

**CLASS RELATIONS AND DEMOCRATIZATION:  
A Reassessment of Barrington Moore's Model**

**J. Samuel Valenzuela**

**Working Paper #265 – March 1999**

**J. Samuel Valenzuela** is Professor of Sociology and Fellow of the Kellogg Institute at the University of Notre Dame. He was formerly on the faculty at Yale and Harvard Universities and has been a Visiting Fellow and Senior Associate Fellow at St. Antony's College, Oxford University, as well as a Visiting Professor at the Institut d'Études Politiques in Paris. He has held fellowships from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation. His publications have centered on the intersections between labor and politics in different historical periods, the emergence of democracies in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, current processes of democratization out of authoritarian regimes, and social change. His most recently published article is "La Constitución de 1980 y el inicio de la redemocratización en Chile" in Torcuato S. di Tella, *Crisis de representatividad y sistemas de partidos políticos* (Buenos Aires: Grupo Editor Latinoamericano, 1998).

My gratitude to Erika Maza Valenzuela for comments and suggestions that have improved this text. My appreciation to Alan Knight, Miguel Angel Centeno, Tulio Halperín-Donghi, and Fernando López-Alves for their insightful reactions to its earlier versions. I thank as well Caroline Domingo and Dolores Fairley for their editorial and page-setting work and their patience with its many corrections.

## ABSTRACT

This paper examines Barrington Moore's contention in his *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* that the formation of different kinds of political regimes as national societies entered the modern world can be explained by analyzing the characteristics of social classes and their relations. It argues that Moore's model is a misleading and even insufficient instrument for this purpose, concluding that it is too rigid in its emphasis on class and too narrow given its neglect of other factors. The discussion of the difficulties presented by Moore's model focuses on a Moorian interpretation of Chilean political development that is widely prevalent in the literature. The paper shows that while this interpretation seemingly confirms Moore's approach, it only does so because it is based on faulty historical evidence and highly questionable assumptions. A different institutional and organizational view of politics whose basic features are suggested at the end of the paper provides a better basis for understanding the inception of regimes.

## RESUMEN

Este artículo examina la noción de Barrington Moore en su *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* de que la formación de distintos tipos de regímenes al entrar las sociedades nacionales en el mundo moderno puede ser explicada analizando las características de las clases sociales y de sus relaciones. Sostiene que el modelo de Moore es un instrumento insuficiente y falaz para este efecto, concluyendo que es demasiado rígido dado su énfasis en las clases y demasiado estrecho al desconsiderar otros factores. La discusión de las dificultades presentadas por el modelo de Moore se enfoca en una interpretación del desarrollo político chileno que está ampliamente difundida y que aparentemente lo confirma. El trabajo muestra que ello sólo ocurre porque dicha interpretación se basa en evidencias históricas deficientes y presupuestos cuestionables. Los inicios de los regímenes políticos pueden entenderse mejor usando un enfoque institucional y organizacional cuyas líneas básicas son sugeridas en la sección final del ensayo.

Barrington Moore's *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* follows a long social science lineage that seeks to find purely societal-based explanations for political phenomena and, within it, to a sublineage that focuses on class relations as providing the basic set of determining factors.<sup>1</sup> Its emphasis on class in order to explain the formation of different kinds of regimes as nations modernize was therefore hardly novel when it was first published almost three and a half decades ago. What made it break new ground at the time within the societal and class relational view of politics was that both its Marxist (to which Moore's work has closer affinities) as well as its non-Marxist variants had long focused mainly on urban classes or on relations among segments of the upper class, while *Social Origins* emphasized primarily the dominant and subordinate classes engaged in agriculture, focusing secondarily on the nature of the links between landowners and the bourgeoisie.

This paper takes a critical view of the class relational model proposed by Moore to account for regime formation. It is, on the one hand, far too abstract. The effects of different classes and their relations on political development cannot be examined without focusing on concrete individuals whose actions were both enabled and constrained by a series of factors that were not necessarily related to their class positions, such as their organizational resources, the noneconomic interests they may have held, the institutional envelopes of the state and of the existing regime, the personal connections they may or may not have had with heads of state, armed forces, or bureaucracies, their correct or incorrect perceptions of what they should do in order to best preserve their essential interests, and so on. Such more specific factors determined whether class-related actors, i.e., individuals who were members of a certain class or who were involved in organizations that generally articulated and defended specific class interests, acted in similar or in different ways in shaping political change in their respective settings. On the other hand, Moore's model is far too restrictive. It takes an act of faith to present a model in which all interests that have a significant effect on the course of regime formation and change are class interests. This simplification is perhaps not a fundamental flaw in a small number of countries where political cleavages did revolve largely around class divisions and the timing of democratization was such that its political leaderships emerged in conjunction with class-linked organizations, all of this after the formation of solid national states—as in Sweden—but it shows important limitations whenever it confronts cases with a more complex set of cleavages, timings, or weaker states. Other collective identities and interests may have been important, the timing of change may have been such that political institutions were established with enduring consequences when certain interests were better organized than others, means of doing politics that did not involve creating a democratic regime may have seemed more expedient, important

---

<sup>1</sup> Barrington Moore, *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966).

power holders may have impressed the course of change with their vision and ambition in ways that had little apparent connection to societal forces, and so on.

To illustrate the limitations of Moore's model this discussion draws from the history of democratization in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Chile. As a result, it will rebut an influential class-based interpretation of Chilean political history that began to emerge in the nineteen-thirties, which was largely compatible with Moore's analysis. For this reason, Moore's followers have drawn from this literature in presenting their own analysis of this case, thereby further diffusing, this time mainly in English, a historiographical interpretation of Chilean politics that confirms Moore's model. In its view, Chile was dominated by a powerful landholding class variously called 'the oligarchy,' 'aristocracy,' or simply 'large landowners' that prevented the development of a truly democratic system in the country until it was finally challenged by popular pressure in the 1960s and early 1970s. However, the evidence shows that key elements in the construction of Chilean democracy, namely the extension of suffrage to literate males in 1874 and the institution of the secret vote through an electoral reform in 1890 that introduced enclosed voting booths and official envelopes for voters to conceal their ballots from view, were championed by Conservative Party leader Manuel José Irarrázabal, one of the nation's wealthiest landowners as well as the descendant of a family of the highest ranking nobility during the colonial or monarchical period that ended with independence from Spain in 1818.<sup>2</sup> While Chilean agriculture may have been, despite appearances to the contrary, in fact closer to Moore's 'commercial' type—thereby generating prodemocratic landowners according to his model—this is a moot point because the reason Irarrázabal and his colleagues championed democratic reforms had little to do with class. The Conservative Party emerged in order to defend Catholicism in Chilean society and state, and hence it was a state versus Church rather than a class cleavage that impelled democratization in this case. Forces of very different characteristics may drive democratization, depending on the overall context of the time.

Moore did not provide a clear justification for the cases he chose for his analysis.<sup>3</sup> He argued simply that small nations were not worth considering because "the decisive causes of

---

<sup>2</sup> The importance of the 1874 electoral reforms was first established in a paper I wrote in 1971, which was published in expanded form as J. Samuel Valenzuela, *Democratización vía reforma: La expansión del sufragio en Chile* (Buenos Aires: IDES, 1985). The significance of the electoral law of 1890 is a more recent discovery. See J. Samuel Valenzuela, "La ley electoral de 1890 y la democratización del régimen político chileno," *Estudios Públicos*, 71 (winter 1998): 265–96.

In addition to being a wealthy landowner, Irarrázabal was a political scientist who had studied at Georgetown and Louvain Universities. He descended from Spanish-Basque nobility of Guipúzcoa, the only family in Chile of true peninsular noble origins. See Julio Retamal Favereau, Carlos Celis Atria, Juan Guillermo Muñoz Correa, *Familias Fundadoras de Chile, 1540–1600* (Santiago: Zig-Zag, 1992), 329–47 and 342–3, for Irarrázabal's specific genealogy and biography.

<sup>3</sup> For a discussion of the importance of the choice of cases and of procedures to do so, see J. Samuel Valenzuela, "Macro Comparisons without the Pitfalls: A Protocol for Comparative Research" in Scott Mainwaring and Arturo Valenzuela, eds., *Politics, Society, and Democracy. Latin America: Essays in Honor of Juan Linz* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998), 237–66.

their politics lie outside their own boundaries.”<sup>4</sup> But if the world’s small nations were exceptions to the proposition that political regimes were the product of the constellation of class forces, this meant that for most countries in the world the class determinants did not explain regime formation. One of the cases Moore analyzed, namely India, stood out from the others, given the fact that it was under colonial rule and therefore its institutions were significantly shaped by the metropolitan power, i.e., by exogenous influences. Moore was perfectly aware that in this case political factors took precedence over class and socioeconomic structure. He noted that the latter would have pushed India into a nondemocratic route, but British colonial administration had the effect of “preventing the fateful coalition of a strong landed elite and weak bourgeoisie that...has been the social origin of rightist authoritarian regimes...”<sup>5</sup> Nonetheless, if a country is neither a colony nor a protectorate of another one, Moore’s thesis should apply to it regardless of its size. In those cases where regimes were formed under conditions of formal political independence, even though the national class fabric may have included foreign investors and interests as was often the case, Moore’s class constellation argument should take precedence over others if it is a valid one.

Moore’s argument should also only have referred to processes of regime formation that were completed before the beginning of the Second World War. In this sense, again, India should not have been included in his discussion. The allied victory over Nazism and Fascism gave much greater currency to democratic forms of government among the forces all over the world that Moore saw as predisposed to rightist authoritarianism.

Given the fact that most Latin American countries were independent since the early nineteenth century, they provide an excellent terrain for examining Moore’s thesis. In fact, it is difficult to understand why Moore did not consider any Latin American experiences in his analysis. Belonging to the Western cultural space, with leaders imbued in the new doctrines of representative government and separation of powers that had been developed in Europe and the United States, Latin American nations were among the first countries to experiment with electoral institutions and presidentialist variants (except—most durably—in Brazil) of democratic constitutionalism.

Within Latin America the Chilean case provides one of the clearest examples of the step-by-step construction of a democratic framework during the period that coincides with the first wave of democratization. Chilean republican constitutions, the most important one of which was enacted in 1833, established the separation of powers typical of liberal democracies, including an independent judiciary and a relatively strong bicameral Congress, given its controls over the purse, the deployment of armed forces, and right to censure ministers and presidents. The military was clearly subordinated to constitutional governments beginning in the 1830s. A lively

---

<sup>4</sup> Moore, *op. cit.* n. 1, xiii.

<sup>5</sup> Moore, *op. cit.* n. 1, 431. While Moore therefore argues that India confirms his analysis, he fails to see the contradiction of appealing to a political factor in order to do so.

and critical press can already be found in the 1840s and more durably after repressive measures in the mid to late 1850s. The freedoms of association for political and social purposes followed a similar pattern and were guaranteed in a constitutional amendment enacted in 1874. However, the right of workers to unionize was challenged until the 1930s, even though unions did develop since the latter part of the nineteenth century and artisanal and miners' organizations of various kinds can easily be traced back to the 1840s. The use of civil over canon law for all but Church governance, the freedom of religion, state-run education and confessional pluralism in private education, municipal rather than Church control over cemeteries, a civil registry (including civil marriages and their annulment)—all measures resisted by the Church—were in place long before the formal separation between Church and state in 1925. Elections were held regularly every two or at most three years since the 1820s to fill presidential, congressional, and municipal offices, although electoral procedures made it very difficult for opponents of the government to defeat the officially favored lists of candidates until the reforms that were enacted in 1890.

Despite the risk of repeating what is well known, a first section of this paper presents the fundamental aspects of Moore's model as well as criticisms and additions to it. It then discusses and refutes the Moorian interpretation of Chilean political history. It subsequently argues that the evidence in the Chilean case is more compatible with Moore's prodemocratic class constellation, but that this possible alternative Moorian interpretation is not adequate either. In its concluding comments this paper sketches elements of an alternative view of democratization, drawn from a different theoretical lineage, that leads to focusing on factors that are missing from Moore's approach.

