



Working

**BUILDING AND SUSTAINING SOCIAL PROTECTION: CROSS-CLASS COALITIONS, ELITE RESPONSES, AND PARTY POLITICS IN CHILE AND URUGUAY (1900–1973)**

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POLITICS IN CHILE AND URUGUAY (1900–1973)\***

**Rossana Castiglioni**

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## **ABSTRACT**

A great deal of scholarly attention has been devoted to studying the divergent processes of reform that Chile and Uruguay experienced after the 1970s, when Chile began moving toward radical neoliberal social policy and Uruguay opted to maintain its system of social protection. Yet, this rich and profuse literature tends to underestimate the important role of the policy legacies of institutions that gave origin to the systems of social protection of both countries. This paper attempts to fill this gap and to complement the existing literature. Relying on a historical institutionalist perspective, the paper shows that, although Chile and Uruguay constructed very similar systems until democratic breakdown in 1973, the process of building social protection institutions since the early twentieth century had taken very different paths. In Chile social protection constituted a response to increasing pressure from various social groups, most notably organized labor. Conversely in Uruguay the Colorado Party, which launched the first sets of social policies, sought to anticipate social pressures and to secure the electoral support of urban sectors. While class cleavages permeated the Chilean party system and high mobilization levels were salient both for left- and right-wing sectors, Uruguayan political parties were multi-class from the outset. A greater level of polarization in Chile and the high levels of mobilization from the right and the left undermined the possibility of the class coalition necessary for expanding and consolidating universalistic social policy. In Uruguay the anticipatory character of social protection, the lower level of polarization, and the low relevance of class cleavages facilitated the formation of such a coalition, which managed to survive democratic breakdown.

## **RESUMEN**

Gran cantidad de atención ha sido dedicada al estudio de los patrones divergentes de reforma de políticas sociales que Chile y Uruguay experimentaron desde los años 1970s, cuando Chile comenzó a adoptar políticas neoliberales radicales y Uruguay optó por mantener su sistema de protección social. Sin embargo, esta rica y abundante literatura tiende a subestimar el importante rol de los legados políticos de las instituciones que dieron origen a los sistemas de protección social. Este trabajo intenta llenar ese vacío y complementar la literatura existente. Desde una perspectiva institucionalista histórica, este trabajo muestra que, aunque Chile y Uruguay construyeron sistemas muy similares hasta el quiebre democrático de 1973, el proceso de construcción de instituciones de protección social, desde comienzos del siglo XX, ocurrió a través de caminos diferentes. En Chile la protección social constituyó una respuesta a las crecientes presiones de grupos organizados de la sociedad civil, especialmente de los trabajadores. Por el contrario, en Uruguay el Partido Colorado, responsable de impulsar primeras políticas sociales, buscó anticipar las presiones sociales y asegurar el apoyo electoral de los sectores urbanos. Mientras que los clivajes de clase permearon el sistema de partidos chileno y los niveles de movilización social fueron pronunciados tanto para sectores de izquierda como de derecha, los partidos políticos uruguayos fueron policlasistas desde el inicio. Un nivel de movilización y polarización social elevados en Chile socavaron la existencia de una coalición policlasista requerida para expandir y consolidar políticas sociales universalistas. En cambio, en Uruguay el carácter anticipatorio del sistema de protección social, un menor nivel de polarización y la poca relevancia de los clivajes de clase facilitó la formación de dicha coalición, que fue capaz de sobrevivir el quiebre democrático.

In the study of comparative social policy in Latin America, Chile and Uruguay are probably among the most widely examined cases. This is partly because these two countries shared significant similarities. They started to build their social protection schemes very early, and ever since they offered comparatively high levels of coverage and benefits, exhibited remarkable levels of welfare effort, and were the closest to achieving universal coverage for pensions, health care, and education in Latin America.<sup>1</sup>

As a result of this evolution, social policy outcomes in Chile and Uruguay were strikingly similar. By the beginning of the 1970s, both countries exhibited remarkably high levels of social security coverage, reaching 75 percent and 90 percent of the economically active population of Chile and Uruguay, respectively (Huber, Pribble, and Stephens 2009: 174). Social security expenditures were also extremely high. According to Mesa Lago (1978), in Chile total social security expenditures set a continental record of 17 percent of GDP in 1971, while in Uruguay in the early 1970s this figure was 15 percent of GDP.

However, after 1973, when both countries faced democratic breakdowns, the Chilean military government (1973–1990) replaced the existing state-centered social protection institutions with a market-oriented scheme that relied upon means-testing, promoted privatization, cut benefits, tightened eligibility rules, and considerably contracted the state's involvement in social policy provision and administration. In contrast, the Uruguayan military government (1973–1985) did not choose a market-oriented pattern of reform; rather, it opted to maintain many of the historical traits of the existing social policy model. As a result, a great deal of scholarly attention has been devoted to studying the divergent processes of reform that both countries experienced after the 1970s, when Chile began moving toward radical neoliberal reforms with a strong participation of the market and Uruguay opted to maintain the system of social protection.

