile:
The Evolving Identity of Chile’s National Police Force and the 1973 Military Coup

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I cannot think of a better way to spend my last year at Colby than working on this thesis, and for this experience I have many to thank. First, the Jonathan Barry Research Grant and a grant from Office of the Dean of Faculty made my research at the National Archives in Santiago, Chile, possible. Thanks to Edward Echeverria for all of his support and encouragement throughout this process. I’d also like to thank my academic advisor and second reader, Professor Paul Josephson, whose passion and enthusiasm inspired me to undertake the study of history during my first year at Colby. Lastly, without the patience, diligence and continual support of my thesis advisor, Professor Elizabeth Leonard, I could not have successfully completed this paper.
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Glossary of Spanish and Chilean Terms

*callampas*: Shanty-towns on the margins of cities, especially Santiago. Typically lacking adequate infrastructure and sanitation with makeshift homes.

*cerros*: Literally means “hills,” but are tight-knit communities with varying class distinctions to which inhabitants generally feel great loyalty, especially in Valparaíso.

*garrote*: Literally translates to “stick,” but is most closely associated with the batons the Carabineros used as weapons, often against civilians. The word carries with it the themes of oppression, abuse and police brutality.

*hacienda*: Large plantations where *inquilinos* work under a *latifundista* or a *patrón*. These were the most obvious remnants of the colonial period in Latin America.

*Ibañista*: Supporter of General Ibáñez, sometimes in an extreme and militant form.

*inquilinos*: Referring to tenant-laborers in a *hacienda*. Although not legally bound to the land as European serfs were in the feudal system, they typically owed enormous debts to landlords and the status was generally hereditary such that it was feudal-like in nature.

*latifundista*: Land or estate owner, acts as landlord to *inquilinos*. See *patron*.

*nacista*: Member of the National Socialist Movement in the 1930s; Nazi sympathizer.

*patrón*: Land owner or boss, like *latifundista* but can also refer to a factory owner.

*pobladores*: This word comes from “*pobres*” which refers to the poor, but in Chile it specifically refers to *pobres* who have come together in some form of activity, typically in protest.

*pueblo*: Translates to town, nation or people, but most often refers to common-folk and marginalized groups in society, ie., the working class.
I. El Once, The Most Tragic Day for Chilean Democracy

On May 21, 1971, President Salvador Allende Gossens gave his first official address to Congress as the newly elected president of Chile. Allende, a socialist, was a revolutionary figure as the world’s first freely elected Marxist president.¹ The fact that a socialist rose to power by the means of a popular election was unprecedented, and free market capitalists in Chile and around the world felt threatened; Allende’s election implied both popular support for Marxism and showed that revolution could occur without bloodshed, suggesting a peaceful road to socialism. Indeed, Allende’s goal was to prove that this peaceful road was possible in a country where constitutionalism prevailed. He was, in fact, a strong believer in the integrity of Chile’s constitutional democracy. Along with this belief came his trust in the loyalty of the country’s armed forces, despite the fact that there had been several military uprisings throughout the twentieth century.

In the early 1970s, many Chileans shared Allende’s belief that the armed forces, both the military and the Carabineros (the national police force), would not interfere in the political sphere, even in the event of a transition to socialism. Contemporary scholars often describe this misled conviction as the “myth of professionalism” of the armed forces.² President Allende reinforced his trust in his armed forces in his first address to Congress:

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¹ Spanish last names can often be confusing, and that is because they do not use them as “last names” in the way that English speakers do. Rather they are called apellidos, which roughly translates to surnames. The first one (Allende in this case) comes from the father and the second (Gossens) comes from the mother. When referring to them after the initial introduction, it is customary to use just the first surname for convenience unless other relevant characters make this confusing. Thus, after giving his full name, Salvador Allende Gossnes will be referred to simply as Salvador Allende. They also frequently use first names in conjunction with middle names (eg. Juan Pablo), and in this case both are considered part of the first name.
It has been emphatically claimed that the armed forces and the Carabineros, the supporters till now of the institutional order which we shall overcome, would not agree to support the will of the people in their decision to build socialism in our country. But they do not take into account the patriotism of our armed forces and the Carabineros, their traditional professionalism and their submission to civil authority.\footnote{A military junta can be generically defined as a coalition of upper ranking military officials that control (or seek to control) a government. These juntas have taken various forms, in number and structure, throughout Chile’s history.}

In this first address to Congress, Allende demonstrated a belief that the “traditional professionalism” of these armed forces would prove greater than their loyalty to the “institutional order,” i.e., the democratic system used to protect and support the Chilean capitalism. Like many Chileans, the new president had fallen victim to the myth of professionalism.

Two years later, on the morning of September 11, 1973, a telephone call woke President Allende at 6:30 am with disturbing news. A minister in the Moneda, the presidential palace in the capital, Santiago, informed the president that the navy was in rebellion and occupying Valparaíso, Chile’s second largest city and most active port. Forty-five minutes later, Allende cautiously exited his home with a helmet on his head and a machine gun in his hand along with twenty-seven members of the Grupo de Armada de Protección (GAP). This group of highly trained sharpshooters, offering support to the Allende’s smaller personal escort, then loaded the president into a convoy and left for the Moneda.\footnote{A military junta can be generically defined as a coalition of upper ranking military officials that control (or seek to control) a government. These juntas have taken various forms, in number and structure, throughout Chile’s history.}

When they arrived at the presidential palace, nothing seemed out of place. Just after 8:00 am, however, Allende received a telephone call from his air force aid, Colonel Roberto Sánchez, on behalf of the military junta\footnote{A military junta can be generically defined as a coalition of upper ranking military officials that control (or seek to control) a government. These juntas have taken various forms, in number and structure, throughout Chile’s history.} that was responsible for the uprising. Colonel Sánchez told the president that the junta was prepared to take control of Chile by force and that a plane was ready to transport Allende and his family out of the country as
soon as he agreed to resign. Allende reportedly responded: “I am the President, and it is here at the Moneda that I am going to remain….As traitorous generals, you are incapable of knowing what honorable men are like.” Allende’s courageous decision to stand in the face of this threat exemplified his steadfast belief in upholding constitutional democracy, a conviction that he would have contradicted by surrendering to the golpe, or coup. He also believed that some members of the armed forces would remain loyal to his administration, especially the Carabineros. Indeed, Carlos Ibáñez del Campo created this national police force forty-six years earlier intending to implement a defense against this exact type of uprising from the military.

For a series of historical and bureaucratic reasons, Allende had reasons for hope in the Carabineros. First of all, they answered directly to the Ministry of the Interior, the section of government that worked most closely with the executive office. Chile lacks a vice-president, so the minister of the interior is next in line assume control of the executive branch should the president become indisposed. Furthermore, while the Chilean president has always been the commander-in-chief, the loyalty of the military was most frequently in the hands of the generals in the Department of War. The military’s particular sense of institutional loyalty, based in their strong tradition and the autonomous nature, was uniquely powerful in Chile and made the members of the armed forces very susceptible to manipulation from their commanders. The Carabineros were the only legally armed civilian force in Chile, a force that the dictator Carlos Ibáñez created in 1927 as a defense against the power of the Department of War by tying their institutional loyalty directly to the executive branch.

Allende felt secure among the Carabineros because of their direct tie to the executive and their often peasant and working-class origins, a background that he
mistakenly believed would make them loyal to his socialist mission. Marc Cooper, a journalist from the United States who worked for Allende, described the importance of this background in his memoirs: “The carabineros were generally from workers’ families and often lived in substandard housing in squatters’ villages – areas almost unanimously sympathetic to the Socialists and Communists.”

Even if the majority of the 75,000 members of the army, navy and air force rebelled, Allende believed that the 25,000-30,000 Carabineros could defend his government, especially with the aid of popular mobilization, if they remained loyal to their duty.

On the morning of the coup, this police force initially maintained an outward appearance of loyalty to the president. At about 8:30 am, however, General Director of the Carabineros José María Sepúlveda noticed that something was amiss among his officers; while the general went about reinforcing the palace security, “his subordinates lacked their usual respect and hesitated at his orders.” This was highly unusual for the Carabineros, an institution that prided itself on maintaining a strict chain of command and obedience to orders.

As it turns out, two other Carabineros generals, César Mendoza and Arturo Yovane, had for several days been secretly persuading many members of the officer corps to participate in the coming coup. At about 8:30 am, Mendoza revealed that he was assuming command of the Carabineros when he and the other members of the junta broadcasted an official proclamation of military rule. In this proclamation, they told Allende to “immediately relinquish his authority to the armed forces and the Carabineros of Chile.” By specifically naming the Carabineros in the proclamation, the junta explicitly stated that the police had joined the coup, although the extent to which this was

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1 The choice to capitalize Carabineros or not often varies in scholarly works, but most Chilean newspapers do not. In this paper, I do not capitalize it if the cited excerpt does not.
true remained to be seen at the time of the broadcast. It did not take long, however, for Allende to realize that the majority of the Carabineros were, in fact, following Mendoza.

At about 8:55 am, Allende met with General Sepúlveda and some other senior commanders of the Carabineros in his office. They informed the president that the *junta* had seized the Carabineros headquarters, that they could not communicate with Mendoza, and that nearly all of the three hundred Carabineros palace guards had joined the besiegers. An eyewitness from the GAP, the president’s personal protection force, who was at Allende’s guard recounted that “there was division among the upper commands which led to chaos,” while others reported that some of these senior commanders said they would not stay to defend the president, perhaps out of cowardice.¹² Nathaniel Davis, the U.S. ambassador to Chile who was present in Santiago during the coup, wrote in his account that, instead of cowardice, “It is more likely…that they knew their troops would no longer follow them.”¹³ Those accounts and the Carabineros’ departure from the palace reveal that Mendoza and the *junta* did indeed have the loyalty, or at least the obedience, of most of the police and a significant number of the commanding officers.

A small few indecisive Carabineros actually remained at the Moneda when Allende’s meeting with the senior Carabineros ended at about 9:00 am.¹⁴ Despite these lingerers, it was clear to the president that enough of the police would abandon him that he would have no adequate line of defense against the combined military forces. At this point, the success of the coup seemed inevitable, and at 9:10 am, President Allende gave his final address to the Chilean people over the independent Radio Magallanes:

This is surely the last opportunity I will have to address you. The Air Force has bombed the towers of Radio Portales and Corporación. My words are not

¹ The air force had destroyed every other pro-government radio station earlier that day, but Radio Magallanes transmitted from a mobile location and thus remained intact for several more hours than other pro-Allende transmissions.
bitter but they are full of disillusionment. And they will serve as moral sanction for those who have betrayed their oath of loyalty: the soldiers of Chile, the branch commanders….Mr. Mendoza, a slinking general who only yesterday swore his loyalty to the government, who has proclaimed himself head of the Carabineros….I will not resign….With my life I will pay for defending the principles of our nation….History cannot be stopped by repression or violence….Long live Chile! Long live the people! Long live the workers! These are my last words….¹⁵

Allende’s disappointment over the disloyalty of his armed forces was obvious in his final words to his beloved country. His indignation toward the Carabineros and their betrayal was particularly apparent in the words he directed at General Mendoza, to whom the Carabineros now showed their allegiance. His words also showed that his own loyalty to the constitutional government was completely unwavering, and for this reason he chose to stay in the Moneda until his eventual death.

For about an hour after 9:00 am, some remaining Carabineros palace guards “hesitated and conferred among themselves,”¹⁶ until the junta commanders gave them a final ultimatum to abandon the Moneda or suffer attack. They departed the palace grounds, destroyed any weaponry inside the palace that they could not carry with them, and soon the last of the police abandoned the palace.¹⁷ At about 9:30 am, following Allende’s final words, the junta opened fire on the Moneda while the forty or so defenders of the palace, mostly members of the GAP, returned shots. Even the president himself fought against the junta forces, using an AK-47 that Fidel Castro had given to him two years earlier.¹⁸ At about this time, President Allende gave his blessing to anyone who wanted to save his life in retreat. Juan Seoane, the head of the president’s personal security, recalled the situation:

When I arrived at the Moneda we were the better off. The palace was defended by the Carabineros’ tanquetas, that shortly afterward became the

¹ These are small and more mobile tanks used by the Carabineros. They usually have wheels instead of the tracks used by larger tanks and are often used to spray gas in order to disperse groups of
besiegers….We did not have personnel to defend the palace, since only we remained at the security of the president. After the retreat of the Carabineros we remained alone and this made it so that we had no possibility of defending the building [my emphasis]….I did not see hysteria or people who wanted to leave, only calmness and dignity, especially in the president, who had to know very well what was going to happen.19

If there was any doubt that the Allende needed the Carabineros to defend the palace, then Seoane disproved it. As the head of the president’s security, surely he knew better than anyone what was needed to defend against the junta’s forces. Furthermore, if the Carabineros had demonstrated widespread loyalty to Allende they could have influenced some members of the military who were unsure about where their loyalties lay. Still, the remaining defenders of the palace successfully fought off the military for as long as they could.

Dr. Danilo Bartulin was inside the presidential office in the Moneda that morning and he recalled that most of the armed forces surrounding the palace directed their firing at that section of the building. Likewise, most of the defense forces were in the same section, firing bazookas out of the windows, destroying at least two tanks. Dr. Bartulin recalls the battle as “heartening,” because the junta forces appeared to retreat slightly as they suffered casualties and the destruction of those two tanks.20 For a time, the defense of the Moneda proved successful primarily because of the building’s structure. It was built like a fortress in the eighteenth century, and its three-foot thick walls meant that ground forces alone would not easily destroy it.21

The fatal turning point came, however, at 11:52 am, when the first of several Hawker Hunter aircrafts’ turned behind San Cristóbal Hill, about three miles northeast of people without fatality. This account, however, certainly refers to tanquetas that were capable of lobbing artillery.

1 These aircrafts were developed and built in Great Britain, but they were part of the Chilean air force, piloted by members of the Chilean military. Claims exist that U.S. pilots flew these planes, but the evidence overwhelmingly favors the contrary.
the palace, went into a steep dive, and launched Sura P-3 missiles with incredible accuracy at the north wall of the Moneda. At least six more missiles followed, setting the palace aflame.\textsuperscript{22} (See Appendix 1 for a photo of the Moneda after the bombing.) Those who knew Ernesto Amador González Yarra, the pilot of the first plane to fire on the palace and the son of a Carabineros officer, said that he “felt pride about his actions until the day of his death,”\textsuperscript{23} a sentiment indicative of the righteousness many soldiers felt about the coup. This attitude of the common soldier reveals that not just power hungry officers in the military perpetrated the coup, although the loyalty in the lower ranks was far more divided.

The military ground forces entered the palace at about 1:30 pm, and many on the ground floor immediately began to surrender. Allende ordered everyone who remained at his side to do the same, hoping to spare their lives. All but five obeyed, and at approximately 2:20 pm, the \textit{junta} forces killed Allende and all who had remained at his side.\textsuperscript{24} Thus, the \textit{golpe} of September 11, 1973, came to a close, the first successful military coup in Chile since 1924.\textsuperscript{*} It bears noting that the specific details of the president’s death remain shrouded by contradictory stories of assassination and suicide, see Appendix 2 for more details on this matter.

Why was it that Allende stood virtually alone in the protection of Chilean democracy? The military’s betrayal makes sense given that many of its commanders were known fascists with little history of loyalty to the president or the constitutional process, including General Augusto Pinochet, who was deeply involved in the events and established a seventeen-year dictatorship following the coup. The Carabineros were a different case, however, because their original purpose was to act as a deterrent to

\textsuperscript{*} There were several attempted \textit{golpes} between 1924 and 1973, but none of them proved successful.
military adventurism. So why did these police, who answered directly to the president’s office, abandon their historic duty in September 1973?

The answer to this question is really quite simple: by 1973 the Carabineros had fundamentally changed as an institution, such that they viewed Marxism as the greater threat to Chile than a military coup. This made them predisposed to join the military, which they had come to trust, in overthrowing Allende’s socialist government. How and why the Carabineros institution changed in this way between 1927 and 1973 – which is the focus of this paper – is a much more complex issue. As the identity of Carabineros institution evolved, they began perceiving the military as less of a threat because it stopped interfering with Chile’s democratic process; in searching for a new enemy, this national police force found Marxism because every president before Allende (1970-1973) ordered them to oppress the working class, which they generally perceived as inherently Marxist. To best understand this progression, it is necessary to begin examining the context in which Carlos Ibáñez consolidated this national police force in the first place.
II. The Instability of the 1920s and the Birth of the Carabineros

President Carlos Ibáñez created the Carabineros in 1927 during one of the unstable decades in the history of Chilean politics. Economic downturn following the end of World War I and growing unrest from the proletariat, which organized itself into formal parties and moved toward Marxism in the early 20th century, caused widespread outcry for drastic changes in the Chilean government. This made the 1920s a ripe environment for armed insurrection from the military, which came in September 1924 and began nearly a decade of uncertainty about the stability of Chilean democracy and mistrust toward the armed forces. This uncertainty and mistrust directly led to the creation of the Carabineros, a new force that aimed at stabilizing politics by pacifying the military through deterrence. That is, the military was less likely to intervene with the well-armed Carabineros defending government. Before expanding on this theme, it is first important to briefly examine the specific causes of the unstable 1920s.

Before 1924, the most recent instance of armed struggle in Chile was the 1891 civil war, a dispute between Congress and the executive that began after President José Manuel Balmaceda Fernández (1886-1891) attempted to block a British monopoly over nitrate mining. Nitrate, used around the world for fertilizer, became Chile’s most important economic asset after the War of the Pacific (1879-1883) when the nation acquired mines previously owned by Bolivia and Peru. (See Appendix 3 for a map of territorial changes.) The Chilean government allowed Europeans and North Americans to build and operate their own mines, setting a precedent for Chile’s lasting dependence on foreign investment. The success of nitrate mining benefitted only the economic elite and political participation was limited to the educated, white men who mostly made up this
This limited political participation meant that there were only two major political parties at this time in Chile, the Liberals and Conservatives. These two parties banded together in the 1891 civil war, and from henceforth can be considered one political bloc. (Refer to Appendix 4 throughout for a breakdown of Chilean political parties.)

Congress went to war against President Balmaceda in 1891 because they wished to continue reaping the benefits of nitrate mining without government interference. When Congress won after nine months of bloody confrontation, they began thirty-three years of laissez-faire economics that brought incredible wealth to a select few Chileans, and great macro-economic growth, while the lower and middle classes suffered. This era of economic growth and relative political stability, known as the parliamentary era, also gave unbalanced power to Congress vis-à-vis the executive because the senators’ postwar reinterpretation of the 1833 Constitution gave them the right to dissolve presidential cabinets. Over the next thirty years, the Liberals and Conservatives in Congress dissolved the presidential cabinet over 120 times,¹ a testament to their virtually unchallenged authority.

The economic success of foreign investment accelerated urbanization, yielded government investment in education and generally seemed to pull Chile into modernity. But these topical developments masked the poor living conditions of the urban lower class, living mostly in five by eight meter rooms called *conventillos* that held up to eight inhabitants. They received little aid from the government and the growing cities lacked

¹There are two things worth noting here. First, the primary blockade for lower-class suffrage was literacy requirements. In 1890, the literacy rate in Chile was only 29% (Faúndez, 5). Secondly, the distinction of class based on race, the *Casta* system, was historically important in all of Latin America and blocked many with indigenous or African blood from political rights. Different combinations fell into varying levels in the social hierarchy. Examples include criollos (100% white but born in the Americas), mestizos (one white parent, one native), and mulatos (one white parent, one African). The stigmatisms associated with the classifications often carry over into modern society even today.
the infrastructure and sanitation to provide humane living conditions. In Santiago, the capital, government did not begin construction of a sewer system until 1903 and many of its citizens remained without water until 1920. In 1905, the popular newspaper El Mecurio described Chile’s second largest city, Valparaíso, as “infected, fetid, pestilent, with its streets covered with a thin layer of fermenting filth.” In 1909 it commented again on the city: “The Spanish language, so rich in its words, does not have words sufficient to describe such a pigsty with accuracy.” Thus, the parliamentary era and its economic growth proved beneficial only to the economic elite who could afford to escape these conditions.

The result was Chile’s first widespread labor mobilization. Between 1902 and 1908 there were over 200 strikes. The government responded with violent oppression. In May 1903, over one thousand people died when the military shot protestors during a port workers’ strike in Valparaíso. In October 1905, three hundred upper-class “white guards” armed by the government killed over two hundred citizens protesting in response to high meat prices. Then, in 1907, the government dispatched two naval cruisers that opened machine gun fire on the port city of Iquique where several thousand nitrate miners were on strike. The number of dead remains unknown, but is estimated to be in the hundreds. These early acts of oppression served as a precedent for later violence against the working class, a role that the Carabineros would come to fill.

Only the rural poor failed to organize and fight for social change. This was because of the prevailing hacienda system wherein the large landowners, the latifundistas, maintained political dominion over their landed peasants, the inquilinos. These inquilinos were not bounded to the land as in European feudalism, but were often indebted to the landowner or worked the land for housing and food. Because this status often passed
from one generation the next, the *hacienda* system resembled serfdom more than a free labor market. As a result, the peasantry had neither the wherewithal nor the ability to fight back against their exploitation because their livelihood was subject to the will of their landowners. Furthermore, these landowners made up a large portion of Congress and had maintained enough political influence to block any major land reforms. Chile did not see any legitimate attempts at changing this system for several decades.