### **Moore's Basic Model**

After his long exploration of the rise of democracies or dictatorships in eight nations (England, France, the United States, China, Japan, India, Germany, and Russia, although no specific chapters were devoted to the latter two), Moore concluded that democracies were more likely to develop, as in England or in the Northern United States, where landowners practiced 'commercial,' or fully market-driven agriculture. In these settings landowners became very much like the urban bourgeoisie in their entrepreneurial ways, hiring as much labor as they needed to produce efficiently, and even if landed interests may have been initially stronger than bourgeois ones until economic development reversed this tendency, the dominant class nonetheless bore the stamp of bourgeois hegemony as there was no significant difference between the two segments. By contrast, dictatorships usually emerged where landowners practiced a 'labor repressive' form of agriculture that relied on coercive mechanisms—such as slavery, serfdom, feudal dues and obligations, abusive land-rental or produce-marketing arrangements—and where landowners were able to remain the leading segment of the dominant class, subordinating a weaker bourgeoisie to them and insisting on retaining the socioeconomic arrangements from

which they benefited. Whether the result was a fascist or a communist dictatorship depended largely on the relative strengths of the bourgeoisies and of the rebellious impulses of the peasantries that were involved: the success of fascism stemmed from stronger dominant groups and a more passive peasantry, and of communism from the opposite mix. The eventual rise of democracies where agriculture was characterized by labor repression, as in France, required a successful 'bourgeois revolution' or, as in the United States, victory in a civil war that accomplished the same basic task of transforming the agricultural world in the South. Hence, in Moore's own succinct summary, for a democratic regime to emerge "the political hegemony of the landed upper class had to be broken or transformed. The [field laborer or the] peasant had to be turned into a [wage earner or a] farmer producing for the market instead of for his own consumption and that of the overlord. In this process the landed upper-classes either became an important part of the capitalist and democratic tide, as in England, or, if they came to oppose it, they were swept aside in the convulsions of revolution or civil war. In a word the landed upper-classes either helped to make the bourgeois revolution or were destroyed by it."<sup>6</sup>

Moore's work stimulated a considerable following among scholars who sought to clarify some of his less than clear definitions of important terms, democracy included, as well as to confirm and refine his arguments. The result has been the development of a long list of observations to the basic model, some of which are closer to the literature of an alternative lineage which focuses on the significance of state institutional and political-organizational variables in explaining the formation or collapse of regimes. Thus, Theda Skocpol has noted the significance of the autonomy of the state and of its crisis in detonating revolutions, bourgeois or otherwise, and Ross, Skocpol, Smith, and Vichniac have summarized research pointing to the importance of examining the influence of geopolitical factors or of institutional and organizational features such as parliaments, electoral laws, and political parties that may affect the course of political change.<sup>7</sup> Curiously, Moore himself presented and discussed casually many of these elements in the lengthy historical accounts of his cases, such as when he noted the significance of the monarch's lack of a standing army for the development of democracy in England.<sup>8</sup> And yet he did not make an effort to draw them into his overall explanatory model, thereby remaining within the class relational approach and opening the way for others to note their omission.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> Moore, op. cit. n. 1, 429–30. The words in square brackets are not part of the original quote.

<sup>7</sup> Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979); George Ross, Theda Skocpol, Tony Smith, and Judith Eisenberg Vichniac, "Barrington Moore's *Social Origins* and Beyond: Historical Social Analysis since the 1960s" in Theda Skocpol et al., ed., *Democracy, Revolution, and History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 1–21. See also Theda Skocpol, "A Critical Review of Barrington Moore's *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*" in Theda Skocpol, *Social Revolutions in the Modern World* (NY: Cambridge University Press, 1994), first published in 1973.

<sup>8</sup> Moore, op. cit. n. 1, 32.

<sup>9</sup> For example, Skocpol, "A Critical Review," op. cit. n. 7, 38.

Other analysts have criticized aspects of Moore's model itself. Thus, Rueschemeyer, Stephens, and Huber Stephens have questioned the characterization of the bourgeoisie as a basically prodemocratic force. They note that the bourgeoisie may have contributed in some cases to establishing 'parliamentary government' (or in Huber's more precise terms, given the Eurocentric bias of the previous formulation, it may have supported 'representative and responsible government') but add that it was almost always opposed to "the final extensions of suffrage to the working class."<sup>10</sup> Rueschemeyer et al. also reproach Moore for neglecting the role of the working class, which in their view was the crucial actor in the final creation of democracies precisely because it pressured in favor of inclusion by demanding universal male suffrage. This latter point is stated forcefully by Geoff Eley as well.<sup>11</sup> It is most clearly evident in Northern Europe and Australia, but alternative explanations are needed to account for cases in which workers were enfranchised before the rise of the labor movement.<sup>12</sup> Other authors such as Andrews and Chapman acknowledge that workers may have been important actors, but they point out that the middle class in some cases also played a role in the formation of democracies that must not be underestimated.<sup>13</sup> This is a view that echoes that of the earlier generation of political modernization writings, although its reasoning is different as earlier authors focused on the middle class's education and supposedly tolerant political culture as the decisive elements making it a democratizing force. These observations are presented as additions to Moore's model that do not alter its basic contentions. In particular, all followers of Moore's vision accept the basic notion that 'labor repressive' landowners who controlled economically significant tracts of land were the most consistently antidemocratic force everywhere, and this is taken both as the basic proof of the value of Moore's class relational model as well as the fundamental starting point for all further specifications of it.

Despite the importance of the 'labor repressive' notion in Moore's conception, he has been criticized for a lack of clarity in the use of this term. In his most forceful statement he explained that its difference from 'commercial' agriculture lay in the fact that the former relied on 'political' and the latter on 'market' forces to extract a surplus from peasants, a distinction that

---

<sup>10</sup> Dietrich Rueschemeyer, Evelyne Huber Stephens, and John D. Stephens, *Capitalist Development and Democracy* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1992), 141; Evelyne Huber, "Introduction" in Evelyne Huber and Frank Safford, eds., *Agrarian Structure and Political Power: Landlord and Peasant in the Making of Latin America* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1995), 7.

<sup>11</sup> Geoff Eley, "The Social Construction of Democracy in Germany" in George Reid Andrews and Herrick Chapman, *The Social Construction of Democracy, 1870–1990* (New York: New York University Press, 1995), 107.

<sup>12</sup> This occurred in France, the United States, Switzerland, Colombia, Argentina, and Chile, although Rueschemeyer et al. deny that this was the case in the latter, op. cit. n. 10, 305. In offering explanations for the Swiss case, Rueschemeyer et al. indicate that the bourgeoisie proved to be, exceptionally, a fully prodemocratic force favoring inclusion, 86.

<sup>13</sup> George Reid Andrews and Herrick Chapman, "The Social Construction of Democracy, 1870–1990: An Introduction" in Andrews and Chapman, op. cit. n. 11, 18–9.

Skocpol rejected rightly (because markets also contain political determinants) and that Rueschemeyer et al. found 'too rigid.'<sup>14</sup> It is therefore impossible to assess Moore's model without developing a more precise conception of this crucial category.

Both forms of agriculture are market driven in the sense that they produce to satisfy consumer or agroindustrial demand, and in both there may or may not be important limitations (such as entails) on the free sale of land. Hence, the difference between them lies essentially in their labor use regimes. 'Commercial' agriculture refers to situations in which labor is free to move and is hired for a wage at the prevailing labor market rate, which may be affected by poor law or welfare provisions, minimum wage and labor laws, protectionism, tax relief, subsidies, and/or employer as well as worker combinations, although Moore does not really discuss these elements.

By contrast, and trying to keep as close as possible to Moore's uses of the term, 'labor repressive' agriculture should be viewed as encompassing, first, those situations in which landlords relied on laborers who were prevented from moving in search of new opportunities, either in agriculture or in other areas of the economy, and in which their remuneration (in money, in kind, or calculated as the cost of supporting laborers as individuals or with their families) was clearly below what they would obtain elsewhere if they were able to move. The impediments to laborers' mobility could stem from their legally enforceable status obliging them to work the land, as in the case of slaves or serfs, from state repression against laborers in order to favor landowners, or from state-tolerated but landowner-organized repression. Cases in which landowners could pressure laborers to remain on the job in order to fulfill provisions in labor contracts whose written or unwritten terms the latter had freely agreed to for reasonably limited periods of time should not be viewed necessarily as instances of labor repression, unless there was a clear pattern of abuse and trickery behind them. As noted by Bauer, the debt peonage found in some areas of Latin America, such as Northern-coastal Peru, was of this kind: the debts originated in relatively large cash advances given to laborers in the highlands for agreeing to contracts calling on them to do seasonal work in coastal plantations.<sup>15</sup> Such practices could be classed therefore as part of the rather wide variety of institutional forms through which the labor markets of 'commercial' agriculture were organized. And second, 'labor repressive' agriculture should include those situations in which landlords or agricultural merchants could extract a surplus from peasant producers by virtue of the latter's obligation to give them part of what they produced, to pay them various dues or tributes in money or labor, to process the grain they harvested only in their mills, and/or to sell produce only through their offices or establishments. Again, such obligations could stem from peasants' lower social status enforceable by courts of law, by the

---

<sup>14</sup> Moore, op. cit. n. 1, 434; Skocpol, "A Critical Review," op. cit. n. 7, 36; Rueschemeyer et al., op. cit. n. 10, 288.

strongly entrenched customary norms of caste or caste-like societies, or by systematic repression by the state or by the landowners or landowner-merchants. In the first situations of labor repression landlords or their agents organize production; in the second, peasants do.

If this clarification captures well what Moore had in mind, its problem is that it turns the notion that 'labor repressive' landowners are an antidemocratic force into an obvious point. After all, they rely on producers who are denied the most basic rights of citizens in a democracy, namely, the freedom of movement, equality before the law, and protection from abusive practices or what amounts to racketeering. In so far as democratization necessarily implies denying landowners or landowner-merchants privileges they enjoy given their superior status or their ability to benefit from force, they can be expected to oppose it. Careful research in some cases may find that they contributed, nonetheless, to democratization through the unintended consequences of their actions, sometimes in pursuing other more pressing goals, or given the sometimes surprising convictions of heads of state they supported or those of leaders of their political and social organizations, but such situations (the abolition of slavery in Brazil comes to mind) can be expected to be exceptional. Where these abuses occurred, a fundamental change was needed for democracy to emerge. Given that it was to negatively affect the interests of those benefiting from 'labor repression,' the fact that they were opposed to democratization is hardly worth mentioning.<sup>16</sup>

Perhaps because of the truistic quality of this point, Moore's followers have tended to expand greatly the meaning of the 'labor repressive' category. They have taken a cue from Moore's own example given his many passing references not to 'labor repressive' landowners, but simply to 'strong' (relative to the bourgeoisie) landowners as the antidemocratic force. This slippage occurs notably in Moore's discussion of the Prussian landlords.<sup>17</sup> By the nineteenth century they did not resort to 'labor repressive' practices in the strict sense of the term, i.e., relying on the feudal strictures of the past; they were devoted, rather, to a capitalist form of agriculture, and the great majority of landlords by the end of the century were in fact of bourgeois origin.<sup>18</sup> The effects of this extension of the Moorian conception can be seen in Allub who,

---

<sup>15</sup> Arnold Bauer, "Rural Workers in Spanish America: Problems of Peonage and Oppression," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 59 (1, 1979): 38–9.

<sup>16</sup> In discussing slavery, Moore is aware of the fact that this point is very obvious. For instance, he notes that the victory of the North in the American civil war was a "political victory for freedom," adding that this "seems obvious enough to require no extensive discussion," op. cit. n. 1, 153.

<sup>17</sup> See Moore, op. cit. n. 1, 435–8, in which he makes a point of associating the landholding nobility's antidemocratic posture with its links to the imperial bureaucracy and military rather than, strictly, with its class position and labor practices.