In explaining the patterns of social policy variation of these two countries, most research has centered on studying the impact of a combination of factors, such as the role of political institutions, the ideological distribution within each political system, and economic performance,

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<sup>1</sup> It is important to point out that Latin American countries never achieved universality the “European way” (that is, social benefits were not tied to citizenship). Nonetheless, Chile and Uruguay were a far cry from most Latin American countries in terms of both extension of coverage and the generosity of the offered benefits.

as well as the capacity of veto players to promote and/or obstruct changes to the status quo (see for example, Borzutzky 2002; Castiglioni 2005; Filgueira and Filgueira 1997; Kay 1999; Madrid 2003; Midaglia 2000; and Papadópulos 1992). Yet, this rich and profuse literature tends to underestimate the important role of the policy legacies of institutions that gave origin to the systems of social protection of Chile and Uruguay.

Compared to the accumulation of knowledge related to the processes of social policy reform that both countries experienced during the past few decades, we know much less about the process through which social protection institutions developed in these two countries since the early twentieth century and its consequences for social policy reform. This paper attempts to fill this gap and to complement the existing literature by examining the legacies and consequences of the contrasting processes of building social protection institutions in Chile and Uruguay from the beginning of the twentieth century until the breakdown of democracy in both countries in 1973.

In pursuing my research I take insights from the historical institutionalist perspective. Historical institutionalism has long emphasized the impact of policy legacies, also known as policy feedback, on public policies (Immergut 2008: 559–560; Thelen 1999: 392). The terms “policy feedback” or “policy legacies” refer to the fact that previous policy choices influence present political processes and policies. As Ewig and Kay (2011) explain, “the study of policy feedback treats the policies created in previous political periods as independent variables that may affect political outcomes in later iterations of policy change” (71). Policy legacies are important because they structure not only existing problems but also power distributions within different policy areas (Pribble 2013: 27). Although in some cases policy feedback generates opportunities for policy change, it generally produces “lock-in effects” that undermine and/or impede reform attempts (Pierson 1994: 47).

Relying on a historical institutionalist perspective, this paper shows that, although Chile and Uruguay constructed very similar systems until 1973, the process of building social protection institutions took very different paths. The creation of social policies in Chile was the result of increasing pressures and mobilization of organized civil society groups, mainly labor. The presence of class cleavages combined with a high degree of polarization hindered the possibility of building the broad cross-class coalition necessary for maintaining a universalistic social policy.

Conversely, in the Uruguayan case social policy was mainly the creation of the Partido Colorado, a political party that sought to secure the electoral support of the emerging labor and middle classes by building an anticipatory system of social protection. Uruguayan political parties were multi-class, and ideological distance among parties was historically moderated. Moreover, while in Chile right-wing parties have traditionally enjoyed important levels of support, the Uruguayan right had very limited electoral salience. Thus, Uruguay faced only minor difficulties in forging a broad cross-class alliance that supported universalistic welfare policies. In the case of Chile policy legacies generated opportunities for policy change, while in the case of Uruguay they produced lock-in effects that perpetuated the social policy status quo.

This paper is organized as follows: the next section offers a historical account of the creation of the Chilean and Uruguayan systems of social protection, from their inception until democratic breakdown in 1973. The third section shows that, although the two countries developed very similar models, the processes through which these systems developed were markedly different. The fourth and last section summarizes the main findings of the paper.

### **THE CREATION OF SOCIAL PROTECTION IN CHILE AND URUGUAY: 1900–1973**

During the nineteenth century, living conditions of the Chilean working class were extremely poor. This situation gave rise to strong protests from workers, especially from urban and mining sectors. In this period, new social groups emerged: a middle class, professionals, industrial workers, mining groups, and an urban proletariat. These sectors were able to organize and “pressure the state in search for privileges and benefits” (Raczynski 1994: 5). This change in social structure was accompanied by a rise and consolidation of new political parties: the traditional parties (Liberal and Conservative) were joined in the 1860s by the Radical Party (secular, composed of professionals and civil servants) and in the 1880s by the Democratic Party (precursor of the Socialist and Communist Parties). The increasing mobilization of the popular sectors prompted a consideration of the so-called social question.<sup>2</sup> During the presidential campaign of Arturo Alessandri in 1919 the “social question” emerged as a central issue.

Although the first social protection programs were inaugurated at the beginning of the twentieth century, with the establishment of pension rights for state railroad workers in 1911 and

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<sup>2</sup> At that time the “social question” was a term for social assistance–related issues.

the creation of the armed forces retirement fund in 1915, it was not until the 1920s that the system of social protection started to develop in a comprehensive manner. The first set of social laws, inspired by the Bismarckian social security system of Germany, was presented to Congress during Alessandri's first presidency in 1921, but it was not approved until 1924–25 due to a strong resistance from the Senate (Segura-Ubiergo 2007: 56). The key features of this legislation were the following: the creation of a blue-collar workers' insurance fund with the purpose of providing illness, disability, and old-age pensions, compensation for work accidents, and free medical attention for the insured and their dependents; the establishment of a white-collar insurance fund, called the National Medical Service for Employees (*Servicio Médico Nacional de Empleados*, or *SERMENA*), financed with contributions from workers and employers; and the inauguration of insurance funds for civil servants, journalists, and the police. At this time, new funds were not social security institutions but a means for enforcing savings. The state did not contribute to these withholding funds except when it itself was the employer. Among the benefits provided were retirement and indemnification for years of service. Social legislation introduced at this time laid the basis for the first 1931 Labor Code through the enactment of laws that regulated work contracts, unionization, collective bargaining, minimum wages, and indemnification for dismissals (Arellano 1985: 28–29; Borzutzky 1990: 53–54; Mesa Lago 1978: 24–26; Raczynski 1994: 7–8).