Ultimately, government repression galvanized the nation’s labor forces instead of suppressing their outcry. A Chilean lawyer founded the *Federación de Obreros de Chile* (FOCH) in 1909, a federation of Chilean workers. Then, in 1910, four hundred artisan associations joined with a number of unions that were mostly made up of railway men and metal workers to form the *mancomunales*, labor brotherhoods. These *mancomunales* took control of the FOCH over the next several years, turning it into a predominantly socialist organization.⁶ Other Marxist-oriented groups sprang up at this time as well, including the Socialist Workers Party (POS), founded in 1912 by Luis Emilio Recabarren,⁷ and a branch of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) in 1919.⁸ These labor movements’ increasing influence on political affairs came at an inconvenient time for the nation’s elite capitalists as Chile began to face serious economic turmoil immediately following the end of the First World War.

In 1919, immediately following the end of World War I, nitrate exports fell by an astonishing 66% as European investors pulled out of Chile in order to invest their resources into domestic reconstruction.⁹ As a result of this economic downturn, popular labor mobilization gained further motivation and strength, and in 1920 a record 50,000 workers were involved in over 105 strikes.¹⁰ President Arturo Alessandri (1920-1924) and the growing left called for constitutional reform to strip Congress of the unbalanced level
of power it enjoyed since the 1891 civil war. On September 11, 1924, Carlos Ibáñez instigated a coup from the military under the leadership of General Luis Altamirano Talavera, starting with a *ruído de sables*, a threatening protest that involved banging their sabers on the walls of Congress. Without any bloodshed, Altamirano established the first *junta* since the early 19th century, and immediately forced Congress to pass several of the laws that Alessandri had proposed, including a new labor code. In the next year, Congress approved a new constitution that empowered the executive and created bicameral legislature closer to that of the United States, officially ending the parliamentary era.

Between 1924 and 1927, Chile saw four different heads of state, but there is no doubt that Ibáñez controlled Chilean politics from the moment he organized the 1924 coup. He maintained his control because he held the title of minister of war, and later the minister of the interior as well, and had the full backing of the Chilean military. He knew, however, that the military could be easily manipulated and turned against him, especially if proletarian mobilization continued to grow and create instability that could be used to justify another coup. Thus, as the minister of the interior, Ibáñez outlawed communism in March 1927 and exiled many party leaders to the island of Más Afuera.¹¹ The following month, he issued his most influential and lasting decree from his time in power.

With the decree No. 2,484 on April 27, 1927, Ibáñez consolidated all the various police forces in Chile under one institution, *los Carabineros de Chile*. Several motivations for the creation of the Carabineros should be closely examined. First, Ibáñez was attempting to bring various aspects of Chile’s infrastructure and political system under his control. He created the Carabineros in order to “strengthen the principle of

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¹ Ironically, the same date as the 1973 coup against Allende.
authority…and fix the dependence of the Carabineros de Chile to the Minister of the Interior.”

The Department of War in Chile regularly acted as a state within the state, able to make autonomous decisions because of the president’s minimal involvement in the department’s affairs during times of peace. By fixing the Carabineros’ dependence on the central civilian power, the Ministry of the Interior, instead of making it a branch of the armed forces, Ibáñez created a way for the executive branch to fight the Department of War and its military forces if necessary, although the Carabineros most often acted as a deterrent to military intervention in politics rather than actually fighting them. In addition, Ibáñez gave his new corps legal immunity through its own judiciary, allowing it to self-regulate and thus carry out the presidents’ orders without interference from other government branches.

Thus, the creation of the Carabineros was a direct result of the unstable political context of the 1920s, in which Ibáñez could not trust the Department of War. Such stark division between two departments of the same government seems odd to North Americans and others, but Chilean history has shown that these departments often fall to the will of individuals. Professor Danny Araneda noted in his 2006 essay about the role of the Carabineros, “It should be understood that these Carabineros were, from their origins, destined to serve political ends and personal interests.”

Ibáñez’s intimate involvement in recent military uprisings was the source of his personal desire to create an armed force that would answer directly and unconditionally to his orders. The Carabineros’ code also stated, however, that the president could place the Carabineros under the power of the military if he chose to do so, and their autonomous judiciary was actually based on military code. Thus, despite the fact that the Carabineros corps was a separate institution with aims at deterring the military from taking political action, it had
ties to the military that could potentially create a feeling of allegiance between the police and the army.

Thus, Ibáñez founded the Carabineros as an institution that would fight to stabilize national politics and, in the context of the 1920s, the greatest threat to destabilization was armed insurrection from the military. This meant that he had to create a corps that was fiercely loyal to the institution of the Carabineros and the executive government that commanded it. In whom could Ibáñez instill such controlling loyalty? He had to appeal to those members of society who were desperate for the socioeconomic support of a strong institution such as the Carabineros.

Thus, most of the Carabineros came from the lowest tiers of society. Ibáñez offered membership in this new police force as an opportunity for the poor to escape the slums and climb the social ladder. For non-whites in particular, the Carabineros offered the opportunity to gain power in a society where they would otherwise have none. Thus, lower-class citizens found a safety net in the Carabineros that society did not otherwise offer them. Take, for example, the classroom pictured above. This was one of the “President Ibáñez Orphanage Schools” that offered education to orphaned children and sought to indoctrinate them with his ideologies. In the picture to the right, one of these students, called “Carabineros Chicos” (little
Carabineros), is dressed in a youth-sized Carabineros uniform.¹⁶ The children taught in these schools were not just orphans, but working-class children who attended to these schools at night because they had to work during the day. Ibáñez even established adult night schools for working-class citizens.

Through these forms of education, Ibáñez taught lower-class children at an early age to trust and idolize the Carabineros. For adults who actually joined the corps, it was likely the first time in their lives that they had institutional support, a form of proper education and steady income. For these reasons, they were loyal to the Carabineros because it provided them with livelihood, not to mention a degree of social power that was previously unattainable. One Carabinero, Francisco Zapatta, wrote in the 1944 history of the national police force, “When a citizen incorporates the [Carabineros] corps into his life, it never leaves him willingly.”¹⁷ Zapatta continued, “The Carabinero effectively lives bound to his institution,” and that the corps’ influence over the individual was a “psychological occurrence.”¹⁸ Therefore, one reason that these Carabineros did not align with Marxist ideals or even more moderate leftist ideas because, in their personal lives, the government offered them sufficient support via the Carabineros.

In May 1927, a month after creating the Carabineros, Ibáñez finally assumed the presidency after winning 98% of the popular vote. His only opponent, the communist Elías Lafertte, remained exiled with his party members during the duration of the race on Más Afuera. Ibáñez felt safe giving up his dual title of ministers of the interior and war because he now had the Carabineros answering directly to his office and could thus deter a potential military uprising. Shortly after his election, Ibáñez threw two-hundred politicians from every part of the political spectrum out of office, filled congress with his
supporters, and began to rule by dictatorial decree. As the scholar Julio Faúndez noted in his 1988 work on Chilean Marxism, the Ibáñez administration was characterized by his “complete disregard of the democratic principles” established by the 1925 constitution, which he himself helped create in order to return power to the president. Both his story as a politician and his actions as in office demonstrate a strong authoritarian inclination that shaped the character of his most lasting legacy, los Carabineros.

As president, Ibáñez attempted to steal the allegiance of the working class offering them membership in his government-controlled “legal” unions under the Republican Confederation for Civil Action (CRAC), although they never gained the support that he had hoped for. He even went so far as to give this organization nineteen seats in his cabinet. The CRAC was not as much an attempt at giving power to the proletariat, however, as it was a method of controlling and subduing the labor movement. He recognized their legal right to strike, yet simultaneously used the Carabineros to violently oppress worker demonstrations.

The outbreak of the worldwide Great Depression after the U.S. stock market crash in October 1929 greatly affected Chile’s economy, due to its connection to the fluctuations of the foreign market. Ibáñez could not stifle the economic downturn that followed, straining his relations with the ever-suffering working class. Wages were cut by as much as 40% as the number of mining employees fell from 50,000 in 1929 to 8,000 in 1932. Faced with food shortages and economic turmoil, popular uprisings from the working class began to occur in great numbers despite the outlawing of communism.

Students of La Universidad de Chile in Santiago, committed to Marxist ideology, were the main provocateurs of popular uprisings against Ibáñez. The president responded with force via his Carabineros, now using them to fight citizens instead of soldiers. This
was the earliest moment of significance wherein the identity and function of the Carabineros changed because political destabilization came from the citizenry, not the military. Thus, much earlier in the Carabineros’ history, a new enemy began to emerge.

The conflict climaxed in late July 1931, when students began openly fighting the police in the streets, leaving many dead and injured on both sides. Then a physicians’ strike at San Vincente Hospital on July 24 followed the deaths of two protestors at the hands of the police: a medical student, Jaime Pinto Riesco, and Professor Domingo Zañartu. The strikers declared, “The physicians commit to not attend [to patients] except in the case of emergency and not to attend to members of the Carabineros for any reason.” This rather drastic manner of protest revealed a very early seed of hatred between the Carabineros and the citizenry.

Another protest on July 25, 1931, led to the resignation of Ibáñez. Engineers, doctors, professors, students, and public workers joined this strike of brazos caídos, fallen arms, and paralyzed commerce and normal life until “the government collapsed miserably in the center of the joyous protests of the entire nation.” The source of the demonstrators’ joy was that this was the first instance in Chilean history that civilian activism had resulted in direct political change. Furthermore, the wide range of professions that participated in these protests shows that objection to the government did not just come from the lowest ranks of society, but was present in many tiers of society. This was not a Marxist revolution, but a protest against the Ibáñez regime from a diverse range of citizens.

Where were the Carabineros when the government collapsed? One of the president’s secretaries recalled, “…the Carabineros were absolutely at the side of Ibáñez. At the end, the Carabineros, desperate and unassimilated to the popular movement, were
waiting for orders from Ibáñez. But this was very delusional.” Clearly the police, despite their often working-class origins, were more loyal to their institution than to popular sentiment. It was this institutional loyalty that prevented them from assimilating to the “popular movement.” At least in 1931, it appeared that the Carabinero, Zapatta, was correct in writing that “the Carabinero effectively lives bound to his institution.” The Carabineros were not loyal because someone told them to be, they were loyal because they felt a personal connection to their institution.

Despite the Carabineros’ unflagging loyalty, President Ibáñez knew in July 1931 that he had lost the support of the people and chose to resign. The president’s resignation left a hole in the government that led to yet another power struggle. Between July 26, 1931 and December 1932, eight different people took the helm of the Chilean government. The most notable of these was Arturo Puga Osorio, who established the first socialist republic of the Americas with the aid of Marmaduke Grove, a conspirator in the 1924 coup. Puga’s government attempted to nationalize copper mining and passed a few small pieces of legislation, but failed to last more than 13 days.

Meanwhile, in the context of the power struggle that followed the fall of President Ibáñez, Congress faced an important and controversial question: what should be done with the Carabineros, a powerful and well-equipped force that was fiercely loyal to their creator, Ibáñez, and also ferociously hated by much of the citizenry for their reputation of brutal oppression? Immediately following the events of July 1931, the politicians set out to answer this question. Congressional Delegate Juan Pradenas Muñoz led the charge against the Carabineros, proposing that they be reorganized in order to detach them from the Ministry of the Interior, and thus the president, to eliminate their capacity for intrusion into the social and political spheres. Instead, Pradenas wanted an autonomous
branch of the government, separate from any congressional or executive body, to control them. Furthermore, he sought to eliminate the legal immunity they had secured through a legal code based on that of the military so that they would be subject to civil law.\textsuperscript{28}

In response to these attacks from Congress, the officers of the Carabineros reiterated their steadfast loyalty to the ruling government. Carlos Robles Sotomayor, then Prefect Commander of the Carabineros of Santiago, issued a statement about the July 1931 domestic conflicts on behalf of the officer corps in which he declared,

In the case of this situation, the officials of the Carabineros consider it essential to put on record… the Carabineros had no other mission nor other duty than the strict compliance with received orders from superiors [the president via the Ministry of the Interior being the most superior]…\textsuperscript{29}

Commander Sotomayor did two important things here. First, he attempted to exonerate the Carabineros for the crimes against the public during the 1931 uprisings by making it clear that they were simply following orders. Second, he reinforced the subservient character of the Carabineros by suggesting that they unquestioningly obeyed the orders of their immediate superiors within the corps, the officers, and their greater superior, the executive branch of the government. He went on in his statement to expand upon this second point:

Because of their tradition, \textit{los Carabineros de Chile} have been, and forever will be… an especially obedient service of the government and of the republic, \textit{whichever it may be} (my emphasis)… [the Carabineros] therefore never deliberate, nor alter, nor distort the commands that inform them via their chain of command.\textsuperscript{30}

Sotomayor’s statement once again reinforced the value the Carabineros placed on obedience and emphasized that this was an important part of their tradition, and thus their identity. He extrapolated from this point that this police force would obey the commands of whatever administration was in power because they did not break the chain of command, the top of which was the civil executive. In the end, the purported loyalty of
swayed the majority of the delegates in their favor. Congress rejected Juan Pradenas’ propositions to eliminate the Carabineros’ immunity and extinguish their political influence as a tool of the Ministry of the Interior in a vote of 55 to 13.31

By popular vote, Arturo Alessandri returned to the presidency in December 1932* and, between 1932 and 1937 he remained acutely aware of the threat of military intervention that had plagued previous presidencies. He ousted a number of high-ranking military officials and simultaneously supported Republican Militias, which right-wing extremists founded in 1932 to defend the government against potential military uprisings and the perceived threat of the leftist labor movements. These militias consistently maintained over 10,000 combatants (one source estimates that their numbers reached 20,000 in May 1933)32 as well as advanced weaponry, heavy artillery and even tanks.33 Alessandri encouraged them, which many considered illegal since he supported an extra-constitutional force that was doing the job of the Carabineros. Although it was an inefficient use of resources, the decision to depend on this loyal militia instead of the national police was logical, since the Carabineros’ original allegiance to Ibáñez could not be overlooked. Despite Alessandri’s lack of trust, for the time being the Carabineros faced no other serious attempts to diminish their power. The animosity of the citizenry toward the Carabineros, however, persisted.

Public attitudes toward the Carabineros, in general, had never been positive, especially among lower- and middle-class citizens who most frequently came into conflict with them. This hostility likely existed toward the various police forces even before Ibáñez consolidated them into the Carabineros. By creating one national police force, however, Ibáñez also consolidated the anti-authoritarian sentiments of the

* In Chile, a president can serve as many terms as they want, but no two terms can be consecutive.
population against this singular entity. Indeed, on the day that Ibáñez resigned, citizens took advantage of the situation by hunting the Carabineros and even executing some of them in the street. Arturo Olavarría, a Santiago citizen who was present during these days, recalls in his memoirs:

In the streets of the capital a hunt began for the Carabineros, many of whom were cowardly murdered by the mob that stupidly punished them for acts that were the responsibility of the fallen government.  

This account reveals the militant attitude that much of the citizenry had toward the national police in the 1930s, understandable emotions from the downtrodden that were subjugated by the brutality of these officers and the oppression of the government they served. Olavarría, however, seems have understood clearly who was truly responsible for the oppression, namely the Ibáñez administration, rather than individual Carabineros who were truly subject to the orders of their superiors. Thus, even though the Carabineros were not entirely to blame, and some Chileans recognized this, they became the target of popular anger toward the government, which often took the form of physical violence. Moreover, this animosity toward the Carabineros was sure to affect the evolving identity of the individual officers and the institution. Congress allowed the national police force to retain its strength after Ibáñez’s departure, but the role that this very new police force would play in the future of Chile was entirely uncertain. Thus, 1932 was a watershed year for Chile as a whole and the Carabineros’ future because Alessandri’s election marked a return to relatively stable politics after a decade that saw more than ten governments rise and fall. Furthermore, communism was once again legal after 1932, meaning that the door was open for Marxism to move into the forefront of Chilean politics. Since this ideology posed a threat to the capitalist elite that controlled politics, would the Carabineros also view it as a threat? The Carabineros had a well-defined role
while Ibáñez ruled as a dictator – to maintain order by keeping the military at bay – but where was their place after a return to stable democracy?
III. The Carabineros’ Identity Crisis and Marxist Growth

After Arturo Alessandri’s 1932 election, Chile saw a return to relatively stable and democratic politics following the tumultuous decade that preceded it. The most significant change was that the military, in general, ceased to interfere in the political sphere. For the Carabineros, this created somewhat of an identity crisis because the threat of military intervention was no longer in the foreground. Being only five years old, the identity of the Carabineros’ institution remained very malleable as they searched for other threats to the Chile’s internal order. Throughout the 1930s and into the 1940s, political activism became such a threat, but whether or not the Carabineros would identify a specific group as their primary enemy was not yet determined. Rather, their role was merely to follow the orders of the executive.

While it is not fair to argue at this point that the Carabineros identified the growth of Marxism as the greatest threat to Chile’s political stability, President Alessandri and the majority of Congress, controlled by the right, most certainly viewed it as such. The president’s focus on growing Chile’s export economy while failing to appease the workers’ demands for higher wages and better working conditions exacerbated the situation, leading to frequent protests. Alessandri responded by using the Carabineros to quell strikes and uprisings, and sometimes even declared emergency powers in unruly mining regions so that he could use the military as well. In June and July 1934, for instance, in the southern region of Cautín, he ordered the Carabineros and the military to suppress a violent protest of evicted peasants in the so-called Ranquil Rebellion; they shot and killed over one hundred protestors. The fact that the president used the military along with the Carabineros contradicted the original purpose of the national police and marked a very early transition in their relationship with the rest of the Chilean armed
forces. This development was likely an early seed of trust that had the potential to develop over the next several decades into a stronger professional relationship.

In the years that followed, despite the efforts of Alessandri and the political right to prevent it, the Chilean Marxist movement grew rapidly and became more unified. Recall that the early roots of this movement lay in the labor federations, the FOCH and the IWW, as well as the POS that became the Communist Party. While the popularity of Marxism suffered briefly while Ibáñez was in power because he outlawed the communists, the ideology made a quick recovery and several political parties began to gain a following. In April 1933, several small left-wing groups combined to form the *partido socialista* (PS) under the leadership of Marmaduke Grove and won the allegiance of over four hundred of the “legal” CRAC unions that Ibáñez had created. At the same time, the *partido comunista* (PC) struggled to recover since it had lost much of its union membership under FOCH – the labor federation founded in 1909 – to Ibáñez’s CRAC unions. Furthermore, the PC refused to work with these “legal” unions because they viewed them as un-free since they the government regulated them. Meanwhile, the PS worked within the established system, subverting the CRAC unions from within and, by the end of the Alessandri administration, the PS would grow to be the fourth largest party, three times the size of the PC. While the left was divided over strategy with regard to working with the government or against it, they were gaining strength and posing a greater threat each day to the elites of the Liberal and Conservative parties that still controlled Congress and the executive.

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1 Non-CRAC unions were not illegal, but they were non-legal. This simply means that they did not have any legitimate power as recognized by the government. The communists favored these unions, viewing them as “free” unions in that they were not subject to government control.
The right’s perception of the left as a threat deepened the polarization between Chile’s political parties, especially after April 1934 when the centrist Radical party withdrew from Alessandri’s cabinet, hoping to become a senior partner in an alliance with the far-left. (Again, Appendix 4 shows a breakdown of Chile’s major political parties.) This was an important turning point because it created an even sharper divide between the Liberal-Conservative bloc and the growing left. Even with the Radicals, however, the left still could not win a majority in Congress and thus continued to encourage workers within their unions to strike.

Alessandri’s economic polices did push Chile’s economy forward successfully. By 1937, industrial and agricultural production passed pre-depression levels and domestic factory output reached production levels such that it satisfied 97% of consumer needs. Still, the standard of living for lower-class Chileans remained extremely poor, primarily due to low wages, and the number of laborers on strikes rose from three thousand to eighteen thousand between 1930 and 1937. The PS and PC were most responsible for inciting these strikes, reinforcing the right’s perception of all worker mobilization as Marxist, and the reactionary forces of Alessandri’s government responded with violence.

In February 1936, Alessandri declared a state of emergency and dissolved Congress in response to a nation-wide railway workers’ strike. The president closed down opposition papers’ and imprisoned leaders of the labor movement and the leftist parties. Alessandri even created a new special forcers unit within the Carabineros designed to fight protestors in August 1936 that would later come to be known as the

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1 This happened frequently during times of particular contention, especially when the government was conducting some of its most brutal oppression. This made my research of primary sources difficult at times because when trying to find first hand accounts of certain oppressive events, left wing newspapers were not publishing and other newspapers were not talking about them.
Grupo Móvil. Marmaduke Grove, founder of the PS, wrote in November 1936 of Alessandri that, “he really had lost his popularity, committed to the right, with his politics of hate and prosecution, he became more distanced each day from the working classes.”

The Carabineros, following Alessandri’s orders, most certainly followed suit as they too became more distanced from the working classes they so often originated from.

The oppression of the working class did not, however, discourage the left. Indeed, the Latin American scholar Julio Faúndez wrote in a 1988 work on Chilean Marxism that Alessandri’s oppressive forces were not strong enough to destroy the labor movement, but they were strong enough to unite it. The result of this uniting force occurred in June 1936 with the official creation of the Frente Popular, The Popular Front, an electoral coalition that included the PS, PC, Radicals and Democrats. None of these parties stood a chance against the Liberal-Conservative coalition that together held 34.5% of the voting power in Congress. The Radicals constituted 18.4%, and the Democrats 13.4%, but by combining with the much smaller left parties they could gain a true majority, thus fulfilling the Radicals’ goal of being a dominant force within a strong coalition, the reason they left Alessandri’s cabinet in 1934. For the struggling PC, this opportunity came about at the perfect moment as they strictly followed the policy of the Comintern in Moscow, recently redesigned to encourage alliances with all left wing parties in an effort to fight Nazism. In line with this policy, the PC combined all of its unions with the PS unions under the Confederación de Trabajadores de Chile (CTCH) in December 1936. (It is noteworthy that the Popular Front coalition was purely electoral, not ideological. See Appendix 5 for a more details about this.) These developments in the Chilean party system are relevant because they increased political polarization, intensifying hostility
between the left and right. In ordering the Carabineros to oppress the working class, the right transmitted this hostility to the national police.