<sup>18</sup> For a characterization of agriculture in large East German estates as 'capitalist,' see David Blackbourn, "The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie: Reappraising German History in the Nineteenth Century" in David Blackbourn and Geoff Eley, *The Peculiarities of German History: Bourgeois Society and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 181. Blackbourn notes, 182, that by 1859, "57% of the Prussian *Rittergüter* were already in nonnoble hands. By the 1880s bourgeois estate owners possessed two-thirds of the total number of estates even in the eastern provinces of Prussia."

writing on Argentina, implied that all powerful landholding classes in peripheral capitalism were

antidemocratic given their class position—not that only some of them were, given the texture of the relationship they had with their subordinates.<sup>19</sup> Allub noted that Argentinean landowners developed ‘commercial’ agriculture but were still able to subordinate the bourgeoisie to their interests and were still an antidemocratic force.<sup>20</sup> Rueschemeyer et al., who contradict Allub by presenting the Argentinean landowners as a prime Latin American example of a prodemocratic class given their ‘commercial’ agriculture, have nonetheless proposed a similar expansion of Moore’s category of antidemocratic landowners by defining it as “landlords dependent on a large supply of cheap labor.”<sup>21</sup> This conception may have the virtue of overcoming the rigidity they reproach in Moore’s distinction between the two forms of agriculture, but it does not have the virtue of clarity. What is the difference between landowners who are ‘dependent’ on cheap labor and those who can be said, rather, to *take advantage* of low wages as any capitalist would? If there is a large supply of labor its price will presumably be cheap, but how cheap does it have to be to turn landowners into an antidemocratic force? Because this formulation can imply the existence of a free labor market, albeit one in which there is an excess supply of labor, it effectively turns Moore’s distinction into a continuum in which the distinguishing feature between ‘commercial’ and ‘labor repressive’ agriculture becomes the amount landowners are willing to pay labor. Some cut-off point would therefore have to be given in order to indicate when the quantitative measure becomes a qualitative distinction. Or is it the case that all landowners engaged in labor-intensive production while benefiting from a lax labor market are antidemocratic? This is a dubious proposition, but be this as it may, both the strict as well as the expanded conceptions of ‘labor repressive’ landowners have informed the Moorian interpretation of Chilean history, as can be seen from the following brief summary.

### **Classes and the Formation of the Chilean Political Regime: A Moorian Interpretation**

The general image that springs from this interpretation is that Chile since the early nineteenth century was controlled politically by a dominant class composed mainly of large ‘aristocratic’ landowners.<sup>22</sup> They formed the backbone of the authoritarian ‘Pelucón’ political group and since the mid-1850s of the Conservative Party. Their estates extended sometimes

---

<sup>19</sup> Leopoldo Allub, *Orígenes del autoritarismo en América Latina* (México: Editorial Katún, 1983).

<sup>20</sup> Allub, 10, and chap. 3.

<sup>21</sup> Rueschemeyer et al., op. cit. n. 10, 288.

<sup>22</sup> In addition to other sources that will be mentioned below, the following is only a brief listing of books that contain elements of the historiographical interpretation summarized here: Ricardo Donoso, *Desarrollo político y social de Chile desde la Constitución de 1833* (Santiago: Imprenta Universitaria, 1942); Hernán Ramírez Necochea, *La guerra civil de 1891: Antecedentes económicos* (Santiago: Editorial Austral, 1951); Marcelo Segall *Desarrollo del capitalismo en Chile: Cinco ensayos dialécticos* (Santiago: np, 1953); Julio César Jobet, *Ensayo crítico del desarrollo económico-social de Chile* (Santiago: Editorial Universitaria, 1955); Julio Heise González, *150 años de evolución institucional* (Santiago: Editorial Andrés Bello, 1960).

into the tens of thousands of hectares and were devoted to an inefficient and labor-intensive agriculture exploiting a poverty-stricken rural population. Labor relations are understood to have been virtually feudal, as the servile subordination of peasants to the landed proprietors was much like that of the serfs of medieval and early modern Europe. The principal agricultural laborer of the large estate was the *inquilino*, or service tenant. In exchange for year-round work the *inquilino* received a minimal cash payment, a ration of food (usually bread and beans) for each day he worked, and a series of benefits consisting generally of a modest ranch, an acre or so for the *inquilino* family to cultivate for its own sustenance, and access to pasture lands for two to four large animals. This labor practice is assumed to have derived from the grants of labor (*encomiendas*) given by the crown to leading Spanish settlers during the colonial period.<sup>23</sup> As such, the institution was the “last link in the chain of slavery.”<sup>24</sup> Even well into the twentieth century the subordination of the *inquilinos* and their families to their ‘masters’ is described as total.<sup>25</sup>

An emerging mining, financial, and industrial bourgeoisie associated with the Liberal and in part with the Radical parties is supposed to have gained strength in the mid-century. It tried to wrest power from the landowning class in two civil wars but failed. Having forged an alliance with a growing middle class, this group then sought to expand suffrage, which resulted in the elimination of the income requirements (variously presented in this literature as occurring in 1874, 1884, 1885, or 1888).<sup>26</sup> However, the electoral process remained subject to abuse by those in

---

<sup>23</sup> The assumed historical link between *encomienda* and *inquilinaje* was first presented as fact by Claudio Gay in the final two volumes on Chilean agriculture, published in 1862 and 1865, of his monumental *Historia Física y Política de Chile*. These were reprinted as Claudio Gay, *Agricultura Chilena* (Santiago: ICIRA, 1973); the supposed origins of *inquilinaje* appear in Vol. I, 181–3.

<sup>24</sup> Gay, 182.

<sup>25</sup> The notion that the relationship between landowners and *inquilinos* was like that of masters and slaves was popularized by George McCutchen McBride, *Chile: Land and Society* (New York: Octagon Books, 1971), first published in 1936. McBride’s elaborate caricature of the *inquilino* fixed the vision of this institution for several generations of writers. See in particular Brian Loveman, *Struggle in the Countryside: Politics and Rural Labor in Chile, 1919–1973* (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1976), who follows and amplifies McBride’s depiction, especially 34–35 et passim.

<sup>26</sup> The correct date is 1874. The constitutional article requiring income and property to vote was not dropped until 1888, but it had already been bypassed by a provision in the 1874 electoral law stating that knowing how to read and write was sufficient proof of income. This was an easy assumption to make, given that the requisite income levels were deliberately set well within the reach of the lowest paid categories of the workforce. Literacy was not required of all voters until 1861.

The elimination of the proof of income requirements led to a tripling of the numbers of registrants from 49,047 in 1873 to 148,737 in 1878; Valenzuela, *Democratización vía reforma*, op. cit. n. 2, 118. This latter figure represented about a third of the male adult population. For political reasons, voter registration declined during the mid-1880s, recovering subsequently. While the numbers of voters remained relatively small, broader segments of the population did become involved in elections and politicized. On this point, see J. Samuel Valenzuela, “Building Aspects of Democracy before Democracy: Electoral Practices in Nineteenth-Century Chile” in Eduardo Posada-Carbó, ed., *Elections before Democracy: The History of Elections in Europe and Latin America* (London and NY: Macmillan and St. Martin’s Press, 1996), 240–8.

power and by local notables. The change did nothing in particular to alter the political supremacy  
of the

landed class because—in what is one of the most durable simplicities in the analysis of Chilean politics—the rural dependents of the haciendas were coerced into voting for the candidates favored by the landowners, many of whom were landowners themselves. As the boundaries of Chilean electoral districts gave enormous weight to the rural areas, this literature notes that the landholding class was able to retain positions of power in the legislature and national government such that it could prevent any legal reforms unfavorable to its interests. Eventually the new bourgeoisie merged with the landowning oligarchy through marriage ties and cross-investments, thereby absorbing the landed group's values and outlooks, turning its back on the democratic aspirations it had previously championed. Thus, Chile never had a 'bourgeois revolution.'<sup>27</sup>

The democratic struggle was then taken up, according to these authors, by a middle class composed of professionals, white-collar public and private employees, and medium to small businessmen, as well as by some popular organizations. They were linked mainly to the Radical party as well as to some progressive segments of the Liberal Party. They succeeded in putting a temporary end to oligarchic government with the 1920 election of Arturo Alessandri, a then populist 'middle-class' (not bourgeois) Liberal. However, the oligarchy made it impossible for him to carry out any meaningful reforms. Labor laws were enacted in 1924 under military pressure, and a social security system was created, but these changes did not extend to the countryside and did not alter the basic inequalities in the nation's social and political conditions.

Given these frustrations, the rights of workers and peasants were supposedly taken up subsequently by the emerging parties of the left, both Socialist and Communist. While these parties succeeded in claiming the presidency in an alliance with the middle class represented by the Radical Party under the Popular Front coalition in 1938, fundamental changes still did not occur, given the strength of the landed interests in Congress and even their influence through some members of the Radical party itself. Analysts insist that landowners continued to control peasants, forcing them to cast ballots for candidates they selected aided by the lack of secrecy of the vote. It is only in 1958 that changes in electoral procedures are understood to have introduced an effective secret ballot, thereby freeing for the first time ever the peasantry to vote as it wished. The changes also stimulated electoral participation by both men and women—the latter having been enfranchised in 1949. This led to a dramatic decline in electoral support for the right in the 1960s and opened an era of reforms that included unionization of farm workers and agrarian reform. It is only then that Chile had or came close to having a democracy. However, these and other gains proved to be short lived as the leftist government of Salvador Allende that was elected in 1970 was destroyed by the military coup of 1973, which was supported by the then fully fused landed and bourgeois families.

---

<sup>27</sup> This image has been popularized, in particular, by the catchy title of Maurice Zeitlin's *The Civil Wars in Chile (or the Bourgeois Revolutions that Never Were)* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), a work peppered with inaccuracies. Its arguments are similar to those in Luis Vitale, *Interpretación marxista de la historia de Chile. Ascenso y declinación de la burguesía minera: De Pérez a Balmaceda (1861–1891)* (Frankfurt: Verlag Jugend und Politik, 1975).

While this interpretation contains some elements of truth as does any caricature, it is not tenable given more careful historical research.

### **Anomalies of the Moorian-Compatible Interpretation of Chilean History**

A basic preliminary issue in examining the origins of democracies is the determination of when a democratic regime, whatever its imperfections, begins in the case or cases that are being analyzed. This sets the stage for focusing on the forces and circumstances that intervened in its formation. A distinction must also be drawn between the instauration of a democracy and its possible subsequent deepening. Any discussion of the origins of democracy should obviously focus on the first, more important moment of its instauration. Moore himself was thinking only of the very basic elements of a democratic regime in his analysis, otherwise he would not have stopped his discussion of France with the Revolution or of the United States with the Civil War.

When democracies originated after a sharp break with the past due to a collapse of an authoritarian regime, the issue of determining the difference between their instauration and their subsequent deepening is usually settled from the outset. But when democratization occurred through a succession of reforms, resulting in the creation of a regime that retained the constitutional framework and many of the institutional practices of the past, as occurred in Chile and in most other cases of first wave democratization, then the matter of when the regime was basically set in place is more difficult to settle.

There is no space here for a full discussion of the difficulties raised by the identification of the point at which a process of democratization through reforms generates what can be classed as a democratic rather than an authoritarian regime. Suffice it to say that it is a point in which a critical, qualitative change in the nature of the political regime occurs, after which political leaders realize that their careers are in the last analysis dependent on winning elections instead of on courting official favor from those who already have state power—as occurs in any authoritarian setting, whatever its specific features. It therefore represents a transformation that politicians and contemporary observers should perceive clearly as having redefined the nature of the political game. Its fundamental mechanism in determining who holds power becomes the preferences made by voters when choosing among candidates who emerge from freely organized political groups or parties in elections their leaders accept as not being stacked irremediably against them. Naturally, the electorate should be broad enough to permit groups or parties that seek to represent all significant political sensibilities in the population to enter the electoral arena and compete effectively in it. In the history of most processes of first wave democratization this condition was reflected primarily in the rise of parties seeking to represent working-class interests by fielding candidates in elections, among other activities. Moreover, the exercise of authority by elected governments should not be second to that of nonelected figures such as monarchs, high civil servants, judges, or military officers, neither in general terms nor in specific policy

domains.<sup>28</sup> In order to evaluate the Moorian interpretation of Chilean history the question becomes, then, when did this kind of qualitative transformation occur?