From the 1930s onwards the system expanded, even in periods of economic recession (Segura-Ubiergo, 2007: 56), to cover increasing portions of the population, widen benefits, and broaden the state's intervention. The idea of social protection as a sort of charity began to shift to a notion that the state should protect the entire population. This shift, although gradual, inspired a widening of coverage. However, the inclusion of different categories of work was uneven and fragmented, generally granting coverage first to groups that were more organized (Raczynski 1994: 11). Expansion of benefits during this period favored workers who participated in productive sectors tied to the modernization and industrialization processes under the import substitution industrialization model (Farías 2014: 38). However, until the 1950s expansion in coverage did not come in response to government policies but to social pressure and reflected, in particular, the victories of unionized workers. Between the 1950s and 1960s the emphasis was placed on homogenizing the system and improving working-class benefits. This second wave of transformations had to do with the re-organization of the new Social Insurance Service that took

place in 1952 (J. S. Valenzuela 2006: 369). Reforms brought about new privileges (specifically survivors' pensions and maternity subsidies) and improved existing services (disability and old age pensions, subsidies for illness, and expansion of health services to workers' entire families). By 1960 the main pension funds were subdivided into various social security sub-systems that dedicated the core of their resources to pensions, family allowances, health coverage, and maternity subsidies (Borzutzky 2002: 115). According to J. Samuel Valenzuela (2006: 379), one of the main consequences of the new Social Insurance Service was the rapid expansion of pensions from the 1950s to the 1970s, when there was one pensioner for every four insured workers.

In the area of health care, Chile was certainly a pioneer in the Latin American region. The bases of the system were set with the creation of the Ministry of Health in 1924 and through the establishment of mandatory health insurance in the same year. The Mandatory Workers' Insurance of 1924 was conceived mainly as a health insurance system intended to cover medical and dental consultation, medicines, examinations, and hospitalization (J. S. Valenzuela 2006: 382). Although the different mandatory health insurance programs were unified for white-collar workers (who after the approval of the Preventive Medicine Law of 1934 received curative and preventative medical attention for tuberculosis and venereal and cardiovascular diseases), the health care system did not undergo a clear centralization process until the establishment of the National Health Service (Servicio Nacional de Salud, or SNS) in 1952. With the creation of the SNS, which initially assisted blue-collar workers, the system expanded coverage to the indigent population. The role of the state in administering and financing the SNS was salient. It provided medical attention free of charge for workers, workers' spouses and children under 15, and it covered around 60 percent of the Chilean population (Arellano 1985: 31–32; Cifuentes 1993: 62–63). The system of social protection that Chile developed around the middle of the twentieth century was highly stratified and fragmented (Farías 2014; Martínez Franzoni 2008).

From the 1960s to 1973 the government promoted structural reforms that curtailed property rights (e.g., agricultural expropriations, statization), protected labor, incorporated new urban and rural sectors into the social safety network, improved real salaries, and developed housing programs. The expansion of the system, especially under the administration of President Salvador Allende (1970–1973), occurred alongside economic recession and marked inflation. The state consolidated its presence as a key engine of the economy in terms of regulation,

production, resource allocation, and conflict resolution; as a matter of fact the government intervened in 461 enterprises, controlled 39 percent of GDP, and increased state control over investment to an outstanding 70 percent (Martínez Franzoni 2008: 161). This situation coexisted with a process of social mobilization and political conflicts that culminated in the military coup of September 1973. By the 1970s, as Mesa-Lago points out,

Chilean social security was one of the most advanced in the Western hemisphere: it covered all contingencies, reached virtually the entire population...and offered generous benefits. But it was extremely fragmented and legally complex and stratified (it comprised 100 independent pension programs plus many others covering different contingencies); it also lacked effective coordination, allowed unjustified privileges and significant inequalities, constituted a heavy economic burden...suffered financial and actuarial disequilibrium, and required substantial state subsidies. (Mesa Lago 1994: 115)

The Allende administration expanded social policy without seeking support outside of its own political group. An alliance with the centrist Christian Democrats would have been critical to Allende, but he failed to secure their support. As Arturo Valenzuela remarks, “Allende as a minority president was incapable of structuring a majority coalition in the parliament to implement his policies and yet was able to make use of ample executive authority to implement many of his measures” (1994: 136). As a result, rather than seeking support from the opposition, Allende sought to bypass it bluntly. The fact that Allende’s objectives implied the compromise of property rights and the preparation of the country for a transition to socialism was considered unacceptable by the opposition.

In the case of Uruguay, at the beginning of the century the traditional two-party system that characterized the political system up to the early 1970s had been in place for several decades. A civil war ended in 1904 with the triumph of the Colorado Party (which represented urban, liberal, secular sectors) over the Blanco Party (which represented rural, Catholic, conservative sectors).<sup>3</sup> The outcome of the civil war gave the Colorado Party the possibility of controlling the state, while the Blancos were weakened by their defeat in the civil war and the death of their leader, Aparicio Saravia. Even so, in order to maintain peace both parties had no other option than to “co-participate,” that is, to divide the administration of the state among

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<sup>3</sup> These urban-rural and liberal-conservative cleavages tended to fade (and virtually disappeared) as time went by.

them. The agreement granted Blanco hegemony in important portions of the countryside and Colorado control of the national government (Mancebo 1991: 36). In this context, the Colorado Party, advocate of the so-called social question, had only minor obstacles to overcome in order to include social welfare as a central component of its platform. Under the Colorado administration, especially during the presidencies of José Batlle y Ordóñez (1903–1907 and 1911–1915), social legislation was introduced.

