

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Violence, Ideology and Counterrevolution: Landowners and Agrarian Reform in Cautín Province, Chile, 1967–73

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(First published online 21 September 2018)

Abstract

The article analyses social and political conflict in Chile during the agrarian reform period of the 1960s and 1970s through a case study of the province of Cautín, in the indigenous heartlands of the south. Using a combination of written and oral sources, it analyses the responses and strategies of landowners descended from nineteenth-century settlers to the emancipatory projects carried out during the presidencies of Eduardo Frei and Salvador Allende. In the context of an increasingly radicalised agrarian reform programme and a growing number of territorial conflicts with the Mapuche communities, this little-studied political actor developed a collective identity, an ideological discourse and a readiness to use violence which provides important insights into the causes of the military coup carried out in 1973.

Keywords: agrarian reform; landowners; peasants; Mapuches; Popular Unity; MIR

Confronted by an increasingly radicalised agrarian reform programme and unable to defend its interests through the existing political system, the landed elite in Chile during the 1960s and early 1970s had to seek other means by which to regain hegemony. This article is about the role of a key, but frequently overlooked, actor involved in that struggle: foreign-descended settler landowners of the old frontier territory to the south of the Central Valley, and in particular the province of Cautín. The conflict between landowners and the promoters of agrarian reform in Cautín was one of the most fertile seedbeds of the *golpista* mentality that would lead to the military coup of September 1973. Ultimately, as I hope to show, this group of landowners played an important role in creating the conditions for a military solution to the instability that the emancipatory governments of Eduardo Frei and Salvador Allende were deemed to have brought about. An analysis of this phenomenon can therefore provide important insights into the reasons for that tragic event.

In January 1967, several months before the passing of agrarian reform laws which would allow for massive land expropriation and the unionisation of rural workers, a warning appeared in an early edition of *Punto Final*, published by the recently-formed Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria (Movement of the Revolutionary Left, MIR). It claimed that an ultra-right wing group with international connections had set its sights on disrupting the agrarian reform programme in Chile. The group, named Fiducia, had been active in opposing land reform in Brazil and promoting a *coup d'état* there. It had then turned to Chile, arriving at the conclusion that it was difficult to break the democratic-reformist consensus amongst the traditional landowners of the central provinces. However, they were optimistic that 'conservative, nationalist, aristocratic *santiaguino* capitalism' (in reference to the ultra-traditionalist establishment based in the capital) could be easily provoked to assume a repressive anti-revolutionary attitude if a reactionary movement could be spearheaded by 'foreign interests linked to the Norte Grande and from the "Germans" of Cautín, Valdivia, Osorno and Llanquihue, who represent the extreme conservative racist tradition opposed to the potentially dangerous indigenous population'. It went on to claim that 30 youth members of Fiducia had visited German-descended landowners, warning them that their property was in danger. In reality, the journal claimed, they were preparing 'a bloodbath in the south, playing to the racism and fear of the landowners'.¹

At the time, it would have been easy to dismiss such claims as the kind of overblown conspiracy theory typical of the Cold War era and of the New Left in 1960s Latin America. Nevertheless, the piece draws attention to the importance of an actor little mentioned in the abundant literature about the tumultuous years of radical reform, attempted revolution and military reaction in Chile between 1967 and 1973. It also suggests a factor which until recently was rarely associated with twentieth-century Chilean politics: that of race.² The 'Germans' referred to in the *Punto Final* article were, in reality, just one group amongst many who had been settled in the indigenous heartlands of the south by the Chilean state in the late nineteenth century as part of an expansionist, nation-building policy. Although ignored in mainstream political discourse of both Left and Right, the unresolved 'Mapuche question' has always been a destabilising factor for political programmes and for narratives of national identity: in some versions of *chilenidad*, the Mapuche is the very essence of the nation; in others, a barbarous relic of pre-civilisation. The legacy of these settlement policies is central to the story I will tell here. My study suggests that these early warnings about a threat to systemic reform from the southern settler landowners turned out to be uncannily accurate. This article traces how, faced with the prospect of losing the traditional basis of their power, they developed a clear collective identity, ideology and strategy for overcoming the threat of social modernisation in the countryside. This led to a stronger sense of common cause or class identity, a more ideological discourse and a greater readiness to employ

¹'Fiducia prepara baño de sangre', *Punto Final*, no. 19, first fortnight, Jan. 1967.