Thus far, it seems that the Carabineros only fought workers’ movements, perceived as exclusively Marxist ones, during the 1930s. But another form of extra-parliamentary mobilization occurred during this period as well, this time from the right. Chile’s National Socialist Movement, founded in April 1932 by the German descendent Jorge González von Marées, declared itself Chile’s nacista movement, a local reflection of Adolf Hitler’s growing National Socialist Workers Party in Germany.14 The Carabineros viewed the nacistas as a threat to internal order as well, and often fought them in street when they staged demonstrations or fought the leftist workers. This goes to show that the Carabineros, at this point, were not just an instrument for oppressing the left, although they targeted the workers most frequently. Due to the widespread militarism of activists such as the nacistas, socialists and communists, Alessandri sought to legalize the use of oppressive force against them.

In late 1936, Congress began the process of passing a bill called the Ley de Seguirdad Interior del Estado, the State Internal Security Law. The proposed bill would ban the use of political uniforms by civilians and use the force of the Carabineros to place heavy restrictions on meetings and publications. The fact that the law did not target the left specifically, but all political activists, speaks to the government’s opposition to all causes of disorder. In December 1936, La Estrella reflected widespread opinion about the law:

As a free and independent press, we have developed the opinion that, behind the guise of defining the provisions for repressing enemies of internal security, they have made an attack on civil liberties and an evident attempt at intervening in the coming March elections.15
This excerpt both exemplified public opinion about the law, and highlighted one of its most unpopular features. In March 1938, the next congressional election was set to take place and the right was surely searching for a way to fight against the Popular Front’s growing power. Many on the left saw the Ley de Seguridad as an unconstitutional attempt to justify that. This opinion held merit, as the election had the potential to produce a large swing in power toward the left since the Popular Front could gain a majority in Congress.

In late January 1937, two months before the congressional election and mere weeks before the final vote on Alessandri’s security law, groups of protestors took to the streets in Santiago against the new legislation. La Estrella reported that “the only thing they threw were shouts such as ‘We want a free Chile,’ ‘Down with the gag law,’ and ‘Long live liberty.’” Yet the Carabineros, or the “reactionary forces of the right” as Marmaduke would have described them, responded with violence:

Carabineros, on orders from the upper authorities [Ministry of Interior], proceeded to dissolve the demonstration and oppress various citizens…In an interview with the Santiago Mayor, he said that the demonstration was authorized. Here we understand justice and equality before the law as seen by the right. If the intervention begins here, what will we have to face in March? That the mayor had authorized the demonstration and the demonstrators acted peacefully made the repressive acts by the Carabineros overtly unconstitutional. True, the potential bias of La Estrella – the leaders of the labor movement organized it – should be noted, but both Alessandri’s and the Carabineros’ tendencies toward violence reinforce the story.

In February, Congress passed the Ley de Seguridad, allowing the use of oppression in various forms against political activists. One of the most famous usages of the law occurred in January 1938, when President Alessandri used it to justify the Carabineros’ seizure of all copies of an issue of the world-renowned satirical magazine Topaze, which contained a political cartoon that humiliated Alessandri in its illustration.
of his subservient relationship with Ibáñez during the 1920s (See Appendix 6). Although the courts immediately exonerated the editor and returned the copies to the publisher, the Carabineros later staged a nighttime raid on the magazine, burning all of the copies that remained. Alessandri later admitted that he directly ordered the raid. What is clear is that the president had pushed the Carabineros from their role as a civilian police, charged with the task of maintaining order, into the role of a political tool, demonstrating the executive’s control over this institution and their potential for political influence.

Despite the new security law, the Popular Front remained united and prepared for the October 1938 presidential elections, continuing to encourage labor mobilization. The newspaper ¡Alerta!, organized by the Democratic Party on behalf of the Popular Front, published an article during the presidential campaign calling the workers to unite under the coalition:

The worker is ready; his conscience is clear; he is not the meek lamb of yesterday; he knows what his obligation is…WORKERS: the advances of the right affront the popular trenches, in the coming elections, they will be strongly defended by the FRENTE POPULAR!

This militant appeal set the stage for a crucial election, one that had the potential to install a Marxist president, or at least one very sympathetic to the left. Marmaduke Grove wrote, “The next presidential campaign is designed…as a contentious fight between the popular forces of the left and the reactionary forces of the right.” As the election grew closer these “popular forces” and the “reactionary forces” indeed came into contention.

The 1938 presidential election had three primary candidates: Pedro Aguirre Cerda, a Radical, ran under the Popular Front, Gustavo Ross ran for the Liberal-Conservative coalition, and Ibáñez returned under the flag of the new Popular Freedom Alliance with the support of the nacistas and other fringe parties. The election took place in typical Chilean fashion, amid violent confrontation and significant disruption of the democratic
process. On one occasion, during the president’s final message to Congress in June, the Conservatives and Liberals shouted down a senator of the Radical Party who attempted to interrupt the speech. In defense of their new political ally, the Popular Front members began to walk out when one of the three nacista congressmen and the party founder, González von Marées, fired his pistol into the roof of Congress. The Carabineros removed him and the other nacista senator from the hall.  

Three months later, on September 4, several thousand ibañistas and nacistas began demonstrations in the street. The next day, two groups of nacistas seized the University of Chile and the Seguro Obligaorio, a government building near the Moneda. In the process of taking over the Seguro Obligaorio, the occupiers killed a Carabinero. The national police swiftly recaptured both buildings by force, killing six in the process. The two groups of young men who survived, totaling sixty-one, were then shot dead by the Carabineros. (The picture to the left shows the Carabineros escorting their captives.) Some believe that the killings were the result of a direct order from Alessandri, although there is little evidence to prove this. The lone survivor of the Carabineros’ assault on the seventh floor of the Seguro Obligaorio, Carlos Pizarro Cárdenas, recounted the experience some sixty years later:  

We scrambled down. On the sixth floor there was an employee of the Seguro that said, “this is an employee, this one is not....” There was a man who claimed to be an employee. He repeated that his name was Cabello. An oficial
head butted him and a civil shot him in the stomach….Afterward, another oficial asked me who I was and I said that I was not an employee. The civil turned and said, “You are the same as the rest,” and shot me in the stomach.25

This massacre demonstrated the excessive and indiscriminate force that characterized the Carabineros. Cabello was in fact an employee in the building, an innocent bystander rather than a nacista occupier. The manner in which the Carabineros officers addressed the people in this story reveals their sense of authority and a superiority complex that surely influenced the way they acted toward the general population. They exhibited no sympathies for these citizens, but rather self-righteous indignation. Furthermore, the massacre of the sixty-one occupiers after their surrender revealed how much the Carabineros had become a violent tool to suppress extremist groups, the nacistas in this case. Whether or not the order to execute the protestors came from the executive or within the Carabineros’ hierarchy, the act was a political statement: the government was prepared to use any degree of force against those who attempted to upset the constitutional order in Chile by extra-legal means, a force previously identified as the military. Now, the Carabineros viewed militant civilians who caused domestic disturbances as the greatest threat to Chile’s constitutional order, but not necessarily activists from the left specifically.

As a result of these events, Ibáñez withdrew his name from the ballot and put his support behind Aguirre, giving him the votes needed to win the election 50.2% to 49.3%.26 Thus, Marxists’ first success in a presidential election came as something of a mishap due to the armed insurrection of the opposing forces and the rash actions taken by the Carabineros. At the same time, since Aguirre most closely aligned with the Radicals

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1 The oficial and the civil in this anecdote are both Carabineros of different ranks, with the oficial being the superior of the two. The distinction is comparable to a deputy and a low ranking police officer.
he was not the revolutionary that the PC had hoped for, nor was he the constitutional Marxist that the PS had hoped would give power to the workers. While the labor movement would make strides during this administration, this Popular Front victory was not as grand as it seemed on the surface, especially with Congress in the hands of the Liberal-Conservative bloc.

Despite the fact that the newly elected President Aguirre was a Radical, and thus much more central leaning than a true ally of the left, the Marxists of the Popular Front put much hope in him. They considered the new president their first legitimate opportunity to effect significant change in the living conditions of the rural peasantry and the urban workers. Furthermore, many on the far left of the Popular Front rather naively believed that Aguirre’s election gave them a foot in the door to establish Chilean Marxism. The socialist newspaper, Acción, directly expressed this sentiment in the months following the election:

The dictatorship, with the Popular Front in the government, will not be the dictatorship of the president elected in October, nor the dictatorship of the Radical Party. It will be – without a single doubt – the Marxist dictatorship, the absolute control of the Socialist Party. The president cannot fail to understand this!?

President Aguirre’s policies aimed at the betterment of the Chilean lower class, but he had no intention of creating the “Marxist dictatorship” that the socialists hoped his presidency would be. Quite the contrary, Aguirre found himself rather powerless in front of a Congress that remained controlled by the Liberal-Conservative bloc. The right not only opposed his reformist politics, but also loathed the president on a personal level because he lacked an upper-class background and because he was a mestizo, a Latin-
American with Spanish and native heritage. It is said that some rightist congressmen even refused to shake his hand. This animosity and the right’s control over Congress made it incredibly difficult for the Popular Front to bring any legislative change, although Aguirre did have some success creating a state-controlled development agency called COFO, which allowed him to obtain some control over Chilean industry. (See Appendix 7 for more details on this and Aguirre’s other reform policies.)

Some in Chile met the rise of the Popular Front with more direct action than merely blocking legislation in Congress. In August 1939, General Ariosto Herrera and Ibáñez made a feeble attempt at overthrowing the government, a coup attempt referred to as the Ariostazo. Their plan was to seize control of the Tacna regiment, a military regiment based in Santiago similar to our National Guard, and use their artillery and manpower to overtake the government. The plot failed to gain adequate support, however, and the other officers in the military quickly suppressed it before a legitimate threat could materialize. The divide in loyalty of pro-coup officers and others who remained firmly allied to the constitutional government ran deep within the military. The fact that the military officers loyal to the government prevailed likely reinforced the Carabineros’ trust in the military as a whole, despite the fact that coup conspirators such as General Herrera and Ibáñez still existed.

Congress took the opportunity of the Ariostazo to make a point by granting President Aguirre emergency powers to deal with this threat, but declaring that they would not be as likely to do so in the future if his left-leaning political views did not change. The Conservative Party’s newspaper, Diario Ilustrado, later condemned the

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during the colonial period, one’s race largely dictated their social status in much of the Spanish-Amerícas. In this system, called the Casta system, different combinations fell into varying levels in the social hierarchy. Examples include criollos (100% white but born in the Americas), mestizos (one white parent, one native), and mulatos (one white parent, one African). The stigmatisms associated with the classifications often carry over into modern society.
attempted coup while also suggesting that it was a reasonable response to Aguirre’s policies. The right wing, in other words, was willing to work with Aguirre’s administration, but would stand firm against his left-leaning policies such as agricultural reform plans and proposed increases in taxation. This event marked a very early turning point in the Popular Front government, after which the centrist president would be steadily forced toward the right.

One of the most significant results of Aguirre’s move toward the right after August 1939 was his failure to follow through on promised agricultural reform. Reform in the countryside was an important issue during the 1930s. In 1939, less than 1% of landowners possessed approximately 68% of the nation’s agricultural land in haciendas, massive estates owned by the so-called latifundistas discussed in chapter two. In 1939, Marmaduke Grove, founder of the PS, estimated that 340,000 Chilean rural workers received barely enough food to live and lived in shacks that “do not appear to have been constructed for human beings.” With growing Marxist influence, these peasants became increasingly politically active in the 1930s, represented by the formation of nearly 200 new rural unions during the early years of the Popular Front government. After the latinfundista-controlled National Society of Agriculture put significant pressure on Aguirre, however, the president used a combination of legislation and Carabineros force to ban further unionization. Thus, agricultural reform fell out of political relevance for the time being as the abused peasants continued to suffer in the countryside.

The quelling of popular mobilization in the countryside was not, however, an indicator of the overall trend of the labor movement during the Popular Front government. Widespread strikes and protests continued and, in September 1939, the newspaper ¡Adelante! reported that 16% of the Chilean population was involved in a union, a
percentage second only to the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{33} Clearly, the Marxist parties, the PS and PC, were gaining considerable ground during the late 1930s as they encouraged the unionization that they controlled. It is important to note, however, that the ideologies of the PC and the PS were no closer to reconciliation despite their Popular Front alliance. For their part, the socialists still hinged their policy on bringing about a Marxist revolution through the electorate. The editors of \textit{Acción} pushed this point in a 1939 article titled, “Against Violence:”

The political action of most, of the grand majority, is inclined toward violence. See that this is an obstacle to your wishes…The path of choosing to meet violence with violence is absurd and extremely unintelligent. We would have to be the strongest, the most bloodthirsty, and still the triumph would be costly and short-lived.\textsuperscript{34}

The socialists recognized that the majority of “political action…is inclined toward violence,” meaning that although the socialists promoted a Marxist revolution though popular election, violent means often resulted from strikes. They also argued that “meeting violence with violence” would not work, which implied that the government still used violence to suppress popular movements. It then recognized that the labor movement was not sufficient in strength to stand up against the government forces, and a battle with them would be “costly and short-lived” even if triumphant. Thus, it is apparent that violence was very much a part of the labor movement’s daily struggle, but the PS remained true to its policy of non-violent reform.

The Communist Party, on the other hand, encouraged the organization of militias and general anti-authority sentiments. In October 1940, the secretary general of the PC, Carlos Contreras Labarca, “denounced the rightist conspiracy against the common folk,” and “expressed that it was necessary that the people maintain their vigilance in the streets…and organize communist militias.”\textsuperscript{35} A couple months later the communist
newspaper, *El Luchador Obrero*, published an article about the relationship between communism and authority that read, “Communism is the enemy, by its essence, of legitimate authority.” The party leaders’ encouragement to form militias and the promotion of anti-authority ideology show that, despite the Popular Front coalition, the PC had not abandoned its policy of armed revolution by any means.

Meanwhile, the government’s response to popular mobilization, especially that which took a violent form as promoted by the PC, was to use the Carabineros as an oppressive force. In August 1940, the minister of the interior sent an official notice to the director general of the Carabineros in which he ordered, “with regard to the agitation in the countryside and the industrial centers,” that “the labor of the carabineros should be used in this case, by means of the strict vigilance of these agitated workers that create artificial problems…. ” The focus on the workers here as the agitators marks a shift from the use of the Carabineros to quell general disturbances during the Alessandri administration to specifically targeting the working class during the Aguirre administration. The order to use “strict vigilance” appeared rather mild, but was probably euphemistic in its wording. In any case, the order certainly showed that the Ministry of the Interior was focused on using the Carabineros as a force to specifically target proletariat and the peasantry and that it did not view their grievances as legitimate, but rather as “artificial.” Orders such as these, based in the belief that these grievances were “artificial,” surely alienated the Carabineros further from their lower-class origins.

Regardless of the mild language of the Ministry of the Interior’s August 1940 order, there is evidence that the Carabineros used a liberal interpretation of “strict vigilance.” In October 1941, for example, a group of anti-Nazi protestors from the working class took to the street, a common occurrence during World War II that the
presence of Nazi sympathizers within Chile only exacerbated. According the report of *Nuevo Andamio*, a newspaper published on behalf of a plasterers’ union, the protestors were peacefully singing the national anthem. When the Carabineros arrived, “The superior officer ordered that they dissolve the protest with the force of the *garrote,*” as in the times of Ibáñez and Alessandri…seriously wounding comrade Sagredo who went to the hospital.”

It is possible that this newspaper, given its bias toward the plight of the proletariat, underemphasized the unrest of the protestors or failed to mention some provocation on their part that agitated the Carabineros. Even so, the incident exemplified the sort of violent conflict that occurred between the Carabineros and the workers despite Aguirre’s leftist sympathies.

The aftermath of the 1920s and Chile’s return to fairly stable and democratic politics saw several developments in the evolution of the Carabineros. Being a very young institution, the Carabineros sought to define their identity after the fall of Ibáñez in 1931. The stabilization of politics and the military’s overall loyalty to the government made the Carabineros’ future unclear since their initial role was to defend against a disloyal military in the midst of unstable politics. The *Ariostazo* may seem to have indicated that the military was not fully loyal to the government, but since the coup failed because Ariosto and Ibáñez could not rally support, this futile attempt actually proved the contrary.

As the Carabineros sought a new threat to defend against, their main enemy became the agitators who created internal disorder. These agitators came from both the left, in the form of labor mobilization, and the right, the *nacistas* that attempted to disrupt

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*Literally translates to stick, but refers to the baton that the Carabineros carry. Chilean newspapers with leftist sympathies often refer to the suffering of the Chilean people under the *garrote,* and thus the word became widely recognized as synonymous with oppression and authoritarianism. I do not translate it to baton because of this sentiment and its frequent use.*
the 1938 election, for example. For Alessandri, most of Congress, and eventually Aguirre, however, there was a much more specific threat: the growth of Chilean Marxism. They used the Carabineros to fight this threat and, in response to this oppression, the Marxists encouraged retaliation, the formation of militias, and further mobilization. With each civil disturbance, the Carabineros’ identity as a symbol of state oppression became more deeply entrenched as their role became less focused on the protection of the government against the military and more focused on the protection of capitalism against leftist workers’ movements. Still, the Carabineros did not have an institutionalized predisposition against Marxism or the working class at this point, but frequently clashed with them because the executives ordered the national police to target labor movements. As this trend of targeting the working class continued during the next several decades, however, it certainly affected the identity and the biases of the both individual Carabineros and the institution as a whole.

IV. Growing Anti-Marxism Reflected in the Carabineros

The popularization of Marxist ideology increased with regard to mobilizing workers or electoral strength during the 1940s, despite the right’s attempt to prevent this. The right still did, however, maintain convincing control over national politics because of its majority in Congress. Furthermore, the outbreak of the Cold War during the late 1940s put significant pressure on Chile to subdue the growth of Marxism because the United States was a major stakeholder in Chilean copper. If the Chilean government adopted Marxist ideology, or even a very far left one, they would likely nationalize copper mines and U.S. companies would suffer substantial monetary losses. These internal and external pressures led to widespread anti-Marxist sentiments, often reflected in the Carabineros as the executive ordered them to repress labor mobilization even more aggressively. Thus
far, however, no evidence has shown that these Carabineros held distinctly personal
biases against the Marxists, only that they followed orders. True, the manner in which
they carried out these orders had been very abusive thus far, but the Carabineros equally
abused the nacistas and Marxists alike.

Nevertheless, it is reasonable to assume that the Carabineros had developed
prejudices against the workers, since these police specifically targeted them more
frequently. This is an even more reasonable assumption since many workers, especially
those associated with the PC, held very militant attitudes toward the national police. This,
of course, had the potential to foster hostility toward the working class within the
Carabineros. Still, these assumptions have little empirical support at this point in the
Carabineros’ story. A 1941 plasterers’ strike in Santiago, as told by the newspaper Nuevo
Andamio, gave a good representation of the developing relationship between the
mobilizing proletariat and the Carabineros during the early 1940s.

The plasterers in Santiago went on strike in December 1941, and from the earliest
days of the strike these workers came into conflict with the Carabineros. Nuevo Andamio
reported extensively on the abuses that these workers faced from the Carabineros, and
while the bias and possible exaggerations of this paper must be considered, it
nevertheless sheds light on the brutal and abusive actions of the national police force. The
newspaper published the following article, “Ibáñez’s Drunks Put Into Action,” just a
couple of weeks into the strike:

The series of abuses and inhumane treatments that these celebrities’ [the
Carabineros] commit…we have repeatedly denounced them…Incalculable
are the victims that have fallen under the garrote of these lackeys. But these
irresponsible ones have orders to proceed; orders from their superiors; I call

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1 The word used here was actually “los famosos,” which literally means “the famous ones,” but there
is no good English translation that carries the same prose so I chose to use “celebrities” in my
translation.
them irresponsible because ninety percent are illiterates, drunks, the uneducated, poor, etc…

Speaking of a general trend of abuse by these government agents, rather than a specific incident, Nuevo Andamio expressed the striking workers’ feeling that they were unjustifiably oppressed. The second part of the excerpt implied that the Carabineros were merely puppets, following the orders of their superiors, but also belittled them as “illiterates, drunks, uneducated, poor, etc…” More than belittling them, however, this statement identified the Carabineros as lower-class citizens and as having the same traits as those workers they fought, primarily poverty and a lack of formal education.

It does not appear, however, that this shared background yielded any sympathies from the Carabineros toward the Chilean lower class when they protested for a better life. The same article in Nuevo Andamio went on to say that, while the Carabineros “barbarically” abused the poor, they showed the “privileged classes…respect and softness.”

Granted, these “privileged classes” very rarely staged protests in the street when compared with the lower class, and were thus less likely to come into conflict with the Carabineros and develop a hostile relationship. Still, the working class clearly recognized a discontinuity in how the police treated different citizens based on their social class. At the same time, Nuevo Andamio gave the Carabineros something of a free pass by stating that they simply followed orders. Perhaps the author excused the Carabineros’ abuses as the following of orders here as an attempt to rationalize their betrayal of their own class. The final statement, that the Carabineros were “irresponsible because ninety percent are illiterates, drunks, the uneducated, poor, etc…” seems to imply that the Carabineros could have been a force for good if educated about the plight of the workers. Instead, these police remained cut off from leftist ideals, their only education came from the institution they served.
In mid-March, about sixty days into the plasterers’ strike, Nuevo Andamio displayed an even less favorable attitude about the Carabineros than it had showed in the early days of the strike: “The powers that the Carabineros have exercised during this strike have passed their limits…it is clear that the police are acting on their own without authority.” This statement marked a clear departure from the previous view that the Carabineros acted abusively on superior orders, but it was not clear where in the chain of command authority ceased to control the Carabineros’ actions. That is, were individual Carabineros “acting on their own without authority,” or were high-ranking officers giving orders to abuse the workers that did not come from higher up in the chain of command? This distinction is important because if the individual officers were acting abusively without being ordered to do so, it would imply that they felt personally justified in the oppression of the working class by violent means. This would mean that their abuses represented personal anti-worker sentiments that extended beyond loyalty to their institution and the orders they received, a significant development in the identity of the Carabineros.