### The Inception of Chilean Democracy

Some of the contributors to the historiographical interpretation depicted above assumed that Chile never really had a democracy because they wrote with the intimate conviction that only a soviet, or popular style 'democracy' was a true democracy.<sup>29</sup> Others made their assessments while holding implicitly a conception of democracy that confuses its basic rudiments with their subsequent quantitative or qualitative extensions.

Among the works cited here, only Rueschemeyer et al. work with an explicit definition of democracy. They argue that—in addition to cabinets that must be responsible to parliaments or elected presidents, to the subordination of the military to civilian rule, to the respect for the outcomes of nonfraudulent and nonnotable controlled elections, and to the necessary freedoms—a democracy is only attained when all male adults (except foreign residents, even long-term and legal ones) are allowed to vote (whether they exercise this right is a different matter).<sup>30</sup> This means that although about 73% of all men over 21 years of age were already entitled to vote in Chile by 1932 given advances in literacy, Chile did not have a democracy until the constitutional amendment granting illiterates the vote was adopted in 1970!<sup>31</sup> Rueschemeyer

---

<sup>28</sup> For discussion of the minimal features of democratic regimes along these lines, see my *Democratización vía reforma*, op. cit. n. 2, 28–35. The notion that for a democracy to exist the suffrage has to be broad enough for there to be a 'complete party system,' 31, means that some regimes may be considered democracies despite not having full suffrage rights; I labelled these 'incomplete suffrage democracies.' For a discussion of tutelary powers and reserved domains of policy that undermine democratic authority, see J. Samuel Valenzuela, "Democratic Consolidation in Post-Transitional Settings: Notion, Process and Facilitating Conditions" in Scott Mainwaring, Guillermo O'Donnell, and J. Samuel Valenzuela, *Issues in Democratic Consolidation: The New South American Democracies in Comparative Perspective* (Notre Dame, IN: Kellogg Institute Series with the Notre Dame University Press, 1992), 62–6.

<sup>29</sup> This was particularly the case with César Jobet, Ramírez Necochea, Segall, and Vitale. By contrast, Donoso and Heise González argued that Chile did indeed have a democracy given the pressure of the rising urban interests, the middle class and some popular groups. Heise González places the rise of this democracy around the early twenties, *150 años de evolución*, op. cit. n. 22, 110–1. For Donoso it was basically in place by the turn of the century; see especially Ricardo Donoso, *Las ideas políticas en Chile* (Santiago: Imprenta Universitaria, 1967).

<sup>30</sup> Rueschemeyer et al., op. cit. n. 10, 303–4. The disregard of voting rights for women does seem awkward in a construct that is so strict in setting the terms for male participation in the electorate. Elsewhere, they indicate that unionization rights are part of the essential elements of a democracy, 288, although this notion is not repeated in the explicit definition contained on 303–4.

<sup>31</sup> Rueschemeyer et al., 184 and elsewhere.

The 73% figure is calculated from Erika Maza Valenzuela, "Catolicismo, anticlericalismo y extensión del sufragio a la mujer en Chile," *Estudios Públicos* 58 (fall 1995), table 1, 175. Estimates of the potential size of the electorate in other sources are misleading because they use official literacy figures that include the population that is under voting age. Those under age 21 were about half the Chilean population, and given both the lack of universal coverage of primary education and the importance of adult literacy efforts by all kinds of associations, a larger than

et al. insist that this measure was adopted under labor pressure, probably because 1970 was the year Salvador Allende's Popular Unity government took office. This assertion permits them to confirm their point that labor was a key actor everywhere in generating full democracy, although the Chilean labor movement and parties of the left did not contribute any more than other forces at the time to this result.<sup>32</sup> In fact, at no time after 1874 did labor and leftist leaders mount any campaigns to press for the elimination of the literacy requirement, and by the early twentieth century the main leader of the Socialist Workers' (soon to be Communist) Party was convinced a majority of the electorate should be voting for his party given its class position.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, and most importantly, the constitutional reform giving illiterates the vote in 1970 was not seen as a fundamental change in the nature of the Chilean political regime by any contemporaneous politicians or observers.<sup>34</sup> With good reason: the illiteracy rate was down to less than 10% by then. Permitting women to vote in Switzerland certainly represented a more important deepening of democracy at about the same time, although Rueschemeyer et al. dismiss this decision as irrelevant in creating a 'full democracy.'

The perception of a fundamental change which, to repeat, is essential in determining when a democracy begins, occurred instead in the wake of the 1890 electoral law and the 1891 civil war, as the government was finally prevented from being able to use its ample arsenal of electoral intervention tools to favor official candidates. The new electoral system was first tested in the legislative elections of 1894. It resulted for the first time ever in Chilean electoral history in first and second place victories by opponents of the government. Subsequently the main parties of the time obtained roughly the same percentages of the vote in legislative elections (with the partial exception of the 1915 elections to be discussed below), until the realignment of the party system in 1925–32, despite changes in the party coalitions in the government.<sup>35</sup>

---

expected proportion of illiterates before the late 1930s were minors. Maza Valenzuela estimates the literacy rate by deducting all under-age cohorts.

<sup>32</sup> The 1970 amendment to the constitution permitting illiterates to vote (and lowering the voting age to 18) was supported by all parties when it was discussed in Congress in 1969. It was finally approved in January of 1970. This was before Allende had even become a candidate for the presidential race held in September. Enabling legislation for illiterates to vote was enacted in 1971, but this was merely a technical change in the law needed to comply with the new constitutional amendment.

<sup>33</sup> See, among other letters and articles in which he made the same argument over the years, Luis Emilio Recabarren's article of 14 May 1920, in Ximena Cruzat and Eduardo Deves, eds., *Recabarren: Escritos de prensa*. Vol. 4: 1919–1924 (Santiago: Terranova Editores, 1987), 128. Recabarren's assessment of the large numbers of voters who were, or could be, linked to labor organizations was shared by observers opposed to the left. For instance, Alejandro Silva de la Fuente, "Voto secreto o voto público," *Revista Chilena*, year IV, no. XXXI (May–September 1920), noted that the secret vote had to be retained in order to prevent unions and labor federations from pressuring workers into voting for their preferred candidates, 440.

<sup>34</sup> Rueschemeyer et al., op. cit. n. 10, acknowledge as much on 305, although on 184 they describe the 1970 reforms as a "breakthrough to full democracy," a point that is consistent with their argument.

<sup>35</sup> On the 1925–32 realignment which benefited the left, see J. Samuel Valenzuela, "The Origins and Transformations of the Chilean Party System" in eds. Fernando J. Devoto and Torcuato S. Di

The fundamental alteration created by the 1890 electoral procedures was indeed noticed at the time. For example, Julio Zegers, a Liberal leader who lamented the change because he was never able to regain a congressional seat, indicated that “the true cause of the difference between the old and the new governments lies in the fact that the [previous] system of official intervention [in the elections], inspired in lofty political purposes, favored the election of honest, dignified and patriotic citizens, whereas the free elections of our days, tarnished by the market for votes, are unscrupulous in their designations.”<sup>36</sup> The testimony of the head of the Democratic Party, the most important one from an electoral point of view linked then to the labor movement, also confirms the point that the change was widely perceived at the time, while providing an understandably different evaluation: “given the electoral frauds, only in 1894 was the party able to elect its first deputy and various municipal councilors, and from that date on its representatives in the communes and in parliament have been increasing constantly.”<sup>37</sup> Similarly, an analyst of Chilean politics, writing in 1920, noted that the secret vote was a ‘great conquest’ when introduced 30 years previously.<sup>38</sup>

Hence, despite its deficiencies, mainly its incomplete suffrage due to the absence of gender equality in voting rights, Chilean politics began its experience with the rudiments of a democratic regime with the 1894 elections. Consequently, the focus of the analysis of the forces that intervened at the origins of Chilean democracy should be placed in the latter part of the nineteenth century, particularly, as noted previously, on the electoral reforms of 1874 expanding suffrage to literate men and of 1890 establishing the voting-day procedures to implement the secrecy of the vote.

This conclusion is certainly at odds with the assessment of Rueschemeyer et al. that the Chilean regime was, at best, a ‘competitive oligarchy’ before the 1920s.<sup>39</sup> They back up this characterization with an allusion to the role played by committees of the largest municipal taxpayers (rural notables, by implication) in the electoral process, which supposedly allowed them to manipulate the results of elections by controlling the extent of voter participation. As an example of this capacity, these authors contend that when ‘effective’ popular participation threatened to ‘escape’ the oligarchy’s ‘control’ in 1912, the taxpayer committees “decided to greatly reduce participation through the process of registration. The number of registered voters dropped from 598,000 in 1912 to 185,000 in 1915.”<sup>40</sup> If this was what actually happened, it would indeed be a sufficient reason to look for a later date at which to place the initial instauration

---

Tella, *Political Culture, Social Movements and Democratic Transitions in South America in the XXth Century* (Milano: Feltrinelli Editore, 1997), 70–3.

<sup>36</sup> Cited by Mario Góngora, *Ensayo sobre la noción de Estado en Chile en los siglos XIX y XX* (Santiago: Ediciones La Ciudad, 1981), 31.

<sup>37</sup> *Convención extraordinaria del Partido Demócrata* (Santiago: Imprenta y Encuadernación “La Universal,” 1922), XII.

<sup>38</sup> Silva de la Fuente, op. cit. n. 33, 439.

<sup>39</sup> Rueschemeyer et al., op. cit. n. 10, 306.

of a basically democratic regime in Chile. However, the Rueschemeyer et al. assessment is based on an inadequate understanding of the historical events. It is not true that the largest taxpayers on municipal treasury lists could slash the number of electoral registrations, or that the drop in the number of registered voters between the above-noted electoral years had the effect of favoring 'oligarchical' candidates as they imply.

Opponents of the government first resorted to using the largest rural and urban taxpayers on municipal treasury lists to generate committees in charge of administering electoral procedures through the 1874 electoral law.<sup>41</sup> The purpose of this initiative was to eliminate the influence of government agents in such procedures, given their constant interference over the years in favor of official candidacies. Following mechanisms set in the 1884 electoral law, the committees were elected by assemblies of the 30 to close to 60 (depending on the size of an electoral district's population) largest municipal taxpayers with proportional representation assuming, as apparently occurred in fact according to a contemporary observer, that this would ensure that they would include men of different partisan positions.<sup>42</sup> The electoral laws from 1884 on stipulated very strictly the manner in which committee members were to exercise their functions, establishing fines or imprisonment for noncompliance. The committees had no power to slash the electoral registries, nor to deny registration to those who solicited it without basing themselves on the law.

The sharp drop in voter registrations for the 1915 elections can only be explained in the light of changes in electoral laws. During the nineteenth century voters had to register during a two-week period in November before each electoral year. Legislators in 1890 decided to make the registry 'permanent' until a new law declared it invalid, with the consequence that by 1912 the electoral rolls included many names of voters who had deceased. This led to a discussion of the need to renew the registries, a matter that became highly politicized given the competitive nature of the Chilean party system. The result was a new electoral law approved by Congress and the President in 1914 (not by the largest municipal taxpayers!) which canceled all registrations and forced citizens to re-register, leading to a reduction in the number of registrants that went far beyond the elimination of the deceased from the rolls. It is most unlikely that this decline can be attributed to the political machinations of an economic oligarchy acting in the taxpayer-designated electoral committees, as Rueschemeyer et al. and their historiographical sources imply. Otherwise, why were the Liberal parties (which were led by upper-class individuals) the biggest losers of votes as a proportion of the total between 1912 and 1915, and why did the Democratic

---

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. See also Evelyne Huber and John Stephens, "Conclusion: Agrarian Structure and Political Power in Comparative Perspective" in Huber and Safford, op. cit. n. 10, 190.