The first relevant social protection law, the so-called Ley Ciganda, created a School Fund that offered old age, disability, and survivors' pensions for schoolteachers in 1896. The foundational stage of the system of social welfare, which extended into the 1930s, included the creation of a retirement fund for civil servants in 1904 (that was expanded in 1919 to those employed in the industrial, commercial, and service sectors), the establishment of retirement pensions for military personnel in 1911, and the institution of old age, disability, survivors' pensions, and non-contributory indigence pensions. One key policy innovation had to do with the way in which the non-contributory pension for indigents was financed, as it opted to tax wealth, earnings, and "social vices"<sup>4</sup> (García Repetto 2011: 19). In 1933, with the creation of the Uruguayan Institute of Pensions, the system was reorganized through the unification of the different social security institutions already in place (that is, the pension funds of civil and public servants, school teachers, and indigents). In 1934, with the approval of a new constitution, the existing social rights gained constitutional status<sup>5</sup> (Ermida Uriarte and Grzetich 1991: 76–77; Saldain 1990: 250–51).

Although the Ministry of Public Health was not set up until 1934, the first health care institutes were inaugurated in the mid 1830s, with the creation of a Sanitary Junta, which carried out sanitary inspections of boats, and the Public Hygiene Junta, which was in charge of vaccination as well as controlling the Charity Hospital and other charitable institutions and implementing various epidemiological measures. Until the 1950s health care was based on a system of voluntary insurance offered by different mutual aid societies. The Uruguayan "mutual system," which remains in place today, was created by various workers' organizations,

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<sup>4</sup> Such as alcohol and playing cards.

<sup>5</sup> In this regard, Ermida Uriarte and Grzetich remark that the 1934 constitution contained a quite relevant disposition in article 67, which included the right of attaining adequate retirement, subsidies or pensions in case of accidents, sickness, invalidity, forced unemployment, old age or death (Ermida Uriarte and Grzetich 1991: 76).

especially those of immigrants, and coexisted with numerous public hospitals that offered health care for low-income sectors (Haretche et al. 1994: 69–73).

From the 1940s to the mid-1950s high export earnings allowed the financing of further expansion of social protection. During the 1940s there was a significant expansion of pension assistance, with the approval of a new law that granted non-contributory pensions to individuals older than 60 who were not covered by any other system (Pribble 2013: 74). The most important policies introduced during this period were the institution of family allowances (which achieved universal coverage in the 1950s) and the creation of wage councils formed by workers, employers, and the state. A broadening of unemployment insurance coverage also took place at this time. From the mid-1950s until 1973 the Uruguayan economy deteriorated, but even in a context of crisis social protection continued to expand and the number of public employees increased significantly. In the midst of a sharp economic recession, the system of social protection encountered increasing financial challenges, but this did not result in its reduction (Midaglia 2000: 27). Moreover, the 1967 constitution created the Social Security Bank (Banco de Previsión Social, or BPS) as the administrative organ for pensions and retirements. Its aim was to unify the independent funds, although it did not achieve this goal universally, and to centralize the pay-as-you-go system (Filgueira and Filgueira 1997: 13).

In the area of health care, the approval of the Legal Statute of the Mutual System in 1943 granted the state clear surveillance mechanisms over mutual aid societies. In 1955 health social insurance became mandatory for private and public employees; however, this process was carried out by gradually incorporating different working categories. Employees' health insurance was provided by mutual aid societies and was financed by contributions from the workers (deducted from their salaries), employers, and the state (Ferreira 1991: 429–35). In this way, two coexisting health care systems were consolidated in Uruguay: on the one hand, the system administered by the Ministry of Public Health provided medical attention free of charge for low-income sectors; on the other, the mutual aid system covered mainly dependent formal employees and middle- and high-income earners.

Concurrently, while real wages dropped and inflation rose, various civil society groups, especially those belonging to the middle class and the urban proletariat, pressed the state for social improvements. In this context, a growing wave of social unrest and repression of

mobilized sectors, especially unions, took place. This stage of social and economic instability reached its climax with the 1973 coup. As Mesa Lago asserts, by 1973 Uruguay became,

the prototypical welfare state in the Western hemisphere, [which had not only] the most developed and generous social security system in Latin America and the Caribbean but also the most stratified and costly. The system's heavy burden (15 percent of GDP, 62 percent of fiscal expenditure, and 65 percent of the wage tax) contributed to the economic stagnation suffered by Uruguay. (Mesa Lago 1994: 155).

This brief historical account points to the striking similarities on the evolution of the Chilean and Uruguayan social protection systems. Both reached the 1970s as the most developed and generous schemes in the region; in both cases the social protection systems presented profound financial problems; and both countries suffered a collapse of their democratic regimes in the same period. However, I argue that the process of creation of social policy as well as the way in which state-society relations were defined were different in both countries. In the case of Chile policy feedback created opportunities for reform, but in the Uruguayan case it generated lock-in effects that contributed to perpetuating the status quo. This, as I will discuss later, had deep consequences in terms of the patterns of social policy reform that developed from 1970s onward.