About ten days later, Nuevo Andamio published a story that sheds light on the motivations of the individual Carabineros. According to the story, one of the protesters, Angel Morande, was walking through Huemul, a Santiago neighborhood that was at the center of the plasterers’ strike. When a sub-contractor who opposed the strike, Enrique Viyetes, and “his woman” saw that Morande was alone, they called on two
Carabineros to come and detain him. As depicted in the illustration of this incident that accompanied the article, the Carabineros then held Morande while Viyetes and “his woman” beat him. Morande had to be hospitalized for several days following the beating. Upon close inspection of Viyetes’ vest, one can make out two swastikas, revealing his alleged association with the nacistas. Furthermore, Viyetes is wearing suit with a tie, while Morande appears to be in the clothes of a worker, indicating a class distinction between the two characters. This is a particularly striking development, because not only did the Carabineros target the leftist worker in this story, but they aided the nacistas, taking a side in both the political and the class struggle. The Carabineros did not act as a neutral force, simply maintaining order, but chose to side with the representatives of a specific ideology.

This story indicates that, during this strike, at least some of the Carabineros were not only biased against the protesters, but were willing to actively instigate or partake in criminal abuse against them. A clear progression occurred as the plasterers’ strike continued. While the protesters initially viewed the Carabineros as puppets carrying out the orders of their superiors, after several months of protesting they came to view the police as carrying out abuses of their own accord. The Carabineros’ assistance in the beating of Angel Morande implied that this was in fact the case. It appeared that with each passing day of conflict the Carabineros had become increasingly hostile on a more personal level toward the protesters, fully ignoring their similarities in class background. Clearly, the way that the Carabineros identified their role in this particular strike evolved from an objective mediator to an active participant in the ideological battle.
At about the same time that the plasters’ strike occurred in the early 1940s, a Carabineros Lieutenant, Don Amadeo Pinto Arellano, wrote an essay about how to improve relations between the Carabineros and the public that sheds light on their growing, mutual hostility. In the opening paragraphs of his essay, Pinto described his opinion on how the Carabineros viewed the working class:

We have the fact that, considering ourselves a country of democratic structure, our acts prove that we are enemies of this form of government. Further, we accept the existence of castes...Poverty is considered a crime; we can’t conceive the existence of a gentleman in the clothes of a worker; we disrespect our domestic employees as an inferior race, and we use the derogatory pronoun, tú,† with those who earn their bread honorably, those who operate our machines, build our houses and serve us food....We close the doors of mutual understanding and we stigmatize them like a parasite....This lack of culture, these colonial vices, they have seeped into us, dominated our sentiments...

According to Pinto, the Carabineros’ actions showed that they were “enemies” of a democratic government. Pinto did not write that the institution was fundamentally anti-democratic, but rather that their recent acts had made them so. That is, Pinto did not believe that the Carabineros had an institutionalized anti-democratic nature. In fact, later in the same article, he wrote that, “…everyone in our country knows...[our] authority is of a clearly democratic origin.” Still, he went on to acknowledge the Carabineros’ strange and troubling disobedience of civil authority.⁸ Thus, according to Pinto, the animosity between the Carabineros and civilians did not result from an institutional flaw, but from the flaws of disobedient individuals.

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† Francisco Zapatta Silva included the essay to be cited here in his 1944 work about the Carabineros, Carabineros de Chile: Reseña Historica 1541-1944 but did not adequately cite the essay, giving no date for its publication. But the essay referenced events in 1941, so it must have been written between 1941 and 1944 when Zapatta published it.

In Spanish, both tú and usted are the second person pronoun translated to “you” in English. However, tú should only be used in casual conversation with people you are very familiar with, while usted is the more polite version, similar to “Sir” or “Madam” in English, but it is used much more commonly. Using tú instead of usted can be very rude in certain contexts and in some cases, such as this one, it implies that the person being addressed is inferior. Verb conjugation changes depending on which form you use.
Pinto also noted that the Carabineros showed clear and strong bias against lower-class citizens. The “colonial vices” that “seeped into [the Carabineros], dominated [their] sentiments” referred to prejudices against lower-class citizens based on their occupations, social backgrounds, and probably their non-white racial identities in many cases. Furthermore, the language that Pinto used is reminiscent of Zapatta’s writing that the influence over the Carabineros was a “psychological occurrence.” Pinto’s statements in this excerpt clearly demonstrated that the Carabineros did not view the working class as equal to themselves, but he also implied that this sentiment was not the result of an institutional problem, although, given hindsight, it is plain to see that it was. At no point did he write that certain policies, regulations, or orders caused the Carabineros to harbor an anti-worker mentality. Rather, Pinto wrote about the personal attitudes of the Carabineros, implying that individuals within the corps maintained prejudices against the workers.

If Pinto did not believe that the institution itself carried animosity toward the working class, then why did that animosity exist? In this article, he placed the blame for the Carabineros’ anti-worker sentiments on the workers themselves. In their daily activities, Pinto wrote, the Carabineros “have found that, in all cases, adults ignore the most elemental rules of courtesy and respect for their fellow man and crudely trample on the principle of our [my emphasis] rights.” In this part of the article, Pinto victimized the Carabineros, claiming that in daily interactions the protesters violated the rights of the police. This represents a very clear distinction between the perspective of the Carabineros and that of the workers, who viewed themselves as victims under the Carabineros’ garrote. Pinto added that the state should create institutions similar to the schools that Ibáñez created for lower class citizens in the late 1920s to educate the citizenry about the
Carabineros and “civic culture,” or the acceptance of civil authority. The Carabineros, he insisted, were justified in their acts as a tool of the government that the people had elected, and the working class had to be educated about this fact.\(^9\)

Pinto accurately addressed the effects of the workers’ militant attitude toward the Carabineros on their relationship. But his argument was entirely one-sided, ignoring that this militant attitude was a response to the Carabineros’ abuses. Furthermore, he removed blame from the institution as a whole for this strained relationship, failing to see that its fundamental ideology and political sympathies were evolving. While it is not safe to say that, by the mid-1940s, the Carabineros’ institution was fundamentally anti-Marxist, the orders that came down through the institution certainly created such a sentiment within the individual police officers. Pinto believed that the institution remained a democratic one merely because it received orders from democratically elected leaders, but at some point the actions of the individual Carabineros must have altered the identity of the institution itself, just as these orders altered the identity of the individuals.

Meanwhile, Chilean politicians faced significant turmoil on a much broader scale in the early 1940s. For one thing, the relationships among the Popular Front parties became increasingly strained between 1939 and 1941. Joseph Stalin’s non-aggression pact with Hitler in August 1939 had put considerable strain on the relationship between the Socialist and the Communist Parties, since the PC closely followed the policies of Moscow and the Socialists believed the pact delegitimized them.\(^{11}\) Then, as Aguirre moved further to the right in 1940 and 1941, abandoning agrarian reform and ceding to many demands of the opposition, both Marxist parties found themselves unable to reconcile their differences with Radical party. In February 1941, the Popular Front coalition officially dissolved. Nine months later, a bad case of tuberculosis forced
President Aguirre to resign and, sadly, it took his life less than two weeks after he left office.\textsuperscript{12}

Overall, the Radicals, the Chilean Marxists, and working-class citizens who had put their hopes in Aguirre were disappointed with his failure to reform the political and economic structures that empowered only the elite upper class. His economic failures (Again, see Appendix 7 for a more in depth description of these) caused a 91% increase in wholesale prices and an 83% increase in the cost of living between 1939 and 1942, putting the working classes in an increasingly difficult situation.\textsuperscript{13} Thus, many working-class Chileans saw the Popular Front era as a failed attempt to fit Marxism into the constitutional structure of the Chilean government. This most certainly fostered anti-government sentiments in the working class that they expressed in protest and animosity toward the Carabineros who represented the government.

The next president, Juan Antonio Ríos (1942-1946), also failed to pacify the workers through economic and social reform. Ríos was a landowner of the Radical party who was clearly most loyal to the conservative wing of the party.\textsuperscript{17} The only reason that he won the election was because the PC and PS feared that a vote for his only legitimate opponent, General Carlos Ibáñez, meant a vote for fascism.\textsuperscript{14} Within the first two years of his presidency, both the Socialists and several of the more left-leaning Radicals left his cabinet in protest against his conservative policies and alliances with the Liberal-Conservative bloc.\textsuperscript{15}

The fact that Ríos failed to improve the economy further agitated the working class against the government: the inflation rate averaged 18\% between 1940 and 1950,

\textsuperscript{1} The Radicals had actually once expelled him for being too conservative and collaborating with Carlos Ibáñez, but since the party had been generally moving toward the right in the late 1930s and early 1940s, he was able to defeat a more liberal opponent and gain the party nomination.
more than double the average rate from 1879 to 1940. In response to the right-leaning government and the failing economy, worker mobilization continued to increase. Between 1943 and 1944 and, between 1945 and 1946, there were 109 and 187 average annual strikes, respectively. It is impossible to examine the actions of the Carabineros during every strike, but there were some particularly noteworthy conflicts that demonstrated the extreme measures that the police were taking against these workers. In January 1946, for instance, the Confederation of Chilean Workers organized a large demonstration in response to a recent law that made several miners’ unions illegal. On January 28, several thousand workers gathered in Plaza Bulnes, directly across from the presidential palace. It is hard to determine exactly what caused the event to turn violent, but at some point the Carabineros decided that it was necessary to open fire on the demonstrators, killing at least two in the process, although sources disagree on the actual number. One leftist newspaper, ¡ahora! Trabajadores, stated that the police killed eight workers and that “the gathering was drenched in blood because of the police.” This particular source placed blame for the violence strictly on the Carabineros.

It is possible, however, that the workers incited violent reaction from the Carabineros, perhaps by throwing things or appearing to threaten them, actions that the police frequently cited as justification for using force. Firing on unarmed civilians was surely an abuse of power by the police, but their independent judiciary protected the Carabineros from civilian trial for such crimes, and it rarely prosecuted the police officers itself. In response to the incident, known as the Massacre of Plaza Bulnes, several

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* During my research at the National Archives in Santiago I worked through a plethora of newspapers and magazines published between 1920 and the mid-1970s that represented every part of the political spectrum. Of all these, I found just one account of legal prosecution against members of the Carabineros. The article was in the August 11, 1951 edition of Estanquero, a conservative newspaper that defended the “prestige and honor” of the Carabineros. It did not give any details of
congressmen, including some conservative Radicals, resigned from President Ríos’
cabinet in protest against what they rightly called police brutality. This act of protest
clearly demonstrated the widespread view that Carabineros’ actions against the protesters
were not acceptable given the scenario and their code of conduct. Even the communist
poet Pablo Neruda, Chile’s most exalted writer, protested this incident in his poem, *Los
muertos de la plaza*:

the crime charged against the two Carabineros officers, and I could not find any other mention of the
incident in other news sources from the same period.
Yo no vengo a llorar aquí donde cayeron:
Vengo a vosotros, acudo a los que viven.
Acudo a ti a mí y en tu pecho golpeo.
Cayeron otros antes. ¿Recuerdas? Sí, recuerdas.
Otros que el mismo nombre y apellido tuvieron.
En San Gregorio, en Lonquimay lluvioso,
en Ranquil, derramados por el viento
en Iquique, enterrados en la arena,
a lo largo del mar y del desierto,
a lo largo del humo y de la lluvia,
desde las pampas a los archipiélagos
fueron asesinados otros hombres,
otros que como tú se llamaban Antonio
y que eran como tú pescadores o herreros:
carne de Chile, rostros cicatrizados por el viento,
martirizados por la pampa, firmados por el sufrimiento.

Yo encontré por los muros de la patria,
Junto a la nieve y su cristalería,
detrás del río de ramaje verde,
debajo del nitrato y de la espiga,
una gota de sangre de mi pueblo
y cada gota, come el fuego, ardía."

In San Gregorio, in rainy Lonquimay,
in Ranquil, scored by the spendthrift wind,
in Inquique, covered up by the sand,
along the sea and the desert,
through the smoke and the rain,
from the *pampas* to the *archipiélagos*
other men have been murdered,
other with names like Atonio, like your name,
fishermen, blacksmiths, men with jobs like yours:
the flesh of Chile: faces scarred by wind-lash,
tormented by the *pampas*,
the signature of pain.

All along the ramparts of our homeland,
bright at the edge of the glass-glitter of the snow,
hidden behind the maze of the forested river,
under the nitrate and the fuse of the bursting seed,
I found thick-strewn the drops of my people’s blood.
And each drop, like fire, it burned."

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"The *pampas* are flat plains to the east, mostly in Argentina actually, while the *archipiélagos* is the string of islands off of Chile’s Pacific coast. So this basically says that murder is occurring throughout Chile, from its eastern boarders to its pacific islands.
Neruda’s poem was a powerful homage to the Chileans who died at the hands of the Chilean armed forces in January 1946. He also recalled several massacres that had occurred either at the hands of the Chilean army or the Carabineros, including the Ranquil Rebellion of 1934, the Santa María School massacre in Iquique in 1907, and the San Gregorio massacre of 1921. By repeatedly pointing out the similarities between the reader and the victims, he made it very clear that these victims of the Carabineros were of working-class origin: fishermen, blacksmiths, nitrate workers and farmers. They were, in his words, “the flesh of Chile.”

The first lines of Neruda’s poem reveal, however, that he intended more than homage to the dead. By stating that his goal was not to “weep” where these people died, but to “speak to you who are still living,” Neruda issued something of a call to arms for the Chilean people to recognize the oppressive nature of Chile’s armed forces and stand against them. *Los muertos de la plaza* adequately portrayed the viewpoint of much of the Chilean working class, particularly the more militant Marxists: their family members and fellow workers were dying unnecessarily at the hands of the army in conjunction with the Carabineros, and this unjust trend could not be ignored.

In the same month as the Plaza Bulnes massacre, January 1946, President Ríos had to resign from his position due to terminal cancer and he passed away just five months later. In the September 1946 elections, Gabriel González Videla, representing the PC and the left wing of the Radicals, won the most votes (40.1%).¹ Since this was not a true majority, however, Congress had to either confirm his presidency or call for new elections. González immediately began bargaining with various members of the

¹ Indeed, the oppressive forces of the government considered Pablo Neruda to be a great threat because of his ability to stir anti-government sentiments in the people. Neruda died of heart failure on September 23, 1973, twelve days after the coup against Allende. Many believe that, like several other prominent, leftist Chilean artists, the post-Allende dictatorship killed Neruda to stop the spread of Marxist ideals.
legislature to win their support. While he stated that, “there is no power, human or divine, that can break the links which bind me to the Communist party and the people,” he nevertheless conceded places in his cabinet to members of the Liberal Party and agreed to firmly oppose agrarian reform and rural unionization. Thus, while securing the presidency by a wide margin (136 votes for, 46 votes against), González embarked upon a path of extreme compromise even before assuming the presidency.

González demonstrated his self-proclaimed allegiance to the workers early in his administration (1946-1952) by standing up for a PC-sponsored mining strike in October. González refused the U.S. State Department’s request for government intervention in the strike, forcing the Kennecott mining company to work within the Chilean legal framework to end it. Despite this act, the president quickly changed his outlook toward labor mobilization and the Marxist parties. In March 1947, the Radicals and Liberals withdrew from González’s cabinet, signifying the president’s loss of their parties’ support. The president asked the communist cabinet members to resign to appease the Radicals and Liberals, and the PC complied, expecting to be reinstated in a new cabinet. González did not, however, follow through on this expectation, and the Communists mobilized their union-based shock-troops in response, openly opposing the government.

Why had González overtly betrayed the Communist Party to whom he had pledged unwavering allegiance just six months earlier? Perhaps it was pressure from the U.S. State Department, which had stopped loaning Chile money after the Kennecott mine strike, or the March 1947 declaration of the Truman Doctrine, a watershed event in the Cold War. Indeed, Chile had been politically tied to the U.S. since entering the Allied camp under President Ríos and its foreign policy often mirrored that of the U.S. González signed the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance act in 1947, for example,
obligating Chile to aid the U.S. and other participating countries in the event of an attack.\(^5\) It is also likely that González personally felt that the PC was becoming too powerful as it controlled the majority of Chilean unions and, until March 1947, had the strongest influence within his cabinet.

González’s new disposition toward the PC was sure to affect the Carabineros. For one thing, it meant that González would now be inclined order the Carabineros to use force against protesting workers, unlike the October 1946 mining strike when he stood up for them, because he no longer aligned as closely with the proletariat. The González presidency could have been a period during which the Carabineros did not specifically target the working class, which could have altered the trajectory of their evolving identity, but this was no longer the case. Furthermore, his betrayal of the Communists directly led to violence in the streets because the PC encouraged the workers in its unions to protest the government. This meant that the Carabineros were not simply trying to maintain order during strikes, but fought very militant workers who openly protested the government.

The González administration and the Carabineros were not the only ones targeting the Communists as a threat in the 1940s. In late 1946, members of the Radical, Socialist and Liberal parties founded the *Ación Chilena Anti-Comunista* (ACHA), an anti-communist organization. This paramilitary force had thousands of members from a broad spectrum of political parties, all joined against the communists.\(^6\) Conflict between mobilizing communists, the Carabineros and the ACHA became increasingly common after González betrayed the PC. A strike of Santiago bus drivers in June 1947, for example, ended with four men dead and at least twenty wounded after it degenerated into violence.\(^7\)
Despite the fact that the government and the Carabineros targeted the Marxist workers, it appears that the Carabineros were not responsible for the deaths during this strike: the communist paper *El Siglo* reported that the Carabineros acted “courteously” during the strike. It went on to report that a Carabineros official complimented the workers when he saw the protest begin to dissolve peacefully, when suddenly, “from their cars, the provokers [ACHA] lanzaron fuego graneado on the people.”8 “Lanzaron fuego graneado” literally means that they “launched rapid fire,” but it is very ambiguous and could refer to literal shooting or the rapid throwing of objects such as rocks and bottles. This instance showed that the Carabineros still had the capacity to act in a professional, non-abusive manner. Despite the fact that anti-Marxist sentiment was growing among the Carabineros’ ranks, it had not engulfed the disposition of the entire institution.

The events of this strike demonstrated that communists faced opposition not just from the government, but also from Chilean citizens who wanted to openly fight them in the streets. Indeed, anti-communist sentiment was strong, as demonstrated by the conservative newspaper *Estanquero’s* 1947 accusation that, “Soviet cells continue to operate in all parts of Chile.” This particular article went on to say that teachers in La Cisterna and all over the country were instilling “in the little ones ideas that will evolve into revolutionary acts and wild hatred against the country that freely educates them.”9

Clearly, González and much of Chile blamed the communists specifically for the violence that characterized Chile in 1947, despite instances such as the bus drivers’ strike when the ACHA was responsible, and this antagonism grew into intense oppression as the year 1947 progressed. In August and October, for example, the coal miners in the

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8 A commune in the southern part of Santiago.
south of Chile went on strike, and on both occasions the president enacted emergency
powers in the region, using the Carabineros in conjunction with the military to force
workers back into the mines.\textsuperscript{10} Despite the complete legality of the strikes, González
issued these back-to-work decrees, censored the communist press, and seized food from
the homes of the strikers in an effort to squeeze their resources and force them back to
work.\textsuperscript{11} He conducted all of these actions using the Carabineros and the military. This was
a clear departure from his defense of the copper miners against pressure from the U.S. in
late 1946. Then, after González had peacefully negotiated copper miners in
Chuquicamata to go back to work, the PC seized control of the local union, convincing
the workers to cancel their arbitration deal. A furious González jailed the local PC
organizer as well as several other communist leaders and shortly afterwards he formally
broke off relations with the PC and all communist nations.\textsuperscript{12}

Then, in July 1948 González signed the Law for the Permanent Defense of
Democracy Act. This law, which the left referred to as the \textit{Ley Maldita} or Accursed Law,
outlawed communism and eliminated over 20,000 Chileans from the voting register. It
banned strikes by public workers, heavily censored the left wing press, and established a
detention camp for communist leaders in the old nitrate mine of Pisagua.\textsuperscript{13} And yet this
was still not a strong enough measure for some right-wing Chileans and thus, between
September and October 1948, General Ramón Vergara Montero, General Ibáñez and
several others tried to persuade González to assume dictatorial powers in order to more
completely extinguish Marxism. If González refused, the conspirators planned to
overthrow the government and make Ibáñez president, but González discovered this plan
and rallied the more loyal military officers to his side before any action came to fruition.\textsuperscript{14}
Once again, the military showed that it would remain out of the political sphere despite the rabble rousing of a small number of conspirators.

Even after banning the PC, González still had to turn to the Carabineros and the rest of the armed forces to completely quell them. In June 1949, for example, the Carabineros attempted to break up a covert communist meeting in Santiago in the Teatro Caupolicán and ended up in a shootout that left four policemen dead and twenty civilians wounded. Then, in August 1949 a student protest against increasing bus fares led to rioting in Santiago. Unable to end the violence with just the Carabineros, the Moneda ordered armored military units to enter the capital. This incident was indicative of the trend of cooperative oppression between the Carabineros and the Chilean military against labor movements that had been evolving over the past decade.