<sup>41</sup> The assumption in Arturo Valenzuela, *Political Brokers in Chile: Local Government in a Centralized Polity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1977) that such committees were created between 1912 and 1915 in order to control the expansion of popular participation, 214, is incorrect. Rueschemeyer et al. base themselves in part on this source.

<sup>42</sup> See Jermán Hidalgo Revilla, *Estudio crítico comparativo de la lei de elecciones de 1884* (Santiago: Imprenta de la Librería Americana, 1885), 9, 34.

Party (the main party associated with working-class groups) as well as the Radical Party (which had links to middle-class and some popular organizations) score at the same time important increases in their shares of the vote?<sup>43</sup> Moreover, if the taxpayer committees had acted in ways that altered the electoral results, contemporary observers, especially those of the left, would have denounced them. However, there is no record of such denunciations in, for instance, the four-volume collection of labor and leftist leader Luis E. Recabarren's letters and articles covering the full extent of his political career, in which he refers on numerous occasions to elections and to his own electoral campaigns.<sup>44</sup> Consequently, the best explanations for this drop in the registries are the simplest ones: many voters did not bother to re-register, were unable to do so because of time constraints, or were unaware that they had to do so. Registrations of voters for the Democratic and Radical Parties suffered proportionally less because their voters tended to be better connected to social organizations.

In sum, the characterization in Rueschemeyer et al. of the Chilean system as a 'competitive oligarchy' on the basis of their assessment of the taxpayers' committees should be discarded, and the inception of an incomplete suffrage democracy in Chile may be set in the 1890s.

### **The Democratizing Influence of the Conservative Party**

The fact that Conservative Party legislators, who supposedly represented the landowning 'aristocracy,' were the prime movers of the 1874 and 1890 reforms against the wishes of Liberal Presidents certainly does not fit the image that is painted of these political forces in the Moorian interpretation of Chile. Naturally, the Conservatives can be viewed as seeking to enfranchise in 1874 'their' rural dependents in order to have them vote for their favored candidates and, true enough, the occupational distribution of the individuals who registered to vote in 1878 does show

---

<sup>43</sup> The vote for various Liberal parties declined from 54 to 42.4% while the Democratic share went from 4.8% to 7.9% and that of the Radicals from 16.6 to 21.2%. The Conservative vote remained the same at about 21%. A new Socialist Workers Party obtained 0.4%. See Ricardo Cruz Coke, *Geografía electoral de Chile* (Santiago: Editorial del Pacífico, 1952), 53. For figures that show the decline from 14.2% to 7.6% of the National Party (a group also associated with the economic elites that Cruz Coke includes in the liberal category), see Germán Urzúa Valenzuela, *Historia política de Chile y su evolución electoral (desde 1810 a 1992)* (Santiago: Editorial Jurídica de Chile), 383–4.

<sup>44</sup> See Cruzat and Deves, op. cit. n. 33.

In 1925 a permanent electoral registry office was organized by the central state, and civil servants and notary publics substituted the largest contributors to municipal treasuries in the registration of voters. This was, after all, the most time-consuming task. The individuals in charge of the voting tables on election day and of the initial count of votes were henceforth chosen by lot by the electoral registry officials and the notaries. However, the 1925 law stipulated that the drawing had to be conducted among individuals who were preferably proprietors, professionals, or those who paid income tax (article 34 of law 14.279 of 1925). Again, the notion was that such individuals had to have higher education than the average voter in order to man the voting tables and count the votes initially. As far as I know, this change in procedure was not seen at the time as anything but a technical one; it is even more than likely that many of the same

an enormous increase in the number who were classified as working in agriculture.<sup>45</sup> But if prior to democratization the political system was an autocracy controlled by the large landowners, as noted in the Moorian literature, then why would the Conservatives have any political need to eliminate the income specifications to vote in order to enfranchise their rural dependents? Moreover, assuming they needed this measure for some reason such as to better resist the challenge of the 'rising' bourgeoisie, middle class, and popular groups, why did they not eliminate the literacy requirement altogether, given the higher proportions of illiteracy in the rural areas? This would have allowed them to stuff the ballot boxes with much larger numbers of their dependents dragged to the polls for the occasion, just as the Moorian interpretation reports they did. And yet, if the Conservatives' intent was to force their rural dependents to vote for their favored candidates, why did they make such an effort to convince, successfully, the legislators in 1890 to ensure the secrecy of the vote by introducing the secret chamber at the polling places and by obliging voters to place their ballots in officially provided envelopes?<sup>46</sup> These questions

---

approximately six thousand individuals in charge of vote reception and vote counting before this change continued to do so after it.

<sup>45</sup> While basing himself on figures in Valenzuela, *Democratización vía reforma*, op. cit. n. 2, 118, this is the argument presented by Arnold Bauer, "Chilean Rural Society and Politics in Comparative Perspective" in Cristóbal Kay and Patricio Silva, eds., *Development and Social Change in the Chilean Countryside: From the Pre-Land Reform Period to the Democratic Transition* (Amsterdam: CEDLA, 1992), as well as in his "Landlord and Campesino in the Chilean Road to Democracy" in Huber and Safford, op. cit. n. 10. The questionable aspect of this interpretation is that it continues to identify Conservatives with landowner interests.

If the number of registered voters who were employed in agriculture increased greatly after 1874, this was because the population was largely rural, and it was the one that had the greatest difficulty before the law changed in *proving* that it met the income requirements despite their low levels.

<sup>46</sup> From the very first electoral laws, Chilean legislation called for a 'secret' vote, but the actual voting procedures did not guarantee it until 1890.

It is impossible to understand why Rueschemeyer et al., op. cit. n. 10, 305 and elsewhere, insist that Chile did not have an effective 'secret ballot' until 1958, while they argue that Argentina had it after the application of the 1912 Saenz-Peña law. In fact, Chile's voting procedures on the day of the election anticipated *in a stricter* way those adopted in Argentina with this law by over two decades! If these procedures did not generate a secret ballot in Chile, how could the laxer version adopted in Argentina have done so? The difference that made the protection of secrecy stricter in Chile was the following: voters in Argentina had to sign the envelope they received from the head of the voting table before they went to the secret chamber to put their vote into it. This was the main voter identification system although, as a result, all envelopes in the vote reception box were signed by the voters (or marked with a cross if they were illiterate, or with their thumb print if voter identity was questioned). It was therefore possible for vote counters to know how individual voters had voted by looking at the signatures before opening the envelopes. By contrast, in Chile voters had to sign the voting table's list of voters, which formed part of its official acts, a signature that was compared for identification purposes with that in the voter registry. The envelopes were not supposed to have any marks other than the official one. The reason for this difference lies in the fact that in Argentina the voting tables did not have voter registry lists with signatures, as the registry was established by drawing it from the military draft records.

For a reference to the signature, cross, or thumb print required of Argentinean voters on the envelopes, see Carlos Malamud Rikles, *Partidos políticos y elecciones en la Argentina: La Liga del Sur (1908–1916)* (Madrid: UNED, 1997), 202.

Moreover, although illiterates could vote in Argentina, no provision was made for them to be able to choose among the ballots of the different candidates, whose names were all printed in

point to elements that cannot be reconciled with the Moorian interpretation of Chile's political history. The fact that Irarrázabal and some of his Conservative colleagues in Congress were landowners in a peripheral capitalist national society does contradict, in addition, the extended version of Moore's model presented by Allub.<sup>47</sup> Assuming that the personal class position of actors makes them representatives of their class interests, such Conservative figures were nonetheless in favor of pivotal changes promoting democratization.

Is it correct to present the Chilean Conservatives as the organized political extension of landed interests? Although the landowners within the party leadership could be found defending laws and policies that favored agricultural interests—together with others of their own or other parties who were and were not landowners—to depict the Conservatives as a party essentially devoted to defending large landed interests is totally misleading. The Conservative party emerged in 1856–7 from the first important manifestation of the state versus Church cleavage that for a long period was the driving polarity in the Chilean party system. It was the main party of Catholic defense, often more extreme in its positions than the clergy itself, against the secularizing forces that dominated Chilean politics. It would perhaps have been better for the party's historical image if it had called itself the 'Catholic' or even the 'Center Party,' as did the party of Catholic defense that emerged in Germany two decades later.<sup>48</sup> Like the Zentrum, Chilean Conservatives were a cross-class party that was well organized in the cities as well as in the most Catholic of the rural areas. They were also sensitive to social issues, and in this sense they were a centrist force unlike Liberals, although the irony is that given their label analysts have made the opposite assumption. Conservatives were often chided by their opponents for their lack of 'progressivism,' but this referred to their positions regarding the religious and educational issues that divided them. By the 1860s and 1870s Conservatives became engaged in social action among the laboring poor, although the involvement of Catholics in Church-related beneficence activities, in which many women, in particular, participated, began earlier.<sup>49</sup> By the

---

letters or required the ability to write them in. Hence, the openness of the Argentinean system to voter choice by illiterates was highly questionable.

I thank Carlos Malamud for his further clarification of the Argentinean voting system in a private communication of 5 February 1999.

<sup>47</sup> See supra, n. 19.

<sup>48</sup> Gabriela Mistral was well aware of this misnomer. See Eduardo Frei Montalva, *Memorias (1911–1934) y correspondencias con Gabriela Mistral y Jacques Maritain* (Santiago: Colección Espejo de Chile, 1989), 131.

As a party of Catholic defense the Zentrum was more strongly influenced by the clergy than the Chilean Conservatives. See Margaret Lavinia Anderson, "Clerical Election Influence and Communal Solidarity: Catholic Political Culture in the German Empire, 1871–1914" in Posada-Carbó, ed., *Elections before Democracy*, op. cit. n. 26. On this difference between the Conservatives and the Zentrum, see Erika Maza Valenzuela and J. Samuel Valenzuela, "Rethinking the Impact of Catholicism on Party Politics and Social Institutions in Nineteenth-Century Chile," paper presented at the VIth Nineteenth-Century History Workshop on The Politics of Religion at the Institute of Latin American Studies, University of London, 22 May 1998, 11.

<sup>49</sup> See Maza Valenzuela, "Catolicismo, anticlericalismo, y la extensión del sufragio," op. cit. n. 31, 137–95.

late nineteenth century the party had created mutual aid societies and cooperatives for working-class men and women, both in urban and in rural areas. The Conservative Party was also an important sponsor of Chile's social legislation, including what became the main legal framework for worker unionization, and the first to advocate women's suffrage.<sup>50</sup> In sum, given the profile of its activities, national reach, and positions, to associate the Chilean Conservative party with landowner interests, even if important landowners, some from socially prominent families, were among its leaders, is a far fetched even if widely accepted notion. The literature discussed here, including Moore's analysis, neglects consideration of political cleavages other than class, and this becomes a significant limitation when analyzing political development in cases where other cleavages—such as the Church-state conflict that had a major impact on Chilean party politics—are important.

### **Were Rural Voters Coerced?**

Despite the important vote the Conservative Party obtained in cities, especially in Santiago, one of the areas where it consistently obtained a larger than average proportion of electoral support was in the rural Central Valley, where conspicuous Conservative landowners had their properties, and in Llanquihue province where Catholic Germans settled in the mid-nineteenth century. This has contributed to the image of the party as rurally based. Nonetheless, the Liberal Party also drew important support from rural Central Valley areas, even if its electorate fluctuated more from one election to the other. Liberals also had an important electorate in Southern agricultural areas such as Malleco and Cautín provinces. The anticlerical Radical Party obtained significant numbers of rural votes as well in Southern provinces but was very weak outside the main urban areas in the Central Valley.<sup>51</sup> The fact that the rural populations of these areas voted for these parties has stimulated the already-mentioned notion that peasants were forced to vote for the candidates chosen by landowners. This image has been especially significant in connection with the Conservative Party, given the regularity of its rural support in the most characteristic and richest agricultural section of the country. It is buttressed by the many reports of electoral agents who vaunted their success in electing their candidates by transporting rural voters to the polls, resorting to economic 'incentives'—described by their opponents as vote buying—and using various strategies that were supposed to provide confirmation that such voters did what was expected of them in the secret chamber.<sup>52</sup> Naturally, in the agents' view the results were explained by their efforts, a point that justified their own emoluments. Similarly, their opponents focused on these agents' role in mobilizing rural voters in order to explain and justify

---

<sup>50</sup> The first Conservative to advocate women's suffrage publicly did so in 1865. Maza Valenzuela, 151–55.