### **SIMILAR OUTCOMES, DIFFERENT PATHS: THE POLITICS OF SOCIAL POLICY CREATION**

In terms of their social protection systems, Chile and Uruguay shared remarkably similarities until the 1970s. Nonetheless, in the two countries the development of institutions of social protection followed different trajectories. In this section, I argue that there are some crucial dimensions along which Chile and Uruguay were strikingly different. First, while in Chile the creation of the social protection constituted a response to increasing pressures from social groups, most notably organized labor, in Uruguay the Colorado Party, which launched the first sets of social policies, sought to anticipate social pressures and to secure the electoral support of urban sectors by the provision of social benefits. The Chilean authorities responded to social pressures with repression, but in Uruguay the authorities sought to mediate conflicts between labor and the business sector. While class cleavages permeated the Chilean party system and high mobilization levels were salient for both left- and right-wing sectors, Uruguayan political

parties were multi-class from the outset. As Esping Andersen asserts “it is a historical fact that the welfare state construction has depended on political coalition building. The structure of class coalitions is much more decisive than are the power resources of any single class” (1990: 30–31). Without broad coalitions, social policy tends to be residual and dualist. A greater level of polarization in Chile and the high levels of mobilization from the right and the left undermined the potential for the class coalition necessary for expanding and consolidating a universalistic social policy. In turn, in Uruguay the anticipatory character of the system of social protection, the lesser level of polarization, and the low relevance of class cleavages facilitated the formation of such a coalition, which managed to survive democratic breakdown.

The rise of social policy in Chile was associated with the increasing mobilization of popular sectors: in the 1890s around 200 strikes were registered; in 1903 40 workers died in a strike in Valparaíso; and in 1905, during the so-called Red Week, around 70 workers lost their lives while rioting to protest the rising cost of living in Santiago. Violent protest and strong state repression that resulted in the death, serious injury, and incarceration of workers occurred regularly in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in various sectors, affecting mostly saltpeter, mining, railroad, and port workers (Ljubetic 2000). Radical organizations of the urban proletariat demanded the replacement of existing capitalism by socialism, and anarchists sought the suppression of state structures (Larrañaga 2010: 17). As Scully remarks, “this cycle of mounting labor militancy and state repression reached its climax in 1907: more than a thousand men, women, and children, striking nitrate miners and their families, were machine gunned in an Iquique school yard” (Scully 1995: 106). The authorities confronted increasing mobilization with repression and exhibited a lack of flexibility to accommodate workers’ demands. As Farías shows, responses to labor mobilization included declaring states of siege and emergency and mobilizing the police and the army to control, repress, and incarcerate protesters, producing in the meantime a dramatic death toll of workers (2014: 62).

In this way, the first social policies passed in Chile were a response to increasing mobilization. In other words, the basis for the creation of the first social policies in this country constituted an attempt by the political elites to appease escalating unrest. As Scully (1995) points out, from 1920 to 1932 “political elites sought to mitigate the most conspicuous aspects of working-class exploitation in order to remove the conditions for recurrent social protest” (106–107). Thus, it is not surprising that President Alessandri declared that “if evolution is delayed,

revolution will prevail” (Alessandri quoted in Larrañaga 2010: 19). Policy changes introduced in the mid-1920s sought to co-opt at least part of the labor movement while repressing left-wing unions. As Larrañaga (2010) asserts, this strategy was successful in neutralizing the most radical segments of the labor movement, so that the “social question” did not become a socialist revolution, as the elites feared, but a set of demands managed by the state (18). At the same time, as Farías (2014) has argued, the strategy resulted in a process of welfare expansion that benefited formal employees and excluded those who were outside of the formal labor market, such as women and peasants.

In Uruguay, on the other hand, after the civil war concluded in 1903 with the defeat of the conservative Blancos and the death of their leader Aparicio Saravia, the winning Colorado Party, under the strong leadership of President José Batlle y Ordóñez, had as a central objective the construction of an interventionist state that would set the basis for social justice. Batlle’s original ideas about social justice were tremendously influential and permeated his political party’s doctrine. As Rodríguez Weber and Thorp (2014) argue:

Batlle was without doubt “exceptional” in his own right, and his individual role is widely recognised, but structural features allowed the emergence of Batllismo and facilitated its role far beyond the person. What Batlle did was to push the specifics of a social justice agenda in a competent and compelling fashion: early legislation followed on education, universal suffrage, and the defense of women, children and the elderly. Batllista governments even struggled with the imposition of taxes on inherited wealth and property. The latter point is telling: the Batllista value was for equality of opportunity, so Batlle did not wish to tax earned income, but unearned and inherited wealth. The egalitarianism this fostered saw equality as deeply rooted in democracy. Social legislation was always aimed at creating responsible and informed citizens; for example, legislation on the eight-hour day was motivated by the desire to leave time to allow people to inform themselves as citizens and participate in civil affairs. (Rodríguez Weber and Thorp 2014: 7–8)