Yet, despite these repressive actions, political mobilization continued within the working class. Almost two thousand sulfur miners went on strike in May 1950; 30,000 miners, gas and electric workers in various regions struck in June 1951; 10,000 leather workers went out in August 1951; and 18,000 coal miners struck in May 1951. Mundo Obrero, the source of these numbers, reported that these protesters frequently resisted armed intervention from both the Carabineros and the military, but never backed down in the face of oppression. Thus, despite the banning of the Communist Party and repression from the armed forces, it seems that a spirit of protest remained deeply embedded in the Chilean workers.

The 1940s saw three different administrations, two of which the left elected with high hopes that they would create meaningful social reform (they elected Ríos merely to avoid Ibáñez). Instead, growing hostility toward Marxism by these presidents and much of the Chilean population characterized the 1940s. The Carabineros also began to reflect
these anti-Marxist sentiments in their daily interactions with the workers. The national police demonstrated that constantly targeting the working class affected their personal dispositions toward them, as shown by the plasterers’ strike and Pinto’s remarks about the “colonial vices” that “dominated [the Carabineros’] sentiments.” Furthermore, in no way did the Carabineros shy away from using excessive force, but were frequently responsible for the shooting and killing of unarmed civilians.

True, the Carabineros did not discriminate against the working class in every scenario and they sometimes acted in a professional manner while dissolving protests. This indicates that the identity of the institution, how it defined itself, was not fundamentally anti-Marxist, anti-worker, or anti-left by the close of the 1940s. The institution itself did not create hostility toward the working class within the individual Carabineros, the actions that the executive ordered them to carry out did. Perhaps, if González had stuck to his original ideologies and not oppressed the workers, as in the October 1946 mining strike, rapidly improving relations between the Carabineros and workers would have characterized the late 1940s. Unfortunately, this was not the case and, as Chile moved into the latter half of the twentieth century, the Carabineros’ identity and their role in national politics continued to develop in the context of growing hostility between the left and right.
V. Drawing a Line in the Sand: Political Polarization

When the 1940s came to a close, the old party system was essentially destroyed because various political allegiances had split the major parties. The Socialist Party alone divided into three separate factions by the late 1940s. The political parties were so divided that the 1949 congressional election saw eighteen different parties fielding candidates and fourteen of them had enough support to win seats. One of these fourteen was the newly formed Agrarian Labor Party (PAL), under which the former dictator and frequent coup conspirator, Carlos Ibáñez, won a congressional seat. This divided and extremely polarized polity augmented civic unrest because opposing ideologues, the ACHA and Marxists, for example, openly fought in the street. The Carabineros’ role was something of a violent mediator that quelled unrest, but it had most certainly targeted the left more than the right. By the end of the González administration in 1952, the Chilean people were desperate for a candidate who was above political squabbling and could unite and pacify the citizenry.

The 1952 presidential election was crowded with candidates from a range of political parties. The major parties, the Radicals, Socialists and the Liberal-Conservative bloc, all ran candidates on well-defined platforms (the PC remained illegal). The candidates included Salvador Allende, for the PS, who proposed radical changes for the time, most notably the state seizure of copper mines and other major industries. Carlos Ibáñez joined the race as well, running under the PAL with a deliberately vague political platform, attempting to appeal to the Chilean people’s disenchantment with the current political parties. The Chilean magazine, Topaze, wrote that his supporters, “guided more by instinct than by any rationale, doctrine, or values, cried out to Ibáñez as one would cry out to a policeman when in danger of being attacked.” In fact, Ibáñez did not even read
his official political platform until after it was published but promised to end nearly all of Chile’s problems without a clear plan of action. He famously stated that he would end inflation by declaring, “I will be able to do it because it is my will.” This statement had clear echoes of his inclination toward dictatorial rule, an inclination that he did not try to deny; instead he promoted Chile’s need for authoritarian rule. His party’s newspaper, Estanquero, even wrote that Chile needed to move toward an Estado Portaliano, a state based on the totalitarian politics of the former dictator Diego Portales (1793-1837). In one article, titled “Dictatorship and Legality,” the author wrote that when the people convert into, “organized masses, the government becomes a puppet, toys of the masses and paid political constituents.” Based in this logic, Ibáñez appeared to be the figure that many Chileans longed for who could rise above inter-party bickering and bring about substantive change while pacifying militant activists.

Ibáñez’s appeal to this widespread anti-party sentiment won him the presidency, receiving 46.8% of the popular vote and a swift confirmation from Congress. During the confirmation process, a group of army officers created a secret group, “For an Auspicious Tomorrow” (PUMA), that prepared itself to intervene with military force if Congress did not ratify the election. Clearly, the former general still had the loyalty of Chile’s armed forces and an inclination toward the use of force to deal with domestic issues. Thus, the new president, and highest commander of the Carabineros, was not only prone toward dictatorial power, but also had the closest ties to the military of any democratically elected president of the twentieth century. For these reasons, authoritarianism and close ties to the military greatly affected the evolution of the Carabineros during the second Ibáñez administration (1952-1958).
The president began his administration by working with the left, even inviting some Popular Socialists into his cabinet. He worked with the *Central Unica de Trabajadores* (CUT), the new trade union federation founded in 1953, discussing the repeal of the *Ley Maldita* that outlawed communism, as well as a minimum wage law and other worker demands. Despite the CUT’s willingness to engage in dialogue with Ibáñez, however, it was still a vehemently anti-government organization. In fact, when Ibáñez invited one of its senior members into his cabinet, the other CUT officers expelled him from his position in the federation. President Ibanez, they rightly suspected, was not truly interested in building an economic strategy based on the wishes of the left, but simply tried to appease striking workers. Indeed, he followed rightist economic policies, attempting to reduce government involvement in the economy: in 1953 he reduced taxation on the two controlling U.S. copper companies, Anaconda and Kennecott, from 92.2% and 79.7% to 50% for both. His strategy paid off and overall copper production soared by 33.3% during his administration, while further solidifying U.S. interests in Chile and the country’s politics.

Relations between the Ibáñez administration and the workers that started off fairly well fell apart quickly after the minister of the interior denounced the CUT as an “illegal organization” in October 1953. Then, in the first months of 1954, a strike in the copper mines inspired workers across several industries to go on strike and President Ibáñez responded by declaring a state of siege (i.e., martial law) in the northern mining regions, Valparaíso, and Santiago. Using the military in conjunction with the Carabineros, Ibáñez proceeded to censor the press and imprison several CUT leaders, using both the Carabineros and the military to carry out his orders. Among the arrested was the CUT
president and primary founder, Clotario Blest, whom the president imprisoned for
attacking the government at a CUT event in May.12

Congress rather quickly ended Ibáñez’s state of siege, but conflict between the
workers and the government was far from over. While the CUT galvanized the working
class, as well as many of the political parties on the left, living conditions rapidly
deteriorated for the lower class. The cost of living rose by 71% in 1954 and 84% in 1955
and copper revenues began to fall drastically after the end of the Korean War.13 Hoping to
stabilize the economy, Ibáñez invited a U.S. consulting firm with a well-known laissez-
faire bias, Klein-Saks, to devise a solution to Chile’s economic problems. While
Congress only approved a handful of their recommendations, the left saw Klein-Saks’
presence as a form of U.S. infringement on Chilean sovereignty. The polices achieved the
primary goal of ending the chronic inflation, which dropped to 38% in 1956 and 17% in
1957, but unemployment continued to rise and the poor bore the costs of deflation1 as
industries contracted their spending.14

Difficult living conditions in combination with encouragement from the CUT to
mobilize caused growing unrest within the working class, which manifested itself in
widespread protest. As could be expected, Ibáñez attempted to quell the protests with the
use of the Carabineros and the military, a collaboration that was becoming ever more
common. ¡ahora! Trabajadores published an article in 1957 stating that the protesters
during this period were, “not communist, nor socialist, nor radical,” but they were
citizens who protested because they could not survive without bread. The author went on
to say that the government unfairly oppressed these citizens in its attempts to extinguish

1 While deflation increases the value of currency, it has several downsides that most often fall onto
the lower class. In a very basic explanation, this occurs because when prices are falling with deflation,
demand falls because people (and companies) believe things will cost less in the future. This lack of
demand causes lower production which, in turn, leads to unemployment.
communism completely, wrongly identifying all protesters as communists.\textsuperscript{15} Many protesters probably did not have strong political allegiances, especially during these years; they protested simply because living conditions were particularly awful. Nevertheless, the CUT and Marxist parties bore the responsibility for instigating the protests and the Ibáñez administration, along with the Carabineros and military, viewed the protests as Marxist. This meant that the Carabineros, working with the military, targeted not only Marxism during the 1950s, but also all parts of the working class that mobilized.

In addition to squashing protests, Ibáñez’s administration somewhat obsessively fought the Communists who operated underground illegally. Although illegal, the PC was still involved with the CUT and the instigation of protests. In September 1955, for example, the government declared another state of emergency citing, “information of a new seditious plan by Communist elements determined to paralyze the most important industries in the country.”\textsuperscript{16} In February of the same year, Ibáñez had met with several colonels of another military group associated with PUMA, \textit{Línea Recta}, in order to hear their plans to secure dictatorial powers for the president through force so that he could save Chile from “international Communism.” Other members of the military heard about the plans, and the entire conspiracy became public knowledge before any action could be taken.\textsuperscript{17} Although President Ibáñez never outright supported this plan, the fact that he entertained the idea shows that he was hardly less power hungry than he had been when he took control of Chile by force in 1924. Furthermore, the movements of the groups within the military such as PUMA and \textit{Línea Recta} demonstrated that, like the Chilean citizenry and politicians, members of the armed forces believed that they needed to
choose a side in the struggle between the left and right. This was becoming increasingly true for the Carabineros during the Ibáñez administration as well.

As was the case in 1936 with the creation of the Popular Front against President Arturo Alessandri, in 1956 President Ibáñez acted as a catalyst for the creation of a new political alliance. In March, the Socialist, Democratic and Communist parties created the Popular Action Front (FRAP) and doubled their collective number of congressional seats to 24 in the March 1956 elections. This event marked a clear loss of power for Ibáñez and the PAL, and demonstrated the consolidation and strength of the left. Despite the congressional victory for working-class parties, however, widespread abuse against protesting workers continued.

In January 1956, the newspaper ¡Arriba! reported that the Ministry of the Interior had given instructions to the Carabineros and the military, “who patrolled the streets in tanks,” to “detain any person who tries to incite a protest.” Then, in November of the same year, ¡ahora! Trabajadores reported that the Carabineros had assaulted the office of the communist-oriented newspaper, El Siglo. The same article reported that the Carabineros had violently removed a vendor of their newspaper from his stand and arrested him, thus confirming the “fascist character of their actions.” These actions by the Carabineros demonstrated clear political leanings toward the right.

April 1957 saw the most violent confrontation following protests incited by the student federation, FECH, about high bus fares. The heavy use of the Carabineros and the military degenerated into widespread rioting and looting in Santiago and, in the end, more than twenty people lost their lives.
front page of the May 1957 edition of ¡ahora! Trabajadores, pictured to the right, compared this violence in Santiago to the 1886 riots in Chicago surrounding the Haymarket Affair, which ended with seven dead police officers, at least four dead civilians and the subsequent execution of seven alleged anarchists. Indeed, time and time again, President Ibáñez demonstrated his tendency to use the armed forces for political ends, most often the repression of Marxism.

In general, socioeconomic status and political orientation dictated public opinion about the Carabineros during this period. In more blunt terms, the wealthy conservatives still viewed the Carabineros fondly while the poor left vilified them. A Liberal Party newspaper, for example, wrote that, “The citizenry has seen with pleasure…that its authorities [the Carabineros], without a single exception, are working for their well-being and the security of the people.” Just six months later, however, a leftist newspaper from the same region wrote the following:

> When you voice your hunger, they apply the law of the garrote; when you try to organize, you end up in the armpit of the police [as in being detained by them via a headlock]; when you learn to distinguish the exploiters, they vanish you into exile.

The contrast in opinion between those who saw the Carabineros as justly protecting the citizenry and those who saw them as an abusive force reflected the polarization of both political opinion and economic status in Chile. It also demonstrated that the Carabineros acted as a political tool for those who supported their actions against the protesters, despite constant assurances that they were an apolitical institution.

The Carabineros actively promoted the view that they were an apolitical force during this time period in order justify their abusive actions, which were directed almost exclusively at the left. During the 1950s, it seemed that all Chileans, politicians and citizens alike, were drawing a line in the sand politically, and the Carabineros wanted to
make it clear that they were not. Rather, as they claimed, their only objective was to maintain public order. Take, for example, a notice sent out by the director general of the Carabineros during the first year of the Ibáñez administration promoting this image:

> Carabineros should abstain from every political allegiance absolutely and without question, and even avoid expressing political opinions publically or privately that could be considered a demonstration of sympathy for certain ideals or political parties that divide the citizenry.\(^{25}\)

Based on the abuses they inflicted against the working class and protesting citizens, as well as the censorship of the leftist press that the Carabineros enforced, it seems apparent that the Carabineros had “sympathy for certain ideals or political parties,” namely those on the right. Yes, they were mostly conducting their activities on orders from the executive, but this did not necessarily make them politically detached from their own actions. In fact, the injunction that they could not participate in politics probably made them even more inclined to oppose the popular opinion of the lower class that they themselves often came from. They were not allowed to vote, could not attend political events such as rallies, and were not allowed to discuss political issues. The statement of Ibáñez’s secretary during his first administration that the Carabineros were “unassimilated to the popular movement” was just as true in the 1950s as it was in 1931.

As every individual and every institution began to choose sides in the Chilean political struggle, what influences affected the Carabineros? The fact is, that Marxist ideology, or even that of the more moderate left, could not influence the Carabineros’ sympathies more than the political disposition of the orders they followed. That is, the Carabineros followed orders that targeted the left as an enemy and these police were too politically detached from the working class to sympathize with them. So bound to the institution of the Carabineros, these individuals adopted the ideology of the political right
and the view of the left as an enemy. It is as Francisco Zapatta Silva, a member of the Carabineros, wrote about this influence a decade earlier:

> The Carabinero effectively lives bound to his institution; he blends with the institution, with the exclusive atmosphere that breathes through the rows of the Carabineros. This influence of the Carabineros corps over its members is a psychological occurrence...From here, thus, when a citizen incorporates the corps into his life, it never leaves him willingly.  

Based on Zapatta’s analysis, it was impossible to separate the sentiments of the individual Carabineros from the institution and its abusive nature since the “influence…is a psychological occurrence.” The Carabineros only saw the workers and the left through the lens of the right, a lens that viewed the workers and Marxists as an enemy, and thus the rightist presidents pushed the individual Carabineros’ political sympathies to the right each time they ordered the institution to serve anti-Marxist political ends. That is, every time a Chilean president ordered the police to fight leftist labor movements, viewing them all as linked to Marxism, the Carabineros developed a more antagonistic view of the workers and their struggle.

Carlos Ibáñez’s second presidency came to a close in 1958 among widespread protest and violent encounters between the armed forces and the citizenry. In the year leading up to the election, the centrist Christian Democratic Party (PDC), born out of the small Falange Nacional Party, made a congressional alliance with the Radicals and the Socialists in order to repeal the Ley Maldita, the law that banned the PC in 1948. Their motivation was not justice for the Communists, but to weaken the strength of the Liberal-Conservative bloc by reintroducing the PC into official politics. This coalition also passed an electoral reform law, enfranchising many more people to vote and freeing the inquilinos from the influence of their patrones by making the ballot secret. This meant
that the rural peasantry could vote as they wished without the fear of their landlords punishing them.\textsuperscript{27}

The 1958 presidential election had three primary candidates: Salvador Allende for the FRAP (now including the PC), Eduardo Frei for the PDC, and Jorge Alessandri for the Liberal-Conservative bloc. It is safe to say that the results of the election came as a shock to both the Chilean bourgeoisie and their international counterparts: Alessandri gained 31.6\% of the votes, just barely defeating Allende, who won 28.9\%.\textsuperscript{28} As tensions surrounding the Cold War were growing, the fact that a Marxist candidate came within about 33,000\textsuperscript{29} votes of winning the presidency in Chile frightened the Chilean elite as well as politicians and businesspeople in the United States. U.S. investment made up 80\% of foreign capital in Chile in 1958 and Allende’s plans for the nationalization of copper would have greatly hurt U.S. companies, given that $483 million out of the U.S.’s $736 million invested in Chile was tied up in copper mines.\textsuperscript{30} Needless to say, this close call for the right was sure to influence Chilean politics as they attempted to curb the growing popularity of Marxism.

The United States’ worries about Chile falling to Marxism increased even more on the heels of Fidel Castro’s January 1959 victory in the Cuban revolution. The U.S. put significant pressure on Chile and the rest of Latin America to join in condemning Castro’s new Marxist government. Internally, however, opinion about the Cuban situation was, as with nearly every other issue, extremely polarized. While the left was often divided about the installation of Marxism via revolution or electorate, they resoundingly supported Fidel’s revolution. One newspaper, \textit{La Calle}, insisted that the FRAP and the CUT give directives to their constituents to go to Cuba and assist in defending the new government. The article stated, “Sinister intervention of Yankee
imperialism makes it imperative and urgent to respond with actions, not words, with action, not romantic declarations.” Salvador Allende also spoke out in defense of Cuba, arguing that, “Any aggression against Cuba is an aggression against the small nations of the world, against Latin America, and against Chile.” Clearly, the view of the United States as an imperialist aggressor was solidified in the ideology of the left.

As for the right, the Liberals and Conservatives predictably despised Castro and were ready to support the U.S. The emerging PDC, however, took a mixed stance in criticizing Castro’s totalitarian nature, but not the ideals of the revolution. Alessandri himself tried to balance these various opinions, but his overarching opinion favored national self-determination and thus, non-intervention. The delegate that the president sent to the January 1962 meeting of the Organization of American States (OAS), Radomiro Tomic, reinforced this stance. Tomic argued that, based on the U.S. State Department’s logic for cooperative intervention in Cuba, Argentina, Peru and Bolivia would have been justified in invading Chile in 1958 if Salvador Allende had been elected.

President Alessandri did make concessions to the wishes of the United States, and agreed that the spread of Marxism needed to be quelled in some way. He embraced John F. Kennedy’s 1961 “Alliance for Progress” plan that proposed progressive reforms – such as a ten-year development plan that would aid the lower class – in order to subdue revolutionary inclinations. The most significant aspect of this plan was the enacting of an agrarian reform law in August 1962. The law permitted the state to buy land with 20% cash payments down and ten-year bonds, but stipulated that it could only redistribute abandoned or inefficiently cultivated properties. In all, this only amounted to about
60,000 hectares’ distributed to just over 1,000 peasants, a rather hollow gesture. Still, it was the first true attempt at creating more equity for the peasantry and it gave them other benefits as well, such as mandating that landowners improve inquilino housing and match wages to inflation.35

The fact that this legislation made it through Congress reflected a major shift in political power that occurred during the Alessandri administration. The 1961 congressional elections were the first clear sign that power was shifting from the Radicals, who won 39 seats, and the Liberal-Conservative bloc, that won 45 seats. Meanwhile, the FRAP won 28 seats and the PDC won 59 seats, an increase of 45 seats since 1957.36 (See Appendix 8 for a breakdown of congressional seats from 1937-1965.) This was a highly significant event, as the PDC had become increasingly left wing, a shift motivated by a desire to gain support from the working class in order to overtake the Radicals as the dominant centrist party. In response to their great losses, the Radicals, Liberals and Conservatives created a formal coalition in October 1961, the Democratic Front. This would not necessarily help them win over new voters, but it gave them them a formal alliance in Congress.37 Both the movement of the PDC toward the left and the creation of the Democratic Front further indicated the polarization of Chilean politics in the late 1950s. The mentality that everyone had to pick a side moving into the 1960s affected all Chileans and Chilean institutions, including the Carabineros.

The FRAP and the CUT both worked hard during the early 1960s to shift the support of the public to the left by encouraging strikes from a wide variety of professions. Between 1960 and 1961 there were 260 annual strikes, a 50% increase from 1959 and an indicator of the workers’ desire to become more politically active. This number rose to

* A hectare equals 2.47 acres.
400 annual strikes in 1962 and 1963, and hit 564 in 1964.\textsuperscript{39} Copper miners, steelworkers, port and railroad workers all struck for higher pay in early 1961, the teachers’ union went on strike later that year, and a large portion of the country’s doctors did so in early 1962.\textsuperscript{39} Thus, the left succeeded in mobilizing both blue-collar and white-collar workers.

Predictably, these strikes often ended in violence, as was the case in November 1962 when the inhabitants of the José María Caro shantytown in Santiago attempted to blockade a railroad. After the police intervened, the citizens responded by throwing rocks. The Carabineros then opened fire on the protesters, pictured to the right, and killed five civilians.\textsuperscript{40} Upon close inspection of the photograph here, one can pick out at least two citizens in the bottom left who appear to be children.\textsuperscript{41} Shantytowns, called \textit{callampas}, such as José María Caro rapidly multiplied during the late 1950s and early 1960s and were often hotbeds for revolutionary ideals to spread. They were also home to many of the Carabineros, as the journalist Marc Cooper noted in his memoir: “The carabineros were generally from workers’ families and often lived in substandard housing in squatters’ villages – areas almost unanimously sympathetic to the Socialists and Communists.”\textsuperscript{42} This shared background did not, however, stop the national police from killing five civilians in José María Caro.