<sup>51</sup> In addition to Urzúa Valenzuela, op. cit. n. 43, see Cruz Coke, op. cit. n. 45, chap. 5, for a description of the areas of strength of Chilean parties.

<sup>52</sup> For a balanced presentation of this aspect of voter mobilization, see Federico Gil, *The Political System of Chile* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1966), 223–4.

their own lack of success in obtaining more electoral support from the rural populace. Hence, both the political agents and their opponents agreed, in the end, in projecting an image of passive rural voters, who did not express their own preferences at the polls but rather simply followed orders or instructions. Given such a coincidence of views from opposing sides, this bit of Chilean political folklore has been accepted as a fundamental truth in basically all analysis of the nation's politics, from observers to social scientists.

However, could it not be the case that voters in rural areas supported willingly the candidates who received important majorities in rural districts? The notion that peasant voter choices were the product of trickery or coercion stems from the unstated assumption that their natural inclination would be to vote for the left, i.e., following their supposed class interest. But many lower-class voters, even unionized industrial workers, do not express their preferences at the voting booth in this manner. There is the possibility of a deferential vote: if in England, why not in Chile.<sup>53</sup> This kind of voting probably benefited landowners of all persuasions. All rural workers were free to move, and those remaining in the countryside can be expected to have seen greater benefits than disadvantages in their situation and to have had a more favorable evaluation of their superiors. Otherwise they probably would have joined the massive migration from rural to urban areas that transformed Chile from an overwhelmingly rural country in 1875 to a majority urban one by 1930 and that reduced the rural population to about of fifth of the total by 1970.

In addition, where, as in Chile, political identities were formed on the basis of factors other than class, class voting was much less important. Since the rural populations of the Central Valley (and of the Catholic German settlement in Llanquihue) lived in the most densely Catholic part of Chile, and (in particular) since Conservative landowners built chapels, sponsored schools run by religious orders, celebrated religious holidays and patron saint days, etc., it is more than likely, given the mobility of the rural work force, that their stable dependents were as well committed Catholics.<sup>54</sup> This would explain why the Conservative rural vote was more consistent than that of the other parties. Is it not understandable that peasants in the densely Catholic areas would vote willingly for candidates of the Conservative Party, as did most devoted Catholics in other parts of Chile before 1930?<sup>55</sup> Social networks built around religion reinforced this process by creating stronger than normal ties among the rural inhabitants.

---

<sup>53</sup> On the notion of 'deference,' see Walter Bagehot, *The English Constitution* (London: Fontana Press, 1993), 248–52, first published 1867. On deference among English urban workers, see Robert T. McKenzie and Allan Silver, *Angles in Marble* (London: Heinemann, 1968), and among English rural workers see Howard Newby, *The Deferential Worker: A Study of Farm Workers in East Anglia* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1979).

<sup>54</sup> José Bengoa, *Historia social de la agricultura chilena*, Vol. 2, *Haciendas y campesinos* (Santiago: Ediciones SUR, 1990), 90–5, describes the social setting of large haciendas owned by committed Catholics. He notes that owners created schools for boys and girls, mutual aid societies, pension schemes, and cooperatives for the workforce. See also 36–7.

<sup>55</sup> Francisco Undurraga, a Conservative landowner, provides an illustration of the importance of the Catholic vote in rural areas as he describes the way he campaigned for a Deputy seat in 1900

The common practice of offering voters certain ‘incentives,’ mentioned as a significant tool in the coercive arsenal, does not alter this analysis. In fact, vote buying indicated that voters were indeed not coerced as much as enticed. It cannot be argued that all voters who lined up to receive a compensation voted the way they did only because they were paid, although this has been assumed in the literature under discussion here.<sup>56</sup> In fact, that was probably less likely than the following three additional possibilities. First, the payment only made the difference between actually voting and deciding to abstain; hence, the money compensated for the costs associated with going to the polls, which were often quite distant, or simply gave the voter a needed incentive to vote. Second, voters, at least the poorer ones, may have lined up to collect money from candidates for whom they would have voted willingly in any case, payment or no payment. And third, voters may have taken the money but voted, nonetheless, for another candidate. The latter possibility must have been common enough at the turn of the century to prompt a contemporary observer to note that “there are voters who sell themselves to one or another [candidate], and to whoever is willing to pay, without it being clear, in the end, for what party they actually voted.”<sup>57</sup> This comment certainly does not fit the image of vote buying as part of a widespread system of voter coercion and does implicitly reaffirm the fact that the voting procedures, following the 1890 electoral law, permitted the secrecy of the vote.

### **Were Landed Interests ‘Hegemonic’ and Based on ‘Labor Repressive’ Practices?**

It would be a gross simplification to claim that Chile had a distinct class of landowners at the top of its social pyramid at any point in the nineteenth century. The nation’s economy always drew its most important capital accumulations from mining exports. During the period that authors most frequently identify with the unrivaled hegemony of landowners, namely the 1830s to the early 1860s, the value of mining exports were in fact an average of about three times larger than those of agriculture.<sup>58</sup> Consequently, Villalobos states an obvious conclusion in asserting that the overwhelming majority of the largest fortunes in Chile by the 1870s were derived from a ‘bourgeois’ origin, namely from mining, commerce, industry, and finance.<sup>59</sup> He also notes that the fusion of landholding and ‘bourgeois’ families began very early on, was a continuous process,

---

by passing out leaflets during Sunday mass. Francisco R. Undurraga V., *Recuerdos de 80 años (1855–1943)* (Santiago: Imprenta El Imparcial, 1943), 146–7.

<sup>56</sup> Gil, op. cit. n. 52, 224, does not make this facile assumption.

<sup>57</sup> Juan Bautista González R., *Revisión de la ley electoral; O sea observaciones sobre algunos artículos de la Ley de Elecciones de 20 de agosto de 1890 con la reforma de 18 febrero de 1896* (Santiago: Imprenta y Encuadernación Aurora, 1900), 20. This is a thesis for the degree of Licenciado in the Faculty of Law and Political Science of the University of Chile.

<sup>58</sup> Calculated from República de Chile, *Estadística comercial correspondiente al año de 1875* (Valparaíso: Imprenta del Universo de G. Helfman, 1876), 570 and 573. The precise factor is 3.09 and refers to the years 1844 to 1861.

<sup>59</sup> Sergio Villalobos, *Origen y ascenso de la burguesía chilena* (Santiago: Editorial Universitaria, 1987), 58.

and that by the War of the Pacific (1879) it was “very advanced if not complete.”<sup>60</sup> The richest families invested as well in land or acquired it through marriages. Moreover, the most prominent landholders, given their other, more profitable ventures, were not dependent on the income they received from the land, and they held it for uses other than agriculture. It could be used as a hedge against inflation, a significant feature of the Chilean economy since the 1870s. It served as the easiest way to obtain credit for other investments, as most credit in the nineteenth century was in the form of mortgages over fixed assets. It was a means to control access to mineral deposits that might be found eventually. Such deposits could be exploited by anybody who found and maintained a continuous operation to extract them; land titles did not grant automatic claims to minerals under the soil following Chilean legislation legated from the colony, thereby making access to possible mineral resources a matter of crucial importance. Land could also be held to control access to water and to forests, elements used not only for agricultural purposes but also for mineral enterprises. The importance of water, forests, and possible mineral resources explains to a large extent why the large estates held so much land in hills and mountains that had little if no agricultural use themselves, acreage that made the estates so large. Land was also used to plant vineyards to produce quality wines, which added to a family's prestige in Chile and abroad, and for recreational purposes since upper-class families spent summers in the countryside while residing the rest of the year in Santiago. Agricultural production on the estates, aside from that of the labor service tenants, was usually turned over to an administrator, while certain sections could also be rented out. Hence, the large estates were in many cases not viewed by their owners primarily as agricultural enterprises.

As the owners of most large estates did not derive their income primarily from agriculture, it cannot be asserted that their economic position was dependent on extracting a surplus from service tenants or from the rural workers who were hired when needed. However, a main concern for owners was that their landholdings not be money losers, and this meant that cash payments to the work force were best kept to a minimum. With their large surface and as long as agricultural land values and rural property taxes remained as low as they did until the 1950s, it was easy and much more rational to pay, at least in part, for labor services in land.<sup>61</sup> Such land benefits (*regalías*) were not only a feature of the compensation given to the *inquilino* (who was, for this reason, more a renter than an agricultural worker) but were also common practice to pay for the services of everyone else in the enterprise, from the accountant and company store manager to the administrator. For example, Bengoa indicates that a Central Valley estate in 1910 gave the administrator, the effective head of the enterprise given the absentee owner or

---

<sup>60</sup> Villalobos, 110.

<sup>61</sup> Bengoa, op. cit. n. 54, 37–8, refers to the low profits derived from the land and therefore the interest of owners in running an enterprise with the least possible monetary costs.

owners, a little over seven acres of irrigated land for growing vegetables, a little less than two acres of wheat, and the right to graze ten animals in addition to twenty pesos a day.<sup>62</sup>

This meant that there was agriculture of very different intensities in the large rural estates. With the exception of vines and a few other specialty crops such as ornamental plants, usually tended by trained personnel, the most extensive as well as the least productive use of the land was generally that which was tilled for the direct benefit of the estate owner or owners. The large estates used low technology, given the lack of interest of owners in investing in their rural operations when higher profits could be drawn elsewhere. Labor for such areas was provided at times of harvest by hired hands and more permanently during the year by the *inquilino*, who more often than not hired someone else to fulfill the labor service he exchanged for the land he used. For instance, in one very detailed study of an agricultural valley just north of Santiago, the authors found that 90% of the *inquilinos* hired other people to do the work they were supposed to do for the hacienda, half of whom were not related to the *inquilino*.<sup>63</sup> The *inquilino* had better things to do than to work for the estate: he and his family were best off devoting energies to the intensive cultivation of their plot, to raising animals, and to selling the excess on the town market if not the estate warehouse.<sup>64</sup> The *inquilino* was at the top of the dependent rural population hierarchy, and it was the advantages of this position (a doubtful one from the point of view of an efficient agricultural enterprise) that dictated the fact that so many *inquilinos* remained on the estates. Bauer notes that the labor service tenantry disappeared much later in Chile than elsewhere, as neither estate owners nor *inquilinos* had much interest in abolishing it. The market pressures that began in the 1950s were the ones that eventually did away with the service tenantry.<sup>65</sup> The more efficiency was essential in order to succeed with an agricultural enterprise, the less resort there was to the *inquilino* as a source of labor. Hence, it is hard to maintain that a labor arrangement that gave *inquilinos* greater advantages than those they would have had as paid agricultural workers or as industrial workers corresponded to a 'labor repressive' form of agriculture. The *inquilinos* were connected to a broader national labor market for unskilled or semiskilled workers but chose to stay on the farms. Bengoa notes that *inquilinos* who were, circa 1920, literally next to Santiago's expanding outer streets remained on the farm even though they earned slightly less than industrial workers in monetary terms. He calculates the *inquilinos*' compensation at 3.6 pesos a day, including nonmonetary payments, while an industrial worker at the time earned 4.5

---

<sup>62</sup> Bengoa, 94.

<sup>63</sup> Rafael Baraona, Ximena Aranda, Roberto Santana, *Valle de Putaendo: Estudio de Estructura Agraria* (Santiago: Instituto de Geografía de la Universidad de Chile, 1961), 235. The authors concluded that the *inquilinaje* hides a "rental of land paid for in money" and that the *inquilino* had for this reason no interest in seeing agricultural wages rise, 237.

<sup>64</sup> The Santiago food market, the largest in the country, was supplied almost entirely by small producers, many of whom were in fact working on lands owned by the large landowners, either as *inquilinos*, or *medieros* (share croppers). See Bengoa, *Historia Social*, op. cit. n. 54, 38.