In contrast to Chile, during the early twentieth century, Uruguayan governmental authorities sought to deal with labor mobilization without resorting to repression. During neither the first nor second Batllist administrations were the police systematically used as a tool to repress the labor movement. As Vanger explains, “Batlle had ended the existing government policy of using the police as strikebreakers, made the police chief a mediator and, during a big port strike had [Domingo] Arena [one of his closest collaborators] publish a series of editorials defending union leaders against the charges of being foreign-born agitators” (1980: 16). There are many additional historical facts that justify this judgment. For example, in May 1913 the

Interior Minister was called by the House of Representatives to explain why the police did not repress a rally organized by the anarchist workers federation (FORU) on May 1st but did repress another rally organized by the Blanco opposition two days later. Additionally, during the first general strike (in May 1911, in solidarity with the trolley workers) the Colorado Interior Minister mediated in the conflict; in April 1911, President Batlle himself mediated a strike by the nurses of a public hospital and a strike by electrical workers; in November 1913 the Public Works Minister mediated a conflict in an important textile factory. Regarding the first general strike, the attitude assumed by the Batllist government was remarkable. As well as publicly upholding it via the Batllist newspaper *El Día*, the government took some measures in order to explicitly support the strike. First, trolley companies that did not provide services during the strike were fined. This was largely interpreted as a punishment of the companies for not responding promptly to worker demands. Additionally, the activities of “strikebreakers” were undermined: government inspectors ordered non-licensed motormen off the trolleys and the companies that hired non-licensed motormen were fined (Barrán and Nahum 1983: 61–68; Vanger 1980: 122–25). At the same time, Batllism inaugurated a new conception of the police role. “Traditionally, the Montevideo police chief was a military officer; to install a civilian was an innovation” (Vanger 1980: 260). In fact, the appointment as new police chief of a civilian who was not only Colorado but also agreed with some socialist ideas was for that time remarkable. Thus, the government and the police were mostly oriented towards negotiating and mediating rather than repressing in an effort to reconfigure the relationship between the government and the labor movement.

The development of the Uruguayan system of social protection can be seen as an attempt to secure working-class electoral support for the Colorado Party, a strategy that proved to be quite successful.<sup>6</sup> Batlle envisioned that urban sectors “could be made the backbone of the electoral strength of the Colorado party. He was particularly interested in attracting the loyalty of Montevideo’s rapidly expanding labor force.... After his electoral victory...Batlle began to flesh out his vision of an activist state that would promote the social and economic welfare of their

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<sup>6</sup> As Carlos Rama has shown, hundreds of union leaders and socialist, and especially anarchist, militants would eventually become supporters of Batlle. When reviewing the names of the most prominent left-wing intellectuals of the beginning of the century, it is evident that ten years later almost all of them had become political activists and Batllista leaders (Rama quoted in Barrán and Nahum 1985: 46).

citizens” (Weinstein 1988: 23). In spite of the fact that Batllism never aspired to control unions,<sup>7</sup> there is evidence to suggest that Batlle’s administration established a fluid relationship with the working class, even with its more radical sectors: working-class strikers marched to the presidential residence to cheer Batlle’s government, Batlle’s administration allowed and promoted the entrance into Uruguay of anarchist immigrant workers expelled from Argentina; and from *El Día*, his own newspaper, Batlle regularly wrote editorials on the right to strike, the relevance of the eight-hours law, and the welfare state.<sup>8</sup> A central aspect to stress here, thus, is that social protection was not created as a response to popular pressures, as in Chile, but was a sort of preemptive strike developed due to the initiative of the political elite.<sup>9</sup> In other words,

rather than reacting to demands for social justice, the state attempted to mold the groups that could formulate such demands. Herein lies a trait peculiar to the Batllist state’s social program. Its desire for social progress, influenced by democratic radicalism and a dose of socialist doctrine, was structured by a political logic that sought to craft a modern urban and industrial society by empowering and expanding the emerging middle classes and the small urban proletariat. (Filgueira 1995: 9)

Another remarkable difference between Chile and Uruguay can be seen in the party system. In Chile, at the beginning of the century class cleavages began to shape the party system. The inability of traditional parties to encompass new social sectors, especially the working class, led to the creation of new political parties. In this regard, “the eventual failure of traditional party leaders to incorporate the working classes within existent parties led to the emergence of working-class parties ‘from below’” (Scully 1995: 107). With the increasing mobilization of the popular sector, the strategy of the traditional parties’ elites was to control labor and to respond with social policies in order to overcome mobilization. Hence, “party elites in Chile enacted legal mechanisms to control labor at the workplace, rather than seeking to mobilize working-class

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<sup>7</sup> As Caetano and Rilla argue, although there was a strong loyalty between unions and Batllismo, Batllismo never sought to control (*cooptar*) union leaders or to sponsor official unions, as occurred in other countries of the region (Caetano and Rilla 1994: 116–17).

<sup>8</sup> For example, in one of his editorials Batlle wrote that the state as an economic organization should “enter industry when competition is not practicable, when control by private interests vests in them authority inconsistent with the welfare state, when a fiscal monopoly may serve as a great source of income to meet tax problems, when the continued export of national wealth is considered undesirable. State socialism makes it possible to use for the general good that portion of the results of labor which is not paid to labor” (*El Día*, September 3, 1919, quoted in Weinstein 1988: 25).

<sup>9</sup> Although the Colorado Party was, unquestionably, the architect of the social protection system, it is important to point out that the Blanco Party promoted the approval of some social policies and was vital for the creation of state enterprises and the subsequent expansion of the public sector.

support within the traditional party system. This outcome had the effect of reinforcing elements within labor that sought to organize their own working-class parties” (Scully 1995: 107).