Most of these \textit{callampas} were located in Santiago and were a direct result of the growth of industry: by 1960 Santiago had 28% of the country’s manufacturing and 50% of industrial labor. The city could not keep up with the influx of labor and thus these \textit{callampas} – with no electricity, drinking water, or medical provisions – sprang up on the
margins. By the mid 1960s, there were an estimated half-million people living in them.\textsuperscript{43} Such living conditions led workers to mobilize by striking against their employers and protesting the government that offered insufficient aid. Despite the validity of the workers’ grievances, the Alessandri administration responded with repression. In the president’s personal notes from 1963, which outlined some of his plans for possible legislation and future reform, he wrote the following:

\begin{quote}
In cases of strikes or closure of factories or businesses or services whose paralysis could put in immediate danger the social-economic health of the population…the government may decree the resumption of work with intervention from the [the Carabineros] or military…\textsuperscript{44}
\end{quote}

The president thus justified the oppression of striking workers on the basis of maintaining the “social-economic health of the population.” In so doing, however, he had to ignore the health of the workers who went on strike. Alessandri warranted the use of the Carabineros and the military as means to an end that favored only one portion of the population. In this case, he favored the protection of industry at the expense of the health of the working class. The president frequently supported the Carabineros’ actions, as in a 1963 press release when he stated that the Carabineros had the “most absolute confidence of the Government,” which recognized their “spirit of discipline…and [the] calmness with which they complete their duties of maintaining order.”\textsuperscript{45}

As the 1964 presidential elections approached, there were three well-defined political blocs in Chile. The first two, the FRAP and the Democratic Front, represented the irreconcilable left and right. The FRAP nominated Salvador Allende as its candidate, while the Democratic Front nominated a Radical, Julio Durán. During the late 1950s and early 1960s, it seemed that increasing polarization between these two blocs forced Chileans to choose a side, because these two ends of the political spectrum could not cooperate. Furthermore, relations between the left and right had become increasingly
hostile due to international pressures stemming from the Cold War, as well as unrest from the proletariat, which so frequently clashed with the Carabineros.

Not wanting to engage in this hostile feud between left and right, many Chileans put their hope in the third political bloc, represented by the PDC, the largest single party in Chile at the time. (Refer to Appendix 8, which shows the breakdown of Congressional seats by party.) The PDC’s candidate, Eduardo Frei, proposed a “Revolution in Liberty” that basically followed the lines of Kennedy’s “Alliance for Progress” in that it would offer socioeconomic reform in order to subdue the left’s revolutionary inclinations. As the Frei himself defined it, his ideology lay between “reactionaries with no conscience” and “revolutionaries with no brains.” Just two years after the Cuban Missile Crisis (October 1962), the United States considered it essential to keep Chile from electing a Marxist president in 1964. The following excerpt comes from the CIA’s Senate committee report on covert action in Chile between 1963 and 1973:

The Central Intelligence Agency spent more than $2.6 million in support of the election of the Christian Democratic candidate…More than half of the Christian Democratic candidate’s campaign was financed by the United States…the CIA mounted a massive anti-Communist propaganda campaign….It was a “scare campaign” which relied heavily on images of Soviet tanks and Cuban firing squads and was directed especially to women.Obviously, U.S. interests in Chile had exceeded previous levels as the CIA directly involved itself with Chile’s politics. While Frei was not the ideal choice to combat Marxism, since he had leftist sympathies, the U.S. knew that he and the PDC could capture a large portion of the working class vote with their campaign slogan of a “Revolution in Liberty,” while the more ideal candidate, Durán, could not. Frei promised that he could bring about social reform for the working class without a revolution, a direct attempt to usurp the ideology of the Communist Party and sectors of the Socialist
Party. (See Appendix 9 for a political cartoon with Frei and Castro depicting this.) Frei won 56.1% of the popular vote and became Chile’s twenty-eighth president.

The complicated party system of the early 1950s simplified, but became more polarized, over the course of the decade. By Eduardo Frei’s election in 1964, there were three political blocs that emerged from nearly twenty parties that covered the whole political spectrum. This was a reflection of political polarization in Chile between the left and right, during which political parties chose sides, forming the FRAP and the Democratic Front. Alternatively, the rise of the PDC resulted from the party’s ability to appeal to those Chileans who wanted to remain noncombatant in an increasingly hostile power struggle between the left and right. With regard to the evolution of the Carabineros, the polarization of Chilean politics began forcing them to one side as well.

Consistently employed to target labor movements that the right perceived as entirely Marxist, the Carabineros became a symbol of the various governments’ violent oppression of the worker. Roy Hansen, a University of South Florida sociology professor, conducted a study in 1963 that yielded much insight into public opinion about the Carabineros and the military. One of the questions, “Would you like the work of supervising elections to be done by the Carabineros (instead of the army),” revealed some strong opinions. A staggering 68% of lower-class respondents “spontaneously disparaged the Carabineros.”

An examination of specific responses from the working class further elaborates on their aversion to the national police:

A Cobbler: “I don’t like the Carabineros. They are very overpowering, very hard…”
A Ceramist: “[The soldiers] are less violent, more gentlemanly, disciplined. They receive orders and fulfill them.”
A Factory Worker: “They [the police] are very pretentious and almost never respect the citizen. They club him for anything. They overstep their privileges. They think all people are corrupt (my emphasis.)”

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These responses represented a popular opinion about the Carabineros in the 1960s, that they abused their power. The ceramist’s response also revealed that many did not view the army in the same light, a difficult sentiment to explain because in the recent years the military had been just as guilty of abuse as the Carabineros. A possible explanation is that the military had only recently become so involved, and thus their identity as an oppressive force was not as ingrained in the psyche of the Chilean workers. The last response was also very revealing. The notion that, “they think all people are corrupt” shows that the police embraced the notion of an enemigo interno. They did not view the workers as people who needed their rights defended, but rather as threats to the social order that they needed to oppose.

Lastly, a housepainter responded to the question by stating, “The Carabineros...think they are Gods. Well, the majority of them are only Indians from the south.” The labeling of the Carabineros as “Indians from the south,” was meant to be an implication of their lower-class background. This is significant because it shows that, while the Carabineros had been moving toward the right and becoming more hostile toward the lower class, the socioeconomic origins of the Carabineros had not changed since their creation in 1927. The Carabineros were truly dissimilated from their own class, indoctrinated by their institution via the orders they received such that they were uniquely hostile toward the mobilized workers.

The overall results of this 1963 poll reveal that most workers certainly viewed the national police as an institution of the right, despite the Carabineros’ assurance that they were an apolitical force. Was the institution fundamentally rightist, however, or had it merely acted as a tool for the right throughout the course of its history? It is still difficult to prove the former because, at this point, the Carabineros’ actions had been consistent
with their orders. Still, the individuals and the identity of the institution were not
ideologically disconnected from these orders. The Carabineros had been in existence for
less than forty years and their role had been, almost exclusively, to oppress and abuse the
working class during that time. With this in mind, could the Carabineros have developed
into anything but a fundamentally rightist and anti-worker institution by the 1960s? If
Eduardo Frei’s “Revolution in Liberty” failed to pacify the struggle between the left and
right, then this question would likely be answered as the Carabineros would surely have
to choose a side along with the rest of Chile.
VI. Revolution in Liberty and Civil Strife

Frei’s election and his proposed “Revolution in Liberty” brought great hope to many Chileans from various socioeconomic backgrounds. Both Frei and the PDC did in fact seem to represent all Chileans, and the party makeup paralleled this since its members included everyone from copper workers and inquilinos to bankers and landowners. Many believed that Frei had the potential to unite a deeply divided Chile and bring peace and order to the streets, something that would have benefited the public image of the Carabineros since the government wouldn’t use them to oppress anyone.

The first test of the new administration’s loyalty to the Chilean people came in April 1965 when, fearing that unrest in the Dominican Republic could result in another Marxist revolution, President Lyndon Johnson ordered U.S. troops to intervene in the conflict. Students and other demonstrators took to the streets in Santiago and elsewhere in Chile to protest U.S. aggression. They even went so far as to attack the American consulate. Thus, when President Johnson requested the backing of the Organization of the American States (OAS), Frei joined Cuba, Mexico, Uruguay and Peru in their refusal to assist with the intervention.¹ Frei won considerable favor from many Chileans, represented by the glorifying cartoon depicted to the right that reads, “Against the ‘Big Stick,’ The Big Nose!”² (Eduardo Frei was well known for having a very large nose.) The fact that the person Uncle Sam is beating in the cartoon has dark skin and is dressed in clothes that a peasant would have worn was meant to show that Frei defended all Chileans, especially the lower class.
President Frei’s reforms and increasingly strong stance against the U.S. were still not enough for some Chileans and, as a result, 1965 saw the creation of a new ultra-leftist group. A faction of students in the University of Concepción founded the Movement of the Revolutionary Left (MIR) in August. This small but very active group advocated for a Cuban-style revolution and often bore the blame (rightfully) for outbreaks of violence at otherwise peaceful protests. The Spartacus Movement was another student organization that declared in 1965, “the student struggle openly stands against the Ministry of the Interior.” Standing against the Ministry of the Interior was synonymous with standing against the Carabineros, and the Spartacus newspaper, *Combate*, frequently published photos, such as the one above, that demonstrated police brutality. Unlike the one-sided view of many leftist newspapers that almost exclusively showed police brutality, *Combate* also showed photos of students attacking police, but they did not do so for the sake of journalistic neutrality. The caption under the photo to the left, which appeared on the same page as the photo above, reads, “A valiant response from a student against the Carabineros’ brutality.” The overt, published glorification of violence on the part of the protesters demonstrated that hostility between the police and the citizenry had greatly intensified in the 1960s. Yes, there were supporters of violence
against the police before this time, but this support was far less overt and certainly did not regularly appear in newspapers in such a glorified manner, even the most extreme ones.

A year later, this hostility climaxed in one of the most infamous uses of deadly force by the Chilean armed forces against citizens in the period between the Ibáñez dictatorship (1927-1931) and that of Augusto Pinochet (1973-1990). In March 1966, Frei sent the military to aid the Carabineros in ending a strike at the El Salvador copper mine, the president now bending to the will of the U.S. since the U.S. based Anaconda Company owned the mine. When the striking workers refused to leave their union hall, troops led by the soon-to-be famous Augusto Pinochet opened fire on them, killing six men and two women and wounding thirty-seven people.8 Subsequently, the president made his stance very clear when he came to the defense of the troops, blaming the Marxists for causing the violence and thus weakening the integrity of his centrist stance by taking a side against the leftist workers.

The president’s position also weakened public trust in his government and further polarized the Chilean polity. One newspaper immediately disparaged the so-called Revolution in Liberty for being “stained with the blood of the proletariat.” The article stated, “They all [the previous governments] have applied repressive methods to crush the just petitions of the wage earners…The same government has massacred women, workers and children in El Salvador.”9 The article accused the PDC government of being no different from the previous oppressive governments, essentially labeling Frei’s revolution as a farce. Clearly, Frei was failing to unify all of the Chilean people.

In the period that followed, this sentiment was one that became widely shared across the political spectrum. Frei’s own party split into three segments shortly after the March 1966 conflict at the El Salvador mine: the oficialistas remained loyal to the
president, the rebeldes wanted a stronger government with more radical leftist policies, and the terceristas sought neutral ground between the other two. In the same year, the Liberals and Conservatives officially declared themselves as one party, the National Party (PN). Although a mere formality as they had worked together since the 19th century, the formal conjoining seemed to imply that they were gearing up for a more contentious political struggle.

While the PDC suffered internal divisions and the right solidified its collaboration, the left struggled with internal divisions of its own. In November 1967, the Socialist Party officially redefined itself as a Marxist-Leninist organization that aimed at the creation of a “revolutionary state.” This was a reflection of Frei’s failure to create reform and unite Chile. Not all in the party agreed, including Salvador Allende, who continued to promote an electoral strategy. As for the Communist Party, they sided with Allende’s faction of the PS, choosing to remain loyal to the electoral strategy that they adopted when they reentered politics in an official capacity in 1958. Earlier in 1967, divisions within the PDC also intensified and the rebeldes and terceristas swayed enough members to gain party control, thereafter pressuring Frei to pursue a “non-capitalist way of development.”

* Another probable motivation was that their shared stake in Congress had dropped from 45 seats to 10 seats in 1965, while the PDC’s rose from 59 to 82. Meanwhile, the radicals dropped from 39 to 20 and the Marxists rose from 28 to 30 seats.
Two major reforms resulted from this 1967 power shift within the PDC: the expropriation and redistribution of over 1,300 haciendas by the end of Frei’s administration in 1970; and the “Chilenization” of U.S. owned copper, by which the Chilean government obtained 51% of the two major companies. (See Appendix 10 for a more detailed description of these two reforms.) Despite these progressive reforms, Frei failed to pacify the working class. In fact, his plan to pay for the reforms incited a nation-wide strike.

President Frei’s plan was to withhold the 5% wage readjustment for public employees, an annual increase in their salaries meant to offset the effects of inflation. The workers would receive the promised increase in a 1-year bond called a chilibono and also give up the right to strike for the year. The CUT responded immediately with a call for a national strike, which resulted in the police killing four workers and a child.\(^{11}\) In the picture here, published by Unidad Proletaria in December 1967, two Carabineros uncover a “stiff and bloody” body so that a family member can identify it.\(^{12}\) The same newspaper claimed that seven, not four, workers died in the strike and wrote of the militarization of Santiago:

> The violence did not arrive in Santiago by the fault of the workers. The government did not hesitate to cordon off peripheral populations [callampas] by surrounding them with soldiers armed with artillery, tanks, helicopters, armored cars, rifles and bayonets. They converted Santiago into a giant camp of military operations.\(^{13}\)

This article demonstrated that the government was fully relying on the military to join with the Carabineros in the repression of the labor movement. The army was no longer a supplementary force, but fully integrated into the daily operations of maintaining
domestic order. This was mostly because violence had become so intense, and further increased the Carabineros’ trust in the military by building a stronger professional relationship. The article also demonstrated that one of the main goals of the government and of the armed forces was to quarantine the unruly lower class by surrounding certain sectors of the city.

This motivation to target the inhabitants of the *callampas* to subdue labor mobilization troubled many in Chile. The journalist Ramon Fernandez pointed out the hypocrisy of the Frei administration, which claimed to support the proletariat, by quoting the president’s campaign statement about worker mobilization, which had expressed sympathy for their plight:

> These people [residents of the *callampas*] live as we know they live. They suffer as we know they suffer. If we were in the same case as them, would we really be so moderate? What is the punishment for them? At their first action, the poor receive bullets.  

Clearly, Frei had gone back on his previous opinion that the government wrongfully oppressed the poor by now ordering the very same oppression he had condemned. Recall that he even supported the massacre at the El Salvador mine, blaming the very people that he defended during his campaign for the violence that occurred just a few years later. By 1967, Frei was fully employing the Carabineros to subdue political opposition when it took the form of popular mobilization, and he used the military alongside the Carabineros more than any president had before.

But the violence was by no means one sided. The newspaper *Unidad*, for example, glorified teachers on strike throwing rocks at police (pictured to the right). The caption under the photograph read, “Throughout the
country we have observed great combativeness in the national strike declared by all the workers. The teachers amply responded to the call." The teachers and other strikers in 1967, as well as the formation of openly revolutionary groups such as MIR and the Spartacus Group, mirrored the trend seen during the plasterers’ strike in 1941 wherein the Carabineros became more violent as the strike progressed, viewing the protesters as an enemigo interno. The workers responded to violence on the part of the Carabineros by becoming ever more militant, especially during the latter half of the 1960s. Take, for example, the “Song of the Teachers’ Struggle,” written in 1968 by Angel Guardia Espinoza, the vice-principal of a Santiago school:

> The illusion of police strength can do nothing to greatly injure the teacher. Neither the jet-streams of water [from hoses] nor the tear gas bombs manage to calm his energy or shatter his idea, and after every demonstration in the street, each treacherous blow at the student or the teacher strengthens the movement and our conviction for which he will fight with more vehemence.\(^\text{17}\)

The song’s rhetoric was a clear response to the abuses of the Carabineros and, although it does not mention them explicitly, the military as well since they, too, were very active in the repression. Moreover, we can extrapolate a militant attitude from the song’s insistence on responding to these abuses by fighting with “more vehemence.” This mentality reflects Neruda’s poem calling for action after the 1946 Plaza Bulnes Massacre.

The events of March 1968, which began a surge of militarization from the left that soared to new heights, reflected the rhetoric of the “Song of the Teachers’ Struggle.” In that month, some of the more extreme protesters launched a wave of urban terrorism that

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\(^1\) The Spanish name, Canto de la lucha del Magisterio, could also be translated to the Song of the Teachers’ Fight. I translated “lucha” to “struggle” because this translation carries the weight of the whole social movement better than “fight,” but lucha really holds a more combative sentiment than “struggle” would typically imply.
included bomb attacks on the American consulate, supermarkets, and the home of a National Party senator. There was also a bomb attack on the tomb of Arturo Alessandri in August 1969 and the MIR attempted several aircraft hijackings during this period, one of which was successful. If the urban terrorism wasn’t enough, the Carabineros also discovered MIR-operated “guerilla schools” used to train militants in the countryside near Santiago and the Argentine border in 1969 and 1970.18

The Carabineros and the military did not abstain from violence either. In May 1968, Denuncia Popular reported that, “by government order,” the police injured several 15 and 16 year-olds in “indiscriminate beatings.” The author of the article went on to say that “This government and the pueblo” are irreconcilable enemies.”19

Meanwhile, the left’s press continued to paint the Carabineros as the enemy of the working class, accusing them of “brutal oppression” as the headline above the picture above reads.20 While the abuses of the police continued during the 1960s, their use of force was more often understandable given the militant evolution of the protesters.

Still, there were still instances when the police and military met thrown rocks with gunfire and tear gas, an unequal use of force that was inherently abusive. One such instance occurred in March 1969 when the Carabineros attempted to evict squatters from a callampa near the southern city of Puerto Montt. On this occasion, the minister of the interior, Edmundo Pérez Zujovic, gave instructions for the police to be “tough,” which

*Pueblo translates to town, nation or people, but most often refers to common-folk and marginalized groups in society, i.e., the working class, instead of an entire nation, a wealthy town or a city. When used in a context relating to Santiago, the pueblo can be translated into the callampas or the people who live in them.
translated into opening fire on the squatters when they began throwing rocks, resulting in eight dead and twenty-six wounded,\textsuperscript{21} although some accounts estimate that more than fifty protesters were wounded.\textsuperscript{22} It is hard to say if Pérez intended his instructions to lead to a massacre, although the famous Chilean folk musician Víctor Jara’ named him as the guilty party in his song \textit{Preguntas por Puerto Montt}.\textsuperscript{23} Several members of the PDC also blamed Pérez for the incident, leading to the official split of the party and the creation of the Unitary People’s Action Movement (MAPU) out of the PDC’s leftist faction.

This split was not the only movement among the political parties in 1969. In October, the PS, PC, Radicals, several fringe parties and the newly formed MAPU joined together in the Popular Unity coalition (UP). Their candidate for the coming 1970 presidential elections was an easy enough choice: although he had lost three times before, they nominated the charismatic Salvador Allende. The right put up the ex-president Jorge Alessandri and the PDC nominated the long-time ambassador to the United States, Radomiro Tomic. Using the 1969 Congress as a barometer for support for each candidate, the right was surely fearful that 1970 would see the first Marxist Chilean president: The PDC had 29.1\% of the seats, the PN had 21.3\% and the UP parties constituted 38.6\%.\textsuperscript{24}

This prospect obviously worried the country’s leading capitalists, as well as the U.S., which had been intruding into Chilean politics for some time now – their monetary support for Frei in the 1964 elections, for example. Towards the end of 1969, three generals from the Pentagon dined with five Chilean military officers in Washington. When one of the Pentagon official asked what the army would do if Allende won the coming election, Chilean General Toro Mazote replied, “We’ll take Moneda Palace in

\textsuperscript{1} Víctor Jara, a communist, would go on to write more protest songs against oppression. Only four days after the 1973 coup, the military dictatorship executed him, making one of the most famous martyrs of the Pinochet years.
half an hour, even if we have to burn it down.” The United States was quite keen on this response and during their subsequent meetings these officials devised plans for a coup should Allende win the election. Henry Kissinger, President Richard Nixon’s National Security Advisor, reportedly commented, “I don’t see why we need to stand by and watch a country try to go communist due to the irresponsibility of its own people.” It is ironic that the United States claimed to be a model for democracy while simultaneously planning to violently interfere with Chile’s democratic process. Indeed, the United States was markedly pro-coup when it came to the election of Salvador Allende.

Coup conspirators were active within Chile as well. On October 21, 1969, for example, General Roberto Viaux took over command of the Tacna Regiment, Santiago’s army base, and made an open threat to overthrow the government. In a demonstration of national unity, a rarity for this time period, almost every political party rallied to support Frei. The CUT ordered the workers to mobilize in defense and the local garbage truck drivers even used their trucks to join the Carabineros in creating barricades to protect the Moneda. Even though the PS tried to use the opportunity to seize power, ordering workers “not to defend the bourgeois institutional structure but to mobilize in support of their own social and political demands,” the other parties’ mobilization proved sufficient and won over most of the armed forces and the attack never arrived. Once again, divisions of allegiance to the golpistas, those who wanted a coup, within the military prevented widespread insurrection. As with the August 1939 Ariostazo, the first sign of trouble dissuaded any potential participants who were unsure about joining the uprising. The allegiance of the Carabineros to the government as well as popular mobilization surely caused divisions within the military to deter the coup from gaining ground.
Viaux’s coup, which came to be known as the Tacnazo, got the presidential race started on unstable terms, even relative to the chaos that typically surrounded Chilean presidential elections. Indeed, many people wondered if Allende would even make it into office without having to take up arms if elected in September. This concern was so great that the commander-in-chief of the army and staunch constitutionalist, General René Schneider, declared the following in May 1970:

The Army is the guarantor of a normal election and that the Presidency of the Republic will be assumed by the one who is elected by the people through an absolute majority, or by the Congress as a whole in case none of the candidates obtains more than 50 percent of the vote.\(^\text{29}\)

This declaration, which later became known as the Schneider Doctrine, sought to reiterate the professionalism of Chile’s armed forces in the wake of the Tacnazo and rumblings about the approaching election. Some politicians condemned the doctrine because they believed that Schneider’s statements implied that the patriotism of the military was in question. These doubts of the military’s patriotism were, however, merited as conspirators made contingency plans and the United States prepared for the worst – for them, the election of Allende.