<sup>65</sup> Bauer, "Chilean Rural Society," op. cit. n. 45, 22–30.

pesos. But the quality of life and security of the *inquilino* were preferable to those of the urban worker, who could become unemployed.<sup>66</sup>

All of these points undermine the appropriateness of viewing the Chilean case from the perspective of the previously mentioned literature and therefore cast doubt on the adequacy of seeing a confirmation of Moore's antidemocratic class constellation in this case. However, perhaps Moore's analysis can be applied in the opposite way, i.e., by noting that the Chilean case contains a confirmation of his prodemocratic class constellation.

### **Moore's Prodemocratic Class Constellation in Chile?**

This scenario is in many ways more plausible than the previous one. If the richest families in the country drew their main income from mining, banking, and commerce ever since the eighteenth century, this means that the fact that they also owned the largest rural estates did not make them a typical landowning class. The rural estates complemented their patrimony, furnished them a political base in the provinces, and served recreational and other purposes. It made little economic sense to invest heavily in agriculture, and the means to prevent the rural estates from becoming a drag on the family resources had to be found. This explains puzzling aspects of the Chilean rural sector in its grandest Central Valley setting: the slow adoption of new technology for producing staple crops and the widespread use of nonwage compensations for employees and field workers. Such a context points to a central conclusion in Moore's terms: the Chilean bourgeoisie and its interests were the dominant—not the weaker—element in the nation's upper class, and this is, of course, a major component of Moore's prodemocratic class constellation. To it must be added that 'lord' and 'peasant' relations can hardly be described in the strict or expanded senses of the term as 'labor repressive.' With the potential mobility of its laborers (including the *inquilinos*) who were therefore part of the larger labor market in the national economy, and with the fact that large landowners did not 'depend' on low wage labor for their prominent positions in the Chilean economy as it was derived from other investments, the nation's agriculture despite its peculiarities was closer to Moore's 'commercial' type.

Moreover, Chile never had a strong aristocratic component in its social structure as did the European and Asian cases Moore discusses. The colonial aristocracy (in the literal sense of individuals with hereditary titles of nobility associated with entailed dominions) was extremely small. It had grown to only 27 families (or 20 judging from the repetition of certain patronymics) by the end of the eighteenth-century.<sup>67</sup> The legal framework of the Spanish American colonies was designed to maximize the power of the central state, not to facilitate the development of local or regional powers under nobilities of various grades. The crown was suspicious of American-

---

<sup>66</sup> Bengoa, op. cit. n. 54, 64–5.

<sup>67</sup> See Arnold Bauer, *Chilean Rural Society from the Spanish Conquest to 1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 17.

born notables, whatever their titular pretensions, and nobility did not guarantee a role in the colonial state as the main officials were, exceptions aside, of peninsular background. Titles of nobility

were sought by prominent eighteenth-century families, many of them new to the country, as a means to enhance their social status, but it was not easy to have them recognized unless proof could be shown of a direct lineage to Spanish nobility nor to obtain much respect from the colonial authorities after receiving them. Indicative of this state of affairs was the fact that the richest of Chilean nobles, a count, had to request in writing in a long and drawn-out process that the authorities address him as 'Señoría.'<sup>68</sup> The small group of nobles at the eve of independence was also composed largely of new blood. Only five of them descended from the 164 Spanish settlers who had received Indian labor and land from the crown before 1655.<sup>69</sup> The essential origin of the nobility's fortunes came from commerce, not from their landed estates.<sup>70</sup> Bauer's assessment, against that of McBride, is that the entails had very little impact on Chilean rural society and that their final abolition was an event of minor significance.<sup>71</sup> By the early decades of independence most families of noble background, having lost their titles with the advent of the republic, were eager to disentail their estates so that they could have access to mortgage credit.

Neither did colonial Chile ever develop the elaborate relations of dominion and vassalage that emerged in medieval Europe, and the principle '*nulle terre sans seigneur*' was never applied. Hence, the many references in Chilean historiography to the 'seigneurial relations' established in the rural world by the 'aristocracy' of landowners overseeing a subject peasantry constitute inappropriate images. Chilean *inquilinos* did not have to pay homage to any lords, were never bound to the land as were Central European serfs until the nineteenth century, nor did they have to pay or fulfill any of the multiple dues, corvées, strictures and obligations associated with the French seigneurie.<sup>72</sup> Although French peasants had been free of serfdom for centuries and hence could move, by the eighteenth century virtually every plot of land was still connected to the rights of a lord, often recently ennobled from having bought his title and its rights. Sometimes peasants were obligated to several of them, given the bits and pieces where they labored as employees, renters, share croppers, or even as proprietors. Tocqueville captured the latter's predicament, revealing the fundamental inequalities of status of the ancien régime, when he referred to a prototypical peasant who manages, after years of savings, to buy his own piece of land: "to acquire it, he had to pay a right, not to the government, but to other proprietors in the

---

<sup>68</sup> Villalobos, op. cit. n. 59, 37, who refers to the *Conde de la Conquista*.

Mateo de Toro Zambrano y Ureta acquired the title in 1770, soon after buying the huge estate of 'La Compañía' that had belonged to the Jesuits. He claimed, incorrectly, to be a descendant of Juan de Toro, a sixteenth-century conqueror from Trujillo in Extremadura. See Retamal Favereau, Celis Atria, and Muñoz Correa, op. cit. n. 2, 622–37 and 632, for an account of the false genealogical claim.

<sup>69</sup> Bauer, *Chilean Rural Society from the Spanish Conquest*, op. cit. n. 67, 17.

<sup>70</sup> See Villalobos, op. cit. n. 59, 19–20, who summarizes research on this question.

<sup>71</sup> McBride, *Chile*, op. cit. n. 25, 200; Bauer, *Chilean Rural Society from the Spanish Conquest*, op. cit. n. 67, 20–1.

<sup>72</sup> For an elaborate account of the many facets of this institution and its remarkable resilience, see Roland E. Mousnier, *Les Institutions de France sous la monarchie absolue, 1598–1789*, Vol. 1, *Société et État* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1974), chap. 11.

area who were just as removed from public affairs and just as powerless as he. Once he finally possesses the land, he sinks his heart as well as his grain in it. This little piece of land belongs to him... And yet, the same neighbors show up to remove him from his field to make him work elsewhere without pay. If he wants to defend his seedlings against the animals they hunt, they are there to prevent him from doing so. The same people wait for him to demand a toll when he goes across the river. He confronts them again when he goes to market, as they sell him a right to sell his own produce. And when, after returning home, he wants to consume what remains of his own wheat, this wheat that grew under his eyes and by his own hands, he cannot do it unless he first sends it to be ground in the mill and cooked in the ovens of these same people.”<sup>73</sup> The ‘proprietors,’ ‘neighbors,’ or ‘people’ in this passage were of course Lords.

The Chilean small proprietors, share croppers, *inquilinos*, or hired laborers never faced such a situation. The *encomiendas* were a forced labor system, but as noted by Góngora this institution had largely been abandoned by the early eighteenth century, given the cost of maintaining not only the laborer himself but also his family.<sup>74</sup> Góngora adds that the institution of the *inquilino* did not stem from the *encomienda* but emerged from land rental arrangements that had become common in the eighteenth century. At that point *inquilinos* paid a canon in kind or in money, and it is only later, as markets for agriculture expanded, that this payment was substituted for labor service.<sup>75</sup> Given this origin, the service tenantry was derived from an arrangement that was basically market driven rather than one that contained forcible impositions on individuals who occupied a formally defined inferior social status. The use of slaves in Chilean agriculture was not widespread before abolition.

The fact that Chile also had a large segment of medium to small rural properties (i.e., economically viable family holdings) within its main agricultural area (from Copiapó to Chillán) contributes another important element to a Moorish prodemocratic constellation.<sup>76</sup> This group was more significant in the nineteenth century than it was in the twentieth, as small properties became smaller and smaller given the effects of inheritance laws. Unlike the large proprietors, medium to small landholding families did not have enough assets to prevent the division of the land either by having a family member buy others out, by having only one person inherit the land while other siblings received other family assets, or by co-owning estates that were large enough for all. The existence of this segment in rural society, to which can be added those who rented

---

<sup>73</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville, *L’Ancien régime et la révolution* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1967), 96. My translation.

<sup>74</sup> Mario Góngora, *Origen de los ‘inquilinos’ de Chile Central* (Santiago: Editorial Universitaria, 1960), 68–71.

<sup>75</sup> Góngora, *Origen*, see especially 72–3, 85, 98.

<sup>76</sup> McBride discusses the independent small rural producer in chapter VIII. He indicates that in Central Chile there were, in 1925, 8,888 farms of 21 to 50 hectares (a size that would be considered relatively large in most areas of Western Europe) and 19,568 of between 5 and 20 hectares, *op. cit.* n. 25, 235. These were all ample enough (depending on the soil and topography) to generate a marketable income for families.

agricultural properties, meant that Chile did have a significant population of independent peasants. Such producers practiced intensive agriculture, and those who were in the proximity of the towns and villages were the main suppliers to the local markets.<sup>77</sup> As a result, they did relate to urban social and economic life, and in the nineteenth century many would have been enrolled in the National Guard and would, for this reason, have been part of the electorate of the time.

This alternative way of interpreting the Chilean class equation leads, once more, to question why the above-noted authors thought that the country needed a 'bourgeois revolution.' However, although it is probably more plausible than the former one, it is also insufficient as an explanation for democratization of the country's political institutions by the turn of the century. By remaining within the framework of a class-based analysis, it cannot explain why the state versus Church cleavage played such a fundamental role in creating the pressure for the above-noted democratizing reforms.

It is also hard to explain a process of democratization through reforms, as occurred in Chile, without examining the influence of institutional definitions accepted by the political players. This leads to a different kind of 'structuralism' in the sense that actors are powerfully constrained in their actions, constraints that result from the development and change of norms, common understandings, and organizational capacities. For instance, the expansion of the electorate in 1874 resulted from a law that the government of the time resisted but was forced to accept given the fact that a majority of the legislature voted for it. While the executive power could at the time determine the composition of the legislature through its control of elections, the legislators were elected for fixed terms of office, and the president did not have the right to dissolve Congress and call for new elections. This meant that legislators could become staunch opponents of the executive after they were installed in their seats, although they had little chance of reelection if they did so. The pressure to change the electoral rules resulted from the fact that the Conservatives moved to the opposition after benefiting, given their prior coalition with the incumbent president, from official interference on their behalf in the congressional elections of 1872. Knowing that they could no longer count on the executive's help for the next election, they formed a coalition with other opponents—even anticlerical ones—in order to change the rules of the electoral game to try to prevent the executive from composing his congressional majorities through electoral interference. The reform therefore resulted from an elementary calculation of political survival, but it was made possible given the prior institutional definitions: members of Congress were secure in their seats until the next election (unlike parliamentarians in many monarchical constitutions such as Brazil's), and they could form a majority to bend presidential wishes. However, as a constitutional change at the time required approval by two legislatures, the electoral provisions in the constitution could not be altered only through a majority vote in one legislative period. This is the reason a Conservative legislator, Zorobabel Rodríguez, devised the

---

<sup>77</sup> McBride interviews one such producer on the train, 232–3.

formula that eliminated the income requirements to vote with the legal presumption that those who knew how to read and write had the necessary income to be enfranchised. This formula circumvented the income requirements in the constitution but at the cost of keeping its literacy provision; hence, even if the Conservatives had wanted to eliminate the literacy requirement altogether, they could not have done so. Such a change would have required reforming the constitution, but Rodríguez and his colleagues would surely not have been members of the second legislature required to approve it.