On the other hand, the Uruguayan party system was not structured by class cleavages. On the contrary, in Uruguay “parties have been multiclass-based from the beginning, and their followers present a relatively wide ideological spectrum, especially during this century” (González 1993: 141). In contrast to Chile, ideological polarization has been historically moderated. As Mainwaring and Scully have pointed out, “Uruguay, which until 1973 had strong democratic traditions, also had a party system with limited polarization until shortly before the breakdown of democracy. Chile (1932–1973) is the only Latin American democracy that lasted for a generation despite significant polarization, and polarization eventually contributed to the breakdown of democracy” (Mainwaring and Scully 1995: 32). In the case of Uruguay, the irruption of the radical Tupamaro guerillas in the mid-1960s was certainly disruptive and fueled polarization, but it was also short lived. In fact, by the time the military coup took place, in 1973, the Tupamaros were almost completely defeated. As a result, extreme polarization was constrained to a limited period of time. A multi-class party system and a more limited polarization than in Chile facilitated, in turn, a process of consensus building in Uruguay. Also, there was an interconnection among political parties and a strong state presence, and there were welfare programs that left quite limited spaces for an alternative market provision of goods and social services (Midaglia 2000: 26).

Even the urban-rural and liberal-conservative traditional distinctions of Uruguayan parties became blurred as time went by. In the long run, support for social policies and the aim of expanding the system of social protection became a matter of state policy and political culture, rather than a matter of specific partisan or class interests. This is why some authors refer to the “‘Uruguayan propensity to equity’, a phrase that frightens some by its appearance of cultural determinism but which has behind it some striking economic, demographic and political characteristics” (Rodríguez Weber and Thorp 2014: 6). Moreover, the emergence of social protection shaped the relationships between the state and civil society. The creation of the social policy was followed by “the formation of a statist political culture, in which it was believed that the state should protect their citizens and their rights. This design...molded the relations between the state and civil society. The formation of pressure groups that represented subordinate sectors was conditioned by these state-society relations” (Filgueira 1995: 20). Uruguayan social policies

prompted the emergence of an extended middle sector and greatly benefited the working class: both groups were critical for promoting the formation of a coalition that backed the consolidation of the social protection system. Thus, in Uruguay the system set from the beginning the basis for its own support.

Finally, both countries show differences on electoral participation. In Uruguay the right to vote was extended to all literate men in 1916. Young men between 18 and 21 and illiterate men were enfranchised in 1918, and women in 1934. In contrast, in Chile women were not enfranchised until 1952, while young citizens between 18 and 21 and the illiterate were only enfranchised in 1970 (González 1993: 14). As a result, the level of electoral participation was different in both countries: “the registered population in Chile was 18 percent in 1957 (the highest until then), and it reached 20.4 percent in 1958.... By 1958 the Uruguayan figure already was 57.1 percent” (González 1995: 500). Nowadays, Uruguay has one of the highest turnout levels in the world.

In sum, in Chile the creation of the social protection institutions was associated with the mobilization of organized groups, especially from the working class, which pressured political elites in order to secure their incorporation into the political and social systems. The salience of class cleavages and a context of increasing polarization hindered the development of a broad cross-class coalition necessary for the maintenance of the welfare state. In addition, the deterioration or even absence of a broad coalition that supported the Chilean system of social protection is one of the key elements to understanding the subsequent reform the system underwent. On the other hand, in Uruguay the first sets of social policies were created, in part, to avoid social pressures and to gain the electoral support of the urban sector. So, in contrast to Chile, the Uruguayan system of social protection was in its genesis anticipatory. Moreover, broad support for social policy was facilitated by the multi-class character of Uruguayan political parties and the absence of clear-cut cleavages in a rather homogeneous society that had, and continues to have, a large middle class. As a result, the system of social protection was backed by a broad cross-class alliance of working and middle classes.

The contrasting social policy trajectories of these two countries up to the early 1970s had important consequences. Policy legacies in the case of Chile resulted in a radical process of social policy retrenchment. The military government brought to an end the pay-as-you-go pension system, which was replaced by a new individual capitalization model that provides old

age, disability, and survivors' pensions. The military government also eliminated employer contributions and introduced a scheme that required dependent workers to save at least 10 percent of their taxable income in personal accounts. Individual savings are administered by for-profit private funds, the operations of which are monitored by the state through a superintendence. Similarly, a new health care system introduced the decentralization of public provision and administration and the creation of private health insurance funds. Dependent workers must choose between making their mandatory contributions to the private or the public health care systems.

In Chile, the decision to introduce radical reforms constituted a strategy to counter the previous system of social protection and its political context. Since the early twentieth century, social policy emerged as a reaction of the political elite to strong mobilization. The eventual election of a socialist government and the increasing levels of political polarization preceding the democratic breakdown of 1973 contributed to the radicalization of right-wing ideas. Although the military government as a whole did not hold a clear-cut view on social policy, it rejected the aims pursued by earlier administrations, particularly that of President Allende. A group of young economists, the so-called Chicago Boys, offered the military both an all-encompassing diagnosis of the country's problems and a comprehensive policy plan for tackling them. The promotion of radical market-oriented policies that resulted in a process of social policy retrenchment constituted a key ingredient of the strategy of the Chilean military government to refund the country's institutions and to remove the state from the center of distributional conflicts. The absence of a cross-class coalition of support for social protection allowed the military and their economic team to dismantle the existing system.