Declassified CIA documents reveal that, for the 1970 campaign, the agency spent “from $800,000 to $1,000,000” on a “large-scale propaganda campaign…similar to that of 1964….”\(^\text{30}\) in order to create opposition to Allende. There was a lot at stake for the U.S. in this election: the loss of copper revenues to nationalization, millions of campaign dollars gone to waste if Allende won, and the loss of another country to Marxism. Cuba was long gone, the Peruvian military had overthrown its government in 1968 and installed a very anti-American regime, and the number of Marxist revolutionaries was growing in both Argentina and Uruguay. Allende also received some outside funding, approximately $300,000 from Cuba and an equal or greater amount from Russia.\(^\text{31}\)
Ultimately, U.S. efforts to sway the election proved futile and Allende narrowly won with 36.6% of the vote, beating out Alessandri, who got 35.3%, and Tomic, with 28.1%. The first democratically elected Marxist president in the history of the world won by less than 40,000 votes, but since he did not win by an absolute majority, Congress still had to confirm the election.³²

Three days after the election General Schneider spoke out against those in the military who still believed intervention was necessary because Allende would dissolve the military’s powers. He reinforced the military’s neutrality in the election and stated that, as for the dissolution of the military, “danger does not actually exist.”³³ On September 10, El Mercurio, one of the most widely read Chilean newspapers that the U.S. flooded money into for propaganda purposes, insisted that the people mobilize against Allende.³⁴ On September 15, President Richard Nixon held a meeting with Kissinger, the U.S. Attorney General, John N. Mitchell, and the Director of Central Intelligence, Richard Helms. According to the Senate Intelligence Committee that compiled a report in 1975 on U.S. foreign involvement, Helms’ shorthand notes here accurately reflect Nixon’s instructions:

One in 10 chance perhaps, but save Chile!
worth spending
not concerned risks involved
no involvement of Embassy
$10,000,000 available, more if necessary
full time job-best men we have…
make the economy scream
48 hours for plan of action³⁵

Nixon was clearly concerned with the election results and willing to spend enormous amounts of money on a covert operation, which the U.S. Embassy in Santiago would not even know of, to upset Chile’s democratic process and prevent Allende from assuming power. The CIA even went so far as to dole out nearly forty thousand dollars to an openly
fascist and pro-Nazi party, Fatherland and Liberty, that a lawyer named Pablo Rodriguez had founded immediately after the election. This organization set off several bombs and spread propaganda against the U.P.

Meanwhile, Viaux was discussing a plan to takeover the inauguration with the commander of the Santiago garrison, the vice-commanders of the navy and air force, and General Vicente Huerta, the commander of the Carabineros. According to Viaux, they wanted the unity of all of Chile’s armed forces for the effort: “it should be the very Commanders-in-chief and the Director of the uniformed police…[that] join together in a coup d’etat.” Knowing that General Schneider was their biggest obstacle to gaining the support of the entire military, they unanimously agreed upon a plan to kidnap him. The fact that Viaux included the Carabineros director in these plans implies that he believed that he needed the loyalty of the national police for the coup to be successful, something he had learned from unsuccessful coups of the past. Furthermore, his strategy represented the evolution of the relationship between the Carabineros and the military wherein they had become more codependent and trusting of each other during the recent decades of collaborative fighting against the Marxists.

The conspirators aborted two attempts to kidnap Schneider on October 19 and October 20 because they wanted to make sure the situation was ideal before taking action. Then, on October 22, after a U.S. military envoy supplied the conspirators with three submachine guns, they surrounded Schneider’s car early in the morning. When Schneider began firing with his pistol, the kidnappers returned fire, wounding him severely. He died three days later in the hospital. The assassination rallied public support to the side of Allende and even the PDC told its congressmen to vote for him after he agreed to sign an
agreement not to violate Congress’ authority. The congressmen confirmed Allende’s presidency in a vote of 153 to 35.39

The 1960s was a crucial decade in the evolution of the Carabineros and their identity because Eduardo Frei failed to unite Chile and pacify the working class with his reforms. This failure signified, for many Chileans, that compromise could not be found between the left and right, and thus the Carabineros would have to eventually pick a side in this struggle. The evolution of this institution had thus far shown that their disposition most certainly aligned with the right, even if they claimed to be apolitical. General Huerta demonstrated this when he sided with Viaux in an attempt to stop Allende’s ascension to power. Still, the Carabineros showed immense institutional loyalty above all else, and a cornerstone of their institution was allegiance to the democratically elected president and the protection of his government. In fact, their constant abuse of the working class was a reflection of this characteristic loyalty since every president had ordered them to carry out said abuses. Allende hoped that this characteristic would outweigh the anti-Marxist nature of the Carabineros.
VII. Popular Unity Government

Among Allende’s first acts as president was to name new commanders of the armed forces, including the Carabineros, an action taken by most new presidents in their first days in office, especially after a change in party control. It is unlikely that Allende knew who the conspirators in the Schneider assassination were (or he would have pursued prosecution), but he surely knew of other conspirators within the ranks of the armed forces. Allende replaced Huerta as director of the Carabineros with José Maria Sepúlveda; he also replaced the heads of the army, navy and air force.1 Another of Allende’s very early acts was his order to dissolve the Grupo Móvil – the Carabineros special forces unit that President Alessandri created in 1936 to fight protesters specifically – and its outfit of small tanks, water cannons, and light artillery.2 This action amounted to more of a symbolic condemnation of brutality against protesters than anything else.

The question remains, why did Allende not do more to purge the ranks of the armed forces of conspirators and remove power from the Carabineros, a force that had almost exclusively fought his supporters for the past forty years? For one thing, discounting hindsight, it is important to realize that it was not easy to identify who exactly wanted to overthrow Allende, and who merely disagreed with his policies. As for the Carabineros specifically, Marc Cooper, the American who worked as a translator for President Allende, described his view on the president’s trust of the national police in his 2001 memoir:

> There was also a calculation based on social class in this political gamble. The left was banking on the modest economic background of most of the police…The carabineros were generally from workers’ families and often lived in substandard housing in squatters’ villages [callampas] – areas almost unanimously sympathetic to the Socialists and Communists.3
Indeed, the Carabineros widely came from lower-class backgrounds, and they always had. In 1974, one author looked back on Allende’s decision, commenting, “Allende felt more secure among the Carabineros, an armed force that was popular and peasant in its origins….“ For Allende, it seemed logical to trust the individual Carabineros’ personal allegiance to their class rather than their allegiance to a tradition of fighting the lower class. If the history of Chile’s national police demonstrated anything, however, it is that they overwhelmingly allied with their institutional identity, which had evolved to become anti-worker, rather than their personal origins, which one would have expected to be pro-worker. This is far more obvious when looking back at the broad scope of their evolution. The modest backgrounds of most of the Carabineros did not stop them from allying with Ibáñez despite popular mobilization in 1931, allying with the military against left-wing protesters in Santiago in April 1957, or firing on squatters in Puerto Montt in 1969. Indeed, instances such as these proved time and time again that the Carabineros’ loyalty to popular, working-class sentiments was basically nonexistent.

Standing in front of the Moneda in 1971, Marc Cooper’s Chilean friend commented on the Carabineros who guarded the palace, “I just don’t trust these assholes.” This simple sentiment summed up the issue of the national police: although many factors made them a seemingly worthy body to protect the Popular Unity government, their history and identity as an anti-Marxist and oppressive force made them impossible to fully trust. Moreover, it is possible that Allende even shared this mistrust. But any conspirators within the military were certainly as unsure about the Carabineros’ loyalty as Allende, given their original purpose of protecting the government, so these national police could still stand as a deterrent to a possible coup.
Regardless, President Allende really had no choice but to trust the Carabineros given his strict allegiance to constitutional legality and a peaceful socialist revolution. That is, he could not eliminate the Carabineros because he lacked the legal grounds to do so, and he needed some armed force to protect his peaceful revolution should some force, military or civilian, attempt a violent overthrow. He could not arm the working class because that would surely cause a violent proletarian uprising and contradict a peaceful revolution. Allende also needed the Carabineros in order to act against the most extreme Marxist parties that wanted to produce such an uprising against even his socialist government. Thus, the success of Allende’s legal and nonviolent installation of socialism ironically hinged on the loyalty of an armed institution that had spent its entire existence oppressing the promoters of his basic ideals. And as it turns out, President Allende found the need to use the Carabineros, and even the military, a handful of times during the first year of his presidency. Allende largely used the armed forces to combat militant groups from the right, although he occasionally used them against the unruly left as well.

From his first days, Allende’s economic policies further alienated him from the right and the United States. In December 1970, a mere month into his administration, he began plans to nationalize copper.⁶ U.S. companies collected over $120 million dollars annually and many believed that Frei’s “Chileanization” of copper was insufficient. In July 1971, Allende passed amendment through Congress that allowed him to nationalize all Chilean copper without paying the U.S. companies a single dollar.⁷ Allende also nationalized many parts of the industrial sector, not even needing Congress’ approval

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⁶ As written into the amendment, the president maintained the sole power of determining the “excess profits” that U.S. copper companies enjoyed. Allende defined excessive profits to be anything greater than 12% of the companies’ book value earned after 1955, the year when Ibáñez renegotiated copper taxation. This meant that the Kennecott and Anaconda copper companies collected $770 million in excess profits and, since this exceeded the $333 million that the Chilean government owed for expropriation (based on book value), Allende declared that the two companies owed Chile the difference. Of course, these companies refused but had no legal channels to fight the expropriation.
because he used a loophole in the form of a long-forgotten law that the short-lived 1932 Socialist Republic had created allowing the expropriation of factories that failed to operate efficiently. Allende nationalized 47 industrial firms in his first year. By late 1973, Allende’s UP government controlled 80% of Chilean industrial output, over 400 total enterprises.

Agrarian reform was also well under way and Allende’s agricultural minister, Jacques Chonchol, promised to expropriate all farms greater in size than eighty hectares. It would have taken two years to complete this expropriation, too long a process for the peasantry, which began seizing land by force. These peasants were becoming increasingly well organized under the direction of the MIR, and land grabbing quickly spiraled out of Allende’s control. Nevertheless, the president did not want to lose the allegiance of the peasantry, so he had to legalize the land seizures after the fact. Many on the right saw this as an abuse of executive power.

Allende’s political opposition, both within Congress and in the street, was outspoken about their indignation toward his policies. Just six months after the establishment of the UP government, a right wing newspaper declared that Allende’s government had already abused its power in “inadmissible ways.” The author went on to say that the “laws, decrees, regulations and moreover the judicial means that have been used, with crooked purposes, are meant to create a communist utopia after this tyrannical socialist phase.” In June 1971, the right’s view of Allende’s government as corrupt became further entrenched when several men whom the president had pardoned during his initial days in office assassinated Edmundo Pérez Zujovic. Zujovic was the minister of the interior under Frei, and many believed that he was responsible for ordering many of the abuses against the working class, particularly the killing of eight people in Puerto
Montt in 1969. Allende quickly disarmed and dismantled the assailants’ party, the Organized Vanguard of the People, but he refused to subdue the MIR in anyway as many in Congress demanded.\textsuperscript{11}

Allende also met resistance to his government from parts of the left who viewed his actions as too moderate. In 1971, the frequency of strikes increased by 50\% and the illegal seizure of land and factories motivated by the extreme left tripled.\textsuperscript{12} Allende tried to slow this radicalization of the left by proposing a law to impose mild criminal punishment on ringleaders of these takeovers when property damage occurred. Congress rejected the law, not because they considered it too aggressive, but because they hoped to make the president either use force to stop the occupations or allow them. The president chose the latter.

Extreme groups from the right often expressed their resistance to Allende’s policies with violence. In the first months of the Allende administration, in fact, one newspaper reported that the police found twenty-one distinct locations that right-wing guerillas were using as safe houses, armed with explosives made of dynamite. These safe houses mostly belonged to members of the National Vanguard Liberator (VNL), a militant rightist group similar to the MIR.\textsuperscript{13} Then, in December 1971 the mobilizing right began their most overt protest against the UP government. It was the second to last day of Fidel Castro’s twenty-three day visit to Chile on invitation from Allende. On December 1, a terrorist bomb planted by militant rightists knocked out Santiago’s electrical grid and blacked out the city for several hours.\textsuperscript{14}

The next morning, five thousand women from the highest tiers of Chilean society staged the infamous March of the Empty Pots, protesting food shortages. They passed out
leaflets stating, “The Marxists cut off the food from the democratic areas of Chile.” Marc Cooper recalled the incident in his memoir of the Allende years:

Some five thousand of Chile’s wealthiest women, bedecked in jewels, some in party dresses, others accompanied by their maids and servants, and all banging loudly on pots and pans….What a theater of the absurd! Here were the best-fed, best-clothed, fattest, and wealthiest peoples in Chile, many of whom controlled and owned the still private-sector food distribution system from top to bottom, claiming hunger. 

Based on Cooper’s description, there was a clear division of opinion about the situation in Chile and who was suffering as upper-class citizens felt that redistribution unfairly diminished their standard of living. Cooper’s take on this famous march deserves merit as these women surely suffered little compared with the residents of the callampas. Still, many middle- and upper-class Chileans shared their opinion.

Cooper continued that this “asinine spectacle” would have caused little fuss if not for several hundred “helmeted youth stock brigades” from the PDC and NP. Upon arriving at the city center, they barricaded streets, broke windows, fought unionized workers, attacked the Communist Youth headquarters with Molotov cocktails, and attempted to burn down the U.N. building. As the fighting continued into the next day, Allende declared a state of emergency and passed control of the Carabineros to the army under Augusto Pinochet, an eerie decision given hindsight of the events that took place two years later. When the police restored order, they had arrested over one hundred people and had injured over one hundred and fifty.

1972 followed a similar pattern, with seizures of factories and farms continuing along with breakouts of violence between militants from both sides of the political

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* During a conversation with my host family in Chile, my “Chilean aunt” recalled that, during the Allende years, “There was no food to eat. We could not even find bread.” Her propensity for exaggeration and very strong bias against leftist parties must be taken into account, but her statements still reveal a prevailing reactionary opinion from this era.
spectrum. Workers formed *cordones industriales*, “industrial belts” that were areas of occupied factories controlled by the proletariat. When the government did not quickly meet their demands to expropriate the factories, they blocked roads and occupied other buildings until Allende conceded to them in lieu of mobilizing the police against them.\(^{17}\) The Carabineros probably felt misplaced under Allende, watching the national government bend to the will of the workers that the police were so used to oppressing.

The few times that the Carabineros did intervene, the press of the extreme left attacked Allende. Such was the case in July 1972 when a Carabinero shot a resident of a *callampa* during a violent encounter and MIR newspapers labeled Allende a murderer.\(^{18}\) These factory occupations greatly impeded industrial production, and as world copper prices fell Chile’s foreign reserves followed, putting huge strains on their import capacity. Allende had to choose whether to buy raw materials and machinery parts to aid industry or buy consumer goods. Opting for the latter exacerbated Chile’s inability to produce domestically, and as a result the nation’s trade deficit rose from $18 million in 1971 to $255 million in 1972.\(^{19}\)

This growing economic crisis worsened the living conditions for all people and the situation actually came closer each day to realizing the image that the women of the March of Empty Pots painted in December 1971. Indeed, black market food sales developed and Allende imposed administrative controls over the distribution of many foodstuffs, an action that the right labeled as the first steps toward rationing.\(^{20}\) As early as March 1972, newspapers promoted the need for military intervention: “…if the Armed Forces think it necessary to intervene in politics in the future, never should they depart from their invariable role: to accept, in critical moments, their role as the great tool of popular aspirations.”\(^{21}\) The same newspaper later defended the notion of an *enemigo*
interno, writing that when the armed forces fight a foreign enemy, “they defend the life of the state. The fight against an internal enemy that tries to demolish the legal organization is the same thing and has the same valor.”

This newspaper justified the military’s open fight against internal enemies and, in this paper’s opinion, the nation’s greatest enemy was Marxism.

If the military was not prepared to stop Allende’s socialist transition and quell the working class and peasantry, however, anti-Marxist citizens were still prepared to mobilize on their own. In October 1972 several thousand truck owners went on strike and caused the most devastating losses for the Allende administration – some estimate that the Moneda had to spend upwards of $300 million during the strike to keep the country running. The truckers were some of the most affected by the trade imbalance since they imported most of their parts and the owners of the companies mostly fell on the political right. There are claims that the CIA supported the strike with U.S. capital and encouraged it to continue in order to worsen the economic situation in Chile to the point of a coup.

The strike eventually spread to other economic sectors and across the entire country, totaling 600,000 to 700,000 workers at its peak. The left seized the opportunity as well, occupying more factories, many of which remained permanently in their hands thereafter. Capitalizing on the chaos, the right in Congress also pushed through the Ley de Control de Armas that same month, October, allowing the Carabineros and military to search for and confiscate firearms in the cordones industriales.

Allende relied heavily on the military and the Carabineros to negotiate an end to this strike in particular, and made an unexpected move in an attempt to strengthen the various armed forces’ allegiance to the UP. He temporarily altered his cabinet to open high-ranking positions in it for members of the army, navy, and air force and even made
General Carlos Prats, commander-in-chief of the army, his minister of the interior. This dual position made Prats the most powerful minister in Chile in the 20th century, which paid off when he successfully negotiated an end to the strike in November 1972. The inclusion of these military men in the Allende administration should not be seen as closing the ideological gap between Allende and much of the military’s officer corps that remained inclined toward an uprising. The men that Allende appointed to his cabinet were all well-established constitutionalists and bringing them into the cabinet was the president’s strategy for appeasing the rest of the military. Still, the president’s decision to bring them into his administration meant that Allende did not feel entirely secure in his post; it reflected something of a “keep your friends close, keep your enemies closer” mentality.

Allende’s strategy worked and all of three of the military men stepped down from their cabinet posts in accordance with the original arrangement shortly after the March 1973 congressional elections. The UP won 44% in the elections while the right gained a majority of 55%, but not the 2/3 majority they required to overrule vetoes and potentially impeach the Allende, so the UP considered the election a success. Supposedly, it was such a surprising victory given the recent political turmoil that Allende closed the door to his office and danced a cueca all to himself. The celebration was perhaps premature, however, as the right became more radicalized now that their options for stopping Allende’s progress had diminished.

Much of the right’s radicalization occurred within the ranks of the military, often fueled by the public insults they routinely endured. Even General Prats, acclaimed for his constitutionalism, famously forced a woman who stuck her tongue out at him off the road.

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1 This is a traditional dance popular in Chile, Argentina and Bolivia. It officially became Chile’s national dance in 1979.
in June 1973. Two days later, on June 29, a group of tanks surrounded La Moneda in open insurrection. General Prats led the Carabineros guard in defending the palace and personally went from tank to tank with a machine gun ordering the rebels to surrender. The attempted coup ended before it could really begin. Once again, divisions in leadership and the loyalty of some of the armed forces to Allende ended an attempted coup before it could gain momentum. Nevertheless, the incident shocked the many Chileans who believed that such an attempt would not occur. Many saw the incident as a turning point after which one of the extreme ends of the political spectrum had to take power and crush the other by force. The leftist intellectual journal, Punto Final, published an article stating, “For Chile, the cards are on the table. It will either be socialism or fascism – nothing in between.” This statement was reminiscent of the growing polarization between the left and right throughout the 1950s and 1960s, now coming to a culmination in which the Carabineros would be forced to choose a side.

The golpista generals, those inclined toward a golpe or coup, learned several important lessons from the June events that the scholar Cristobal Kay pointed out in his 1975 essay about the September 1973 coup. First, the golpista leaders would have to unite the three branches of the military and the Carabineros in order to be successful – they could not leave it up to chance which side officers and the rank and file would take on the day of the uprising. Kay notes that the Carabineros, in particular, “had to be won over, or at least neutralized” because of their “parliamentary strength.” What Kay referred to here is the Carabineros’ strong connection to Chile’s governing body, a characteristic that gave their actions unique legitimacy since elected officials, rather than appointed generals, gave them orders. Thus, if the Carabineros joined the coup, the
*golpistas* could more easily justify a coup and claim that the armed forces were fulfilling their patriotic duty against a tyrant.

Divisions within the officer corps and civil unrest became more intense after the failed coup in June as well. In July, about 10,000 leftists met in an arena in downtown Santiago on the pretext of celebrating the anniversary of the Cuban Revolution. Marc Cooper was present, and he later recalled the divisions within the ranks of the left, some calling for “Political Consciousness! And Rifles!” while, others chanted back, “Ultra-leftism Betrays Socialism,” until the “stirring blood-ecstasy that had inflated the auditorium popped.” Fighting broke out until the Communists walked out of the stadium and the meeting came to a close. After the meeting, Cooper’s friend sadly commented, “You know, we are so close – or rather we were so close. So close, but we aren’t going to make it. It’s all over brother.” Indeed, with the left sharply divided, it seemed impossible that they could stand firm against the *golpistas* within the military who were already preparing for the September coup. More and more each day it became apparent that *Punto Final* had been correct in saying that “the cards are on the table” and that it was just a matter of time before a full swing to either socialism or military rule would occur.