**Conclusion:  
Elements of an Institutional-Organizational Approach to Democratization**

This paper has shown that the Chilean case challenges the adequacy of viewing democratization through the Moorian lens of class relations. On the one hand, if Chilean history is cast into the widely prevalent Moorian view summarized above, it turns out on closer examination of the evidence that the leaderships that pressed for democratic reforms were precisely those that, given their class backgrounds, should have been antidemocratic. This feature is what makes the Chilean case a particularly useful test case for Moore's model, because there is no other case quite like it in continental Europe. For reasons that have to do with the attachment of landed nobilities to monarchies and their armies, and in addition in Catholic countries, to the republican and anticlerical positions to which democratic ideals were linked, such nobles, even when they did not resort to labor repressive practices in the strict sense of the term, were indeed opposed to the advance of democracies. By showing that individuals occupying the same class positions pressed for democracy, the Chilean case indicates that other variables must be used to explain the landed nobility's opposition to it in continental Europe. Rather than drawing this conclusion from the evidence, however, Rueschemeyer et al. preferred to resolve the challenge raised by the Chilean case by resorting to the highly questionable notion that it did not achieve 'full democracy' until 1970. They therefore retained the validity of Moore's model by adding one more distortion to the Moorian interpretation of Chilean history.

On the other hand, if the interpretation of Chilean history were rewritten in order to present landowners as prodemocratic given the fact that they relied on 'commercial' agriculture and were basically subordinate to more powerful financial and mining ('bourgeois') interests, this would still not validate Moore's model. The Chilean anomaly would then become the fact that a cleavage other than class, namely, the effort to defend Catholicism and the place of the Church in state and society, provided the motivating force for what became democratizing change. Moore's model would also fall short, as it does in most other cases, in the sense that it does not provide the conceptual tools to capture additional important elements leading to Chilean democratization, namely, the presence of a state that could not be challenged by force, of party organizations, and of institutional features in the preexisting regime that made it amenable to democratic reform.

Hence, Moore's model (though not his own historical discussion) is both too rigid in its emphasis on class and too narrow given its neglect of other factors.

These deficiencies point to the need to examine regime formation with a different approach. Its basic point of departure for the analysis of the development and instauration of democratic institutions should be the notion that they are the result of "critical historical moments in which the balance of political forces tilts in favor of elites and social forces of often very different ideologies, who press for democratic institutions in the expectation that they will be advantageous for consolidating or increasing their power, safeguarding their interests, and/or resolving in the least costly manner a political crisis."<sup>78</sup> This places the accent on the agency of political actors, some of whom may not even be ideologically committed to a democratic outcome.

At the onset of most processes of democratization it is possible to identify tensions and conflicts that arise given the capacity of the state to penetrate society, injuring collective or individual interests, and the authoritarian nature of the way the regime is organized, including its disregard for individual rights of all kinds. This implies that the state has indeed developed to the degree that it makes a difference, and hence democratization is spurred by the consolidation of state authority. State initiatives lead to the realization by social and political actors that it is necessary to alter the institutional definitions of the regime in order to have an influence over the way state policies are formulated and even to place limits on the way they are implemented. Such actors may reflect any of a wide variety of interests, including of course class interests. While the religious/secular divide may have been instrumental in Chile, in other settings leaders of class-linked organizations may be more significant. As societies become more developed and complex, states usually become stronger and more important, while the same occurs with a variety of social interests. This therefore increases the chances that such social interests will be affected by the combination of state capacity or penetration and the authoritarian nature of the regime, leading as a result to the often-noted association between development and democracy. However, as democratization occurs through political agency, there is no automaticity to this link, and poor as well as rich nation-states may well have regimes that run counter to this expectation.

In each case a key element in analyzing the position taken by social and political forces at the points at which regime change becomes possible is the relative proximity they have to the exercise of state authority. Even political and social leaders who are generally ill disposed to democratic convictions may come to the conclusion that democratization is the best means to respond to moments of crisis, calculating correctly or incorrectly that democratization will prevent a worse outcome from their point of view. And vice versa, those who profess democratic convictions can often turn out to be antidemocratic in their actions, if not their pronouncements, if they have close connections to power holders or if the latter exert state authority in a manner that amply suits their needs.

---

<sup>78</sup> I draw this sentence from my *Democratización vía reforma*, op. cit. n. 2, 132.

At the beginning of democratization there may also be a significant crisis of authority within the state apparatus itself. A diffident or slothful monarch, a head of state who is inept in terms of leading the armed forces, a bureaucracy that functions in a discombobulated way, a lack of capacity to collect taxes or to stand up for national interests, the need to ensure government stability in the face of opponents who are quick to launch insurgencies can all be potent circumstances for leadership to emerge within the apparatus of the state itself to press for new definitions of the regime, forging in the process alliances and enemies within various social forces. The greater the demands placed on state performance, given modernization or a tenuous geopolitical position, the greater the chances that such internal state tensions will emerge. Thus, the threat posed by Peru and Bolivia in the 1830s had a lot to do with the early consolidation of state authority in Chile, setting the stage for subsequent democratization through reform by subordinating the military to civil authority and retaining the enfranchisement of popular (mostly urban) groups, given their enrollment in National Guards.

Social interests must be expressed by specific actors and organizations, for which references to the actions of 'classes' constitutes an inadequate abstraction. Some national societies seem better predisposed to the formation of such organizations for complex reasons, including cultural ones. In part this has to do with the fact that some social cleavages are easier to organize than others, and they are therefore more likely to be manipulated politically. If a national society, no matter how poor, is cleaved into divisions that provide the grounds for a relatively easy activation of collective organization, then it is more likely to have the kind of vigorous civil society that is associated with pressures for democratization than a richer one that does not happen to be cleaved in the same manner. Religious divisions often form the basis for such collectivities. Again, the rich associational life related to the secular/religious divide in Chile is a case in point. Similarly, labor movement formation provides this kind of social basis for politically significant collective organization. In each instance, the study of democratization requires an examination of the way in which these organizations were constituted, generating the variations in the views and political insertion of their leaders. It is impossible to understand the development of working-class parties, for example, without examining the possibilities offered by worker-employer relations and state interference for the building of unions, the relative access workers had to the exercise of democratic rights, and the political alliances emerging labor leaders could forge with other social groups.<sup>79</sup> To simply assert that all labor organizations and leaders had a prodemocratic influence is an exaggeration. In some cases labor leaders developed a highly ambiguous attitude towards democracy and acted in ways that undermined democratization, mostly by galvanizing rightist forces into blocking its possible advance or reversing it. Moreover, if the cleavages that are most easily formed into powerful organizations

---

<sup>79</sup> For an elaboration of these matters, see J. Samuel Valenzuela, "Labour Movements and Political Systems: Some Variations" in Marino Regini, ed., *The Future of Labour Movements* (London: Sage Publications, 1992), 51–101.

generate pressures to secede from the national state rather than to reform the regime, democratization will usually encounter much greater difficulties.

Political action does not occur in a vacuum of state and regime institutional definitions, no matter how authoritarian the regime. Whatever differences existed, for instance, between the political attitudes of English and French landowning nobles could well have been more the result of the institutions of the respective monarchies as they evolved after Louis XIV's success and Charles I's failure, rather than simply the product of class relations among landowners, urban entrepreneurs, and peasants. In 1789 the French monarch continued to be the center of a state with very weak formal institutions, thereby offering virtually no protection from arbitrary power. The king could ignore the advice of the *parlements*, insisting that they register his decrees, and his *lettre de cachet* sufficed to condemn anyone to a dungeon until further order. The English crown had been forced to relinquish such powers beginning with the thirteenth-century revolt against John Lackland that led to the proclamation of the Magna Carta, and although the limitations on royal authority had to be reasserted by opponents with the force of arms on several occasions, by the end of the seventeenth century they were strongly in place. The study of democratization requires a careful examination of these institutional features and legacies. Democratization can proceed through a succession of reforms only in so far as the framework of the preceding authoritarian regime offers opportunities to do so, as did the Chilean 1833 constitution or the peculiar process of constitutional construction through precedents, understandings, and occasional 'acts of settlement' in England. In these cases predemocratic or even antidemocratic forces chose (or were forced) to become supporters or even champions of democratic rules and procedures in order to ensure their continuing influence or to tame the authority of the head of state. Otherwise democratization requires decisive breaks—as in France in 1789, 1830, 1848, and 1871, although the first two did not result in democracies and even then the secret voting booth was not established by law until 1913, i.e., two decades after it was installed in Chile.<sup>80</sup>

Political action takes place within certain broad styles of doing politics. If such a style includes a reliance on the organization of military or paramilitary forces, or the nurturing of links to leaders of the armed forces, as has occurred in a number of Latin American cases, notably Peru, then democratization is more difficult and the resulting democracy, as a transition occurs, less stable. Such styles are, it should be emphasized, independent of social interests per se but have to do with the way political leaderships organize and channel such interests. Leaders who specialize in having links with the military to exert their power do not develop the same degree of commitment as do others to forming party organizations, to competing in elections, and to respecting their results. A major difference between the reformist route to democratization and

---

<sup>80</sup> For an elaborate analysis of the many irregularities in French voting before 1913, see Alain Garigou, *Le vote et la vertu: Comment les français sont devenus électeurs* (Paris: Presses de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, 1992).

the one that occurs through sharp breaks is that the first typically leads to the creation—during the process of democratization, not after its conclusion—of parties seeking to represent and preserve upper-class interests in the new context of a competitive struggle for the allegiance of an increasingly massive and independent electorate. However, this effect is overridden when rightist leaders opt for a military safeguard. The history of the formation of parties of the right is, therefore, more complicated in democratizations occurring through the collapse of the prior regimes or when the military becomes a political actor.

The conceptions of actors, in part given their values, regarding the propriety of various institutional definitions also guide the course of political action during democratization. Such definitions were widely diffused at the beginning of the nineteenth century all over the world by both political theories and by the examples furnished by leading countries. The design of liberal democratic institutions was perceived as sufficiently legitimate and workable that different groups opted to use it as part of their ideological discourse in the pursuit of power or the defense of their positions and interests. It is impossible to study democratization without coming across lengthy debates over the best and most acceptable forms of government. Political actors with more persuasive arguments and oratorical abilities, who were able to sway legislators or followers one way or another, did have an important influence in the course of political change, for better or for worse.

The stress on discrete political phenomena, on the role of leadership, on institutional definitions, on confrontations and critical moments, and even on historical accidents do make this alternative perspective less amenable to a series of simple propositions of the kind contained in Moore's model. This does not mean that this perspective neglects an examination of the social basis of politics. A society of small to medium-sized farmers may well be quite amenable to the development of institutions and practices of democratic self-rule, as anyone reading Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* may readily appreciate. And yet this is only the case as long as other contextual or historical factors do not intervene. The attitudes of White post-Civil War farmers in the former Confederate States was certainly different from that of the same group in the North regarding the enfranchisement of Blacks.<sup>81</sup> Similarly, there is a virtual certainty that agrarian property owners, regardless of the size of their holdings, or owners of industrial establishments will resist democratization if its proponents are the leaders of movements or parties who advocate expropriating their assets. The Spanish Second Republic, for instance, was plagued by the antidemocratic reaction of medium-sized landowners threatened with an ill-conceived agrarian reform program.<sup>82</sup> Land tenure patterns varied greatly from region to region in Spain, and yet

---

<sup>81</sup> For a discussion of the disenfranchisement of Blacks in the South with the recovery of the Democratic Party's influence, see David Montgomery, *Citizen Worker: The Experience of Workers in the United States with Democracy and the Free Market* (NY: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 128–9 and elsewhere.

<sup>82</sup> My appreciation to Juan Linz who two decades ago first called my attention to this aspect of the Spanish predicament during the early thirties.

areas where smaller properties were the norm, such as Galicia, proved to be among the strongest in their support for the antirepublican forces. Moreover, class relations are heavily woven with social and legal norms that may be very different from one context to another, and the behavior of what are apparently the same classes across cases can, as a result, be very different. If the class relations of peasants or agricultural workers and large landowners are not overlaid with rules that contradict basic democratic rights, then there is no reason, given the appropriate political and historical context, why landowners cannot be a force in favor of democracy. Hence, while not neglecting the social basis of politics, this perspective simply approaches them from another angle, one that is conceptually more supple and sensitive to the surprises of history.