Conversely, in Uruguay the system of social protection under military rule experienced a remarkable continuity. Despite an important process of administrative centralization, a deterioration in the quality of the benefits provided, and the implementation of a discretionary mechanism of indexation, the pay-as-you-go pension system was maintained throughout this period. Health care was reorganized according to the same centralization logic seen in pensions. Here, the public system was left mainly unaltered, and some new measures were introduced during this period. The government created a National Resources Fund (Fondo Nacional de Recursos, or FNR) to grant coverage to anyone in the entire population who required complex medical attention; to finance the activities of highly specialized medical centers; and to extend

sickness benefits to formerly excluded working categories. As a result, health care witnessed a moderate expansion of the level of benefits and the flexibilization of eligibility rules. In education, despite the enactment of repressive measures and the introduction of budgetary cuts, the system did not undergo modifications. Therefore, in contrast to the process of radical market-oriented reforms seen in Chile, the Uruguayan system of social protection only experienced moderate changes.

This continuity was related to the fact that the Uruguayan military government sought to “preserve” the status quo. Institutions, in their view, had to be maintained (not transformed). The military sought to eliminate “bad leadership” and “subversion” to “preserve” the existing institutional framework, relying on a statist framework. In this way, the self-proclaimed mission of the Uruguayan military did not involve a re-foundation of the country’s institutions, as happened in Chile, but rather an elimination of the actors allegedly responsible for their collapse. The actions of nationalistic military groups were crucial to explaining the system’s continuity. While some civilians in charge of economic policy favored the adoption of orthodox policies, it would be false

to conclude that they [the military] fully espoused (or even understood) the free market neoliberalism of Alejandro Véggh Villegas, the man who had been made minister of economy in order to calm the fears of the international financial community. Partly, it was the case that Uruguayan political culture (and Batllism) had historically forged a very resilient bond between liberalism in politics and statism in economics, and this characteristic mixture entered the military’s thinking. (Gillespie 1986: 177)

In social policy the traditional bureaucracy associated with the development of the welfare system continued to perform its duties and, in fact, participated in some of the changes that occurred during the military regime. Indeed, the administrative centralization of pensions and health care involved a strong participation of the traditional bureaucracy—rather than an economic technocratic team—that worked to re-organize (but not to re-found) the existing system. This bureaucracy and the nationalist military reflected the presence of a broad alliance that supported the existing system of social protection. This support was crucial to explaining the perpetuation of the status quo in the case of Uruguay.

## FINAL REMARKS

Chile and Uruguay built, throughout the twentieth century, very similar systems of social protection. However, the paths to social protection in both countries were markedly different.

In the Chilean case, as we have seen, a universalistic system was launched (from the 1920s to the 1960s) in order to appease the increasing demands of the popular sector. In other words, the political elite created the system of social protection in order to ease social unrest. With a party system structured along class cleavages and featuring marked polarization, the creation of the Chilean welfare system was not the result of a broad class coalition but, rather, a response from the political elite to tackle increasing social pressures. During the period of greater expansion of the Chilean social protection system (1960s–1973) the political arena changed dramatically. The country’s history of polarization reached its climax under Allende’s government: members of both the left and the right were greatly mobilized in the midst of a severe economic crisis. As Scully (1995) asserts, “ideological escalation made compromise extremely unlikely” (121). Thus, the development of a broad cross-class coalition upholding the welfare state did not occur.

What followed was a democratic breakdown that took place in a context in which the military believed that the only way to “save” the country was to create a “new Chile.” In this way the military defined a self-proclaimed foundational mission by which the political, economic, and social realms would be radically altered. The reform of social policy was inscribed in this broader context. As Huber remarks,

the reason for this radical approach was that the economic policies formed an integral part of Pinochet’s political process.... The government sought to construct an atomized, depoliticized society where there would be no bases for collective action and the state would no longer be at the center of redistributive issues. Instead, the market was to determine the allocation of resources. (Huber 1995: 19)

By contrast, in Uruguay the political elite developed social protection institutions in an anticipatory manner. These institutions were not created to appease social unrest as in Chile but as an attempt to secure the electoral support of urban sectors. In a country where political parties were multi-class, representing a wide ideological spectrum from the beginning, and where strong right-wing parties did not emerge, to forge a broad cross-class coalition in support of social policy was not a difficult task. The creation of a universalistic social policy constituted a

landmark in Uruguayan history: it defined the relations between the state and society and it shaped the Uruguayan political culture.

When Uruguayan democracy collapsed, the military government, deeply influenced by this statism, did not alter the basis of the social protection system. The Uruguayan military neither had a broad project of nation building nor defined a central objective beyond eliminating “subversion.” In an arena in which the left had only modest electoral support—it never compromised property rights or held control of the state—and in which the “enemy” of the military regime, the Tupamaro guerrillas, was totally outside the institutional framework and electoral competition, Uruguay remained less polarized than Chile. This also helps us to understand why the broad cross-class alliance behind the Uruguayan system of social protection was never undermined. Hence, the Uruguayan system of social protection did not face the neoliberal challenges that confronted the Chilean system, and it exhibited an extraordinary resilience.

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