The coup conspirators moved quickly between the failed June attempt and the September 11 coup. Using the October 1972 Arms Control Act, the Carabineros and military began searches in the *cordones industriales* and other Marxist strongholds within a week of the failed coup. Then, a second truckers’ strike began in July, the same month as the leftist rally at the arena, but was coupled this time with terrorist acts incited by the right-wing Fatherland and Liberty party. They blew up bridges, railway lines, and oil pipelines and attacked the homes of UP leaders. The strike along with the terrorist actions
constituted a well-coordinated attack specifically aimed at delegitimizing the UP government. Many members of the right, both leaders of the strikes and congressmen, began demanding Allende’s impeachment since he could not establish order.\textsuperscript{36}

Then, at the beginning of August the military began an internal purge of those who were loyal to the government, mostly low ranking officers. In Valparaíso and Talcahuano, for example, conspirators arrested and tortured twenty navy men who they accused of inciting a mutiny.\textsuperscript{37} The success of purges such as these represented the virtual helplessness of the government against the autonomous ruling structure within the military. The most decisive blow to the strength of the anti-golpistas within the military occurred in the same month when Allende created a second military cabinet as part of his attempt to end the new truckers’ strike in July. A week later, tensions over the power granted to the new cabinet members led to the resignation of the air force commander, General Ruiz, from the cabinet, to which Allende responded by stripping him of his title as commander-in-chief of the air force.\textsuperscript{38} Delegations of generals from the army and navy pressured their own commanders within the cabinet to join in resigning from both titles, and during the last week in August both General Prats and Admiral Montero agreed.\textsuperscript{39} As it turns out, the replacements for these confirmed anti-golpista military leaders were three of the four members of the military junta that overthrew Allende just a few weeks later. The only commander that had not been purged was General Sepúlveda, the commander of the Carabineros.

Surely, it is telling that the golpistas could not preemptively purge the Carabineros commander, but instead had to use General Mendoza, the Carabineros’ future representative in the post-Allende junta, to covertly persuade lower officers to join the coup over the next several weeks. Mendoza only declared himself the head of the
Carabineros once the coup was underway on the 11th. In fact, the conspirators had to go six places down the chain of command before arriving at Mendoza, a senior officer whom they believed would prove sympathetic to the coup. With the country in worse disarray from the strikes and terrorist actions, it was simple enough to persuade the military men that insurrection was necessary. As the scholar Alan Angell wrote in 1974, “No military force could have stood by and watched while civil disorder grew and while its own officer corps suffered internal divisions over whether to help the government or not.”

So why could the golpistas not push Mendoza into office earlier and why did they have to go six places down to find an officer who would join their plan? Was the historic institutional loyalty within the Carabineros, intrinsically linked to a sense of loyalty to the executive, strong enough not to break under this pressure? And if this was the case, then why did this loyalty and strength not hold up on the day of the coup when they joined with Mendoza, a man who only that day had declared himself the leader of the Carabineros in the midst of an armed insurrection? The Carabineros had always followed the orders of the executive, and even did so in part during the Allende administration by fighting right-wing extremists, the National Vanguard Liberator group in particular. Nevertheless, the institution of the Carabineros had changed fundamentally, such that these national police had evolved into an incontrovertibly anti-Marxist organization. Looking at the broad scope of their existence with hindsight, this is apparent, but Allende and the golpista leaders could not be so sure; it would take an incident such as the September 1973 coup, when the Carabineros had to choose a side, to expose this fundamentally rightist identity.
VIII. A Post Abandoned

When Salvador Allende woke up on September 11, 1973, to a phone call informing him that a coup was under way, General Mendoza and the rest of the junta commanders had already convinced enough of the Carabineros’ officer corps to join them so that the national police would not provide defense for the government. The three hundred or so Carabineros that walked off of the palace grounds and joined the besiegers at about 9:00 am confirmed this. The reason that they abandoned their post was simple: they had watched feuding between the left and right polarize the Chilean people to the point of absolute chaos and, because of their forty-six year deployment against the working class, they joined the military in blaming the Marxists for this. By examining the scope of the Carabineros’ institutional evolution, this reasoning is apparent.

Carlos Ibáñez founded the Carabineros in 1927 in the midst of a similar chaos, but the turmoil of the 1920s was the result of military adventurism more than popular mobilization. When Chile returned to legitimate democracy with the election of Arturo Alessandri in 1932, the threat of this military adventurism more or less subsided, and the chaos followed suit. This brand new national police force, a mere five years old, had not developed an established identity at this point of drastic political change. Thus, their fundamental identity and institutional ideology was malleable and uniquely receptive to the influence of their environment.

If the history of the Carabineros during the 20th century reveals anything, however, it is that these largely working-class police were never receptive to the influence of popular movements, even if the roots of those movements had the interests of their own class at heart. The Carabineros demonstrated this as early as 1931 during the protest that included engineers, doctors, professors, students and public workers – a range of
professions that spanned all social classes. Recall President Ibáñez’s secretary, who commented that the Carabineros remained fiercely loyal to the president during this strike, “desperate and unassimilated to the popular movement.” This disconnect seems illogical because, as Marc Cooper pointed out, they “were generally from workers’ families and often lived in substandard housing in squatters’ villages [callampas] – areas almost unanimously sympathetic to the Socialists and Communists.” Why did the Carabineros not find common ground with their own neighbors?

The reason that the Carabineros did not sympathize with leftist politics is that they did not actively associate with any politics. Their internal laws, not being allowed to vote, for example, made it such that they were not politically minded – they did not seek to learn about political ideologies or entertain political discourse. Rather than developing a political allegiance, the Carabineros developed an institutional allegiance. Because of this, their political inclinations formed more subconsciously than their working-class counterparts, by way of the orders they received through their institution. These orders were, for forty-six years, almost exclusively aimed at oppressing the working class in an effort to fight Marxism.

As early as the massacre of over one hundred peasants during the 1934 Ranquil Rebellion, this influence over the Carabineros pushed them toward anti-Marxist sentiment. More overtly political orders occurred as well in the earliest years of the Carabineros’ development, including the illegal raid on the newspaper Topaze in 1938 by order of President Alessandri. Although the Carabineros were merely following orders, the identity of the institution and the individual police officers moved further right with each violent encounter.
The 1941 plasterers’ strike demonstrated a microcosm of this evolution of the Carabineros’ identity. The collective articles published in Nuevo Andamio during the strike highlighted the evolving anti-worker bias of the national police when they changed from blaming the government for the actions of the Carabineros to writing, “it is clear that the police are acting on their own without authority.” It did not take long for this trend to reveal itself as an institutionalized evolution as workers became more militant in the 1950s and the police, now aided by the military, responded with a heavier hand. During the 1957 Santiago protests, which degenerated into outright rioting, El Siglo reported on the “fascist character of [the Carabineros] actions” that resulted in more than twenty deaths.

At the same time, the evolution of party politics shows us that a mentality of left vs. right, in which every person and institution had to pick a side, was developing. The consolidation of the Popular Front in 1936 against Alessandri was an early indicator of this, followed later by the 1946 Popular Action Front (FRAP), and eventually the Unidad Popular (UP) in 1969. On the right, too, the Democratic Front in 1961 and the official combining of the Liberal and Conservative Parties into the National Party in 1966 showed that all parties were drawing a proverbial line in the sand. The eventual failure of Frei and the PDC to mediate this trend and unite Chile, made the chaos of the late 1960s and early 1970s inevitable.

A big reason for this was the reflection of polarized party politics in militarized citizens. The Spartacus Group and MIR often fought with nacistas and the anti-communist ACHA, but the Carabineros continued to target the left more so than the right. The national police, now working ever more frequently in conjunction with the military, killed five protesters in the José María Caro callampa in November 1962, eight more at
the El Salvador mine in March 1966, four during a national strike in December 1967 and another eight in Puerto Montt in March 1969.

Furthermore, frequent collaboration with the military greatly altered the identity of the Carabineros institution as well. The Carabineros became familiar with military operations, surely developed a stronger institutional relationship – meaning that the two institutions shared common characteristics in their identities – and came to rely on them for assisting in restoring order. Recall that Unidad Proletaria wrote in 1967 that the government sectioned off the Santiago callampas with “soldiers armed with artillery, tanks, helicopters, armored cars, rifles and bayonets.” Surely the relationship between the Carabineros and the military was far stronger during and after such instances when they worked together. Indeed, the Carabineros and the military increasingly shared common goals, as high-ranking officers collaborated in oppressing the protests and most importantly, they came to believe that they had a common enemigo interno, the mobilized workers, perceived as exclusively Marxist.

The Carabineros were likely unaware of the implications of their actions on their individual ideologies and their institutional identity. Nevertheless, being separated from political influence outside of their institution, and without a clearly defined identity after Chile’s return to democratic politics in 1932, the orders they carried out drove their evolution. The Latin American scholar Danny Gonzalo wrote in his essay about the Carabineros:

On occasion, the participation of the carabineros has widely been understood as a body of uniformed police; other times, the active action of a part of the police hierarchy in political processes; and, moreover, there have entirely been times when they have been pushed from their role in the public order to take an active part in situations of relevant national politics (my emphasis.)

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Gonzalo pointed out the multiple roles that the Carabineros played, ranging from those of a traditional police force, to acting within politics, to being “pushed from their role…to take an active part in situations of relevant national politics.” The fact that the Carabineros were essentially a political tool molded their identity so that they became an inherently political institution, even when not ordered to be. This evolution caused them to act autonomously on September 11, 1973, without orders from the executive, and join the coup against Allende. Thereafter the Carabineros officially became, and remained, the fourth branch of the military, and actively participated in the imprisonment, torture, and execution of Marxists during the Pinochet dictatorship (1973-1990). Many see the Carabineros’ role in the 1973 coup and the subsequent dictatorship as a transition in the identity of the Carabineros, but this is inaccurate. The 1973 coup did not mark a transition in the identity of the Carabineros, but revealed that their institution had already evolved into fundamentally anti-Marxist organization over the course of the preceding forty-six years.
Los desaparecidos, the disappeared: this is a term that still stings the ears of many Chileans today. It refers specifically to over one thousand Chileans who disappeared during the Pinchoet dictatorship (1973-1990), and whose fate is still unknown, but it is also a term closely associated with the other victims of the military regime. For any scholarly work to examine Chile during the 20th century and not discuss these victims is a shameful disregard for the national suffering that the seventeen-year dictatorship caused; this is the type of disregard that opens the door for these horrific events to repeat themselves, and it is the type of disregard that is very present in Chile today. According to the Rettig and Valech reports, conducted by the National Commission for Truth and Reconciliation and the National Commission for Political Imprisonment and Torture, the dictatorship was responsible for the execution of 2,197 people and the disappearance of 1,102 more. The agents of the dictatorship, many of whom were Carabineros under the management of the Dirección de Inteligencia Nacional (DINA), illegally detained and tortured at least 28,459 Chileans in over 1,156 detention centers across the country.¹

The DINA, responsible for carrying out the dictatorship’s state terror, conducted political genocide by systematically targeting Marxist-oriented parties. The imprisonment and execution of Chilean citizens began on the same day of the coup, and then the dictatorship began targeting different factions of the left in waves: the majority of the victims in 1974 were of the MIR and Spartacus Group, in 1975 they were mostly Socialists, and in 1975 they were mostly Communists. The detention centers themselves were located all over Chile, some of the most famous being the national stadium in Santiago, where tens of thousands of prisoners passed through, and Villa Grimaldi, a large estate located outside of Santiago that was the last known location of over two
hundred of the desaparecidos. Other detention centers were much smaller and more clandestine. The house known as Londres 38, for example, imprisoned and tortured over two thousand Chileans in 1975 and is located in a residential area less than a half mile from the Moneda in downtown Santiago.\(^2\) The Rettig report recalled the conditions of another of these detention centers, José Domingo Cañas 1367, a house on the outskirts of Santiago:

[The detainees] were kept in a relatively open common room…and in the place called the pit, el hoyo, which was something more like a storeroom, without windows or ventilation and approximately 2 x 1 meters in size, was where they came to keep more than 10 detainees at a time, in extreme conditions of overcrowding and without air.\(^3\)

These methods of torture through confinement were some of the most common, along with electrocution, beatings, and solitary confinement in extremely small spaces. The goal of these horrific events was to pacify the Marxist movement and labor militancy through state terror, and the Carabineros carried out much of the imprisonment, torture and executions. By eliminating the left, Pinochet opened the door for neoliberal economic reform, supported by the United States via the “Chicago Boys,” who studied under Milton Freidman at the University of Chicago.

Chile returned to democracy in 1990 by a popular vote, but the effects of the Pinochet dictatorship on Chilean politics and the national psyche remain irreversible. For the human rights violations under his dictatorship, Pinochet faced trial in Britain in 1998, and in Chile in 2004, but no judge ever passed sentencing due to his failing health. He died in 2006. The victims of the dictatorship and their families have received little in terms of reparations or recognition, but fight to remind the Chilean people about the suffering that occurred at the hands of Pinochet and the DINA. Still, even today human rights activists struggle to bring the victims of the dictatorship to the forefront of national
social and political discourse, as many Chileans prefer to live in a state of amnesia about these atrocities. There exists a widely accepted sentiment that it is better to move on and not talk about the sadness of the past. This refusal to recognize the atrocities of the past, however, keeps Chilean society from moving forward in the future. Politically, Chile remains under the rule of the constitution that Pinochet ratified in 1980, blocking economic and social reforms by locking most institutions within the private sector.

One such institution is education, one of the most contentious issues in Chile today. Students have been very active over the course of the past decade, calling for education reform that will bring higher quality and more affordable education to Chile’s youth. With regard to this activism, the Carabineros have not strayed from their abusive identity. During my four-month stay in Valparaíso and Santiago in 2013, I frequently witnessed peaceful student protests broken up by tear gas, small tanks, and brigades of Carabineros predisposed toward beating students rather than maintaining order. The modern age has made these abuses better known, particularly through the Internet, but Chile’s national police continue their oppressive tactics. Indeed, the fundamental identity of the Carabineros remains predisposed toward targeting popular movements of the left, now primarily students, continuing to view them as an internal enemy. Until the Carabineros’ institution itself recognizes this identity, these national police cannot be the objective mediators that they claim to be.
Appendices

1. **La Moneda during the bombing, September 11, 1973¹**

![La Moneda during the bombing, September 11, 1973](image)

2. **Varying Accounts of Allende’s Death**

   The military’s version of Allende’s death on the day of the coup contends that the president managed to duck out of the Moneda and into the nearby Independence Salon, where he placed a sub-machine gun between his knees and shot himself in the head.² According to one account, Allende said: “’I shall defend myself to the end, and the last bullet of this submachine gun I shall shoot here;’ and the president indicated his own jaw.”³

   Luis Renato González Córdoba, a seventeen-year old GAP member, disputed these tales of suicide. He gave a rather romanticized tale in which the *junta* forces shot Allende in his office and the president gave his dying words: “A leader may fall, but still there is a cause. America* will be free.”⁴ This story seems less reliable, especially since González’s earlier testimonies imply that he had left the Moneda shortly before Allende’s

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¹ Many South Americans despise the fact that the United States refers to itself as America and contend that America should only refer to the entirety of the two American continents.
Fidel Castro also gave a heroic tale in which Allende suffered a bullet wound in the stomach in his office, but continued to fire until the “fascists” finally killed him and riddled his body with bullets. One more compelling account from the Columbian Nobel Prize-winning novelist, Gabriel García Márquez, says that Allende managed to shoot General Javier Palacios in the hand while shouting “Traitor!” as the general entered the office. A gang of officers then shot Allende dead and then circled around him, firing into his corpse until a noncommissioned officer smashed his face with the butt of his rifle.

It is hard to determine which tale is true because they are all based on circumstantial evidence and each storyteller has obvious motives. On the one hand, the military wished to show a degree of mercy and humanity, while simultaneously making Allende appear to be a coward. The stories of Allende’s heroic fight to the death, on the other hand, aimed to make a martyr of the deceased president and dehumanize the junta, who supposedly riddled his dead corpse with bullets. Suicide certainly does not fit Allende’s character, as a man who remained at his post in a burning building, surrounded by tanks, almost entirely abandoned by the forces that swore to protect him.

Despite the uncertainty about the precise circumstances of his death, clearly Allende was true to his cause until his bloody end, having justified his position by the democratic process that brought him to power, a process that he deeply believed would protect him.

3. **Map of South-American Pacific Coast, War of the Pacific (1879-1883)**

The black outline defines the Chilean border after the War of the Pacific ended in 1833. Chile’s previous territory is green, Bolivia’s is yellow, and Peru’s is orange. The port of Arica can be seen in the northwest corner of Chile’s new border, and Antofagasta just north of Chile’s old border, both highlighted yellow. Most of the nitrate and copper mines that led heavy foreign influence in Chile are located in these regions acquired in 1833.

4. **Major Chilean political parties, 1830-1970.**

5. Popular Front
It is important to note, that the Popular Front coalition did not represent a complete sacrifice of ideology by the four parties involved. In October 1936, the newspaper *La Estrella* published an article, “Neither Nazi or Communist,” alluding to the involved parties’ centrisism despite being aligned with the communists. According to the article,

The fact that the Radical Party...has decided to collaborate within the Popular Front with communist elements, does not indicate, by any means, that the party has embraced or accepted the ideas of this collective. More to the point, radicalism cannot accept the communist theory of transforming the current social system of the world through revolution.\(^\text{10}\)

The article went on to insist that the “same goes for socialism,” which has built its platform on fighting the capitalist dictatorship, rejecting the dictatorship of the proletariat and the military, rejecting Nazism and “wishing for the free function of all institutions within a democratic system.”\(^\text{11}\) Thus, the Popular Front is aptly described as an electoral coalition, but certainly not an ideological one. The parties aligned against common enemies – Alessandri, the Liberal-Conservative bloc, and the nacistas – rather than being united in a singular mission.

6. “Se Chupo.” 1938 political cartoon about confiscated by Alessandri.\(^\text{12}\)

This 1938 political cartoon pictures an artist painting Ibáñez standing over a cowardly lion with a large whip (Alessandri was often described as a lion). The artist’s easel, however, shows a more ferocious lion that has just eaten something, apparently Ibáñez, given the presence of his boot on the floor. Alessandri stands over the artist’s shoulder with a desperate expression, steering the depiction in this more favorable direction for Alessandri’s image. Alessandri ordered the Carabineros to seize and burn the copies of this edition of the magazine because the cartoon offended him personally.

7. CORFO
In January 1939, the most catastrophic earthquake in several decades occurred in Chillán, about 250 miles south of Santiago, and gave President Aguirre and his constituents an opportunity to implement reform. Between 5,000 and 6,000 people died as a result of the earthquake, and the government faced the question of how to deal with over 70,000 now homeless Chileans. This catastrophe and the need to reconstruct forced the right in Congress to approve measures toward rebuilding, and Aguirre used this leverage to institute economic reform. This led to the narrow approval of a state-sponsored development agency, CORFO, which set long-term goals of increased industrialization and harnessing Chile’s energy resources in the name of reconstruction. The concessions to the right, which feared CORFO would cause increased taxes on corporations and the rich, lay in the funding of the organization. No funds for CORFO could come from these types of taxation, but instead came from U.S. loans and taxation on U.S. owned copper. This meant that the left could not nationalize the copper industry without losing the financing for CORFO since they would lose the tax revenue and the U.S. would likely respond by pulling funding. Nevertheless, the government now had considerable influence in Chile’s industrial sectors as CORFO immediately became directly involved with ninety-two companies. While the implementation of CORFO gave the government a hand in the economy that it previously lacked, the funding for it placed heavier reliance on foreign investment and copper taxation. Furthermore, much funding came from printing more Chilean pesos, doubling the money supply between 1939 and 1942. This caused an increase in wholesale prices of 91% and an increase in the cost of living by 83% in the same period, putting the working classes in an increasingly difficult situation.  

9. Political Cartoon of President Frei and Fidel Castro.\textsuperscript{17}

The caption here reads, “Frei: Now you see, Fidel, that I didn’t need weapons to carry out a revolution in liberty,” while Frei gives the peace sign to Fidel Castro and puts his leg up on a box that reads, “Absolute Majority. Votes.” This cartoon was a way of saying that reform could be instituted without armed insurrection while simultaneously attempting to delegitimize communist ideology.

10. Eduardo Frei’s Major Reforms

The results of the 1967 power shift toward the left within the PDC were immediate as President Frei pushed his reform policies through the legislature. The first pressing issue was the question of Chilean copper. Much of Chile had believed for some time that copper mines should be nationalized, and in the 1960s this opinion spread rapidly due in part to the 1965 conflicts between the U.S. and Chile. Seeking the middle ground, Frei came to an agreement with the Kennecott Company in 1967 called “Chilenization.” Under this arrangement, Chile obtained 51% of the company share and paid a sum of $80 million to Kennecott. As for the other major copper company, Anaconda, they would hold off on such an agreement until 1969, at which
point the owners accepted Chilenization because demand for full-blown nationalization became great to resist reform.\textsuperscript{18}

The other pressing issue was agricultural reform and, finally, the peasant unions gained some ground. In addition to shifting power in the party system, another factor that pushed agricultural reform forward in 1967 was rural unionization, which doubled during the Frei administration (1964-70). Using the 1962 agricultural reform law allowing the state to purchase and redistribute underutilized land, Frei expropriated nearly 400 haciendas by mid-1967, but this was still insufficient in the eyes of the rural unions.\textsuperscript{19} Then, in July 1967, Frei signed into law a bill that made all estates of more than 80 “basic hectares” available for expropriation. This was a step forward, but the president was still playing the middle ground; most leftist parties and much of the PDC argued for expropriation of anything greater than 40 basic hectares.\textsuperscript{20} Some peasants took matters into their own hands, seizing about 400 haciendas in the last year of Frei’s administration. Still, the president still managed to legally expropriate 1,300 haciendas by the end of his term.

\textsuperscript{*} A hectare = 2.47 acres. A “basic hectare” is a measure of land adjusted to its quality of irrigation. For example, 80 basic hectares could actually equal 80 real hectares if the land was well-irrigated like the land around Santiago, but could equal 500 hectares if the land was in the north where water was (and still is) scarce.
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