²A publication dealing systematically with this topic is Patricia Richards, *Race and the Chilean Miracle. Neoliberalism, Democracy, and Indigenous Rights* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2013). See also Joanna Crow, *The Mapuche in Modern Chile: A Cultural History* (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 2012).

violence. I argue that this was one of the major challenges to the viability of the far-reaching reformist projects of Frei and Allende.

Employing a range of sources, including local newspaper articles, documents from the Intendencia (regional government) of Cautín and interviews with landowners who experienced the land reform process at first hand, this study complements work on actors who benefitted from agrarian reform, such as tenant farmers or Mapuche communities,³ by reconstructing the experience, world view and strategy of those who were threatened by such projects. The local daily newspaper, *El Diario Austral*, contained regular opinion columns expressing the reaction of agricultural organisations such as the Sociedad Nacional de Agricultura (National Agriculture Society, SNA) and the Consorcio de Agricultores del Sur (Consortium of Southern Landowners, CAS) to agrarian reform. Through these columns, we can trace the evolution and consolidation of a counterrevolutionary ideology. Conversations with the landowners themselves, carried out in 2009 and 2010 in Temuco, the provincial capital of Cautín, provide important insights into the world views of those who believed themselves to be the upholders of western civilisation in Chile.⁴ Written sources from the Left, such as *Punto Final*, have also been used to provide a broader perspective.

Frontier Settlers in Cautín

Crucial to the arguments developed here are the historical and cultural differences between the traditional landowning class of the Central Valley and the frontier settlers who are the object of this article. Before telling their story, it is necessary to explore their historical background. According to Jorge Pinto in his study of changing attitudes towards the Mapuche in the nineteenth century, the independent republics of Latin America were not interested in the conquest of *subjects*, as had been the case with the Spanish conquistadors, but in the conquest of *territory* as a way to bolster their emergent nation-states. One way of doing this was to populate the frontier regions with new settlers, preferably of civilised and ‘racially advanced’ European stock. Indigenous people who happened to inhabit it were seen simply as obstacles in the way of progress.⁵ Legislation passed in 1866 allowed the Chilean state to establish new towns and provinces in the land between the Bio Bio and Tolten rivers, which had remained independent Mapuche territory since the Spanish conquest in the sixteenth century. A process of colonisation backed up by military advance – generally known as the ‘pacification’ – was all but complete by 1881, with final defeat of Mapuche resistance and the foundation of the town of Temuco. This policy was accompanied by the confinement of indigenous communities to thousands of separate and arbitrary *reducciones*.⁶ Meanwhile, the

³See for example Heidi Tinsman, *La tierra para él que la trabaja* (Santiago: LOM, 2009); Martín Correa, Raúl Molina and Nancy Yáñez, *La reforma agraria y las tierras mapuches, Chile 1962–1975* (Santiago: LOM, 2005).

⁴All interviewees agreed they could be named and quoted on the understanding that their information was to be used strictly for the purposes of academic research.

⁵Jorge Pinto Rodríguez, *La formación del Estado y la nación, y el pueblo mapuche: De la inclusión a la exclusión* (Santiago: Dibam, 2003), pp. 151–2.

⁶Several works deal with this event. See for example José Bengoa, *Historia del pueblo mapuche* (Santiago: Ediciones Sur, 5th edn, 1996).

government attempted to settle the new territory with farmers, as it was considered that they would help establish a modern nation-state.⁷

One of the most systematic accounts of colonisation policy in the years of frontier settlement is that of Carl Solberg, who placed particular emphasis on its discriminatory nature. Echoing Juan Bautista Alberdi's notion that 'to govern is to populate' – the Argentine liberal statesman's prescription for incorporating the large and sparsely populated Patagonia into the nation-state – Chilean governments of the later nineteenth century developed highly selective settlement policies. They barred Chileans of modest means from acquiring land through the device of selling it only in large lots, while simultaneously favouring foreign-born colonisers through the setting up of recruitment offices in Paris and other European cities. These were enticed by the promise of extensive government help with items such as travel expenses, farm equipment and seed. This occurred at a time when widespread belief in a natural hierarchy of human civilisations, known today as 'scientific racism', was in the ascendancy. Solberg points out how some intellectuals believed the solution to racial inferiority was to gradually whiten the population through interbreeding of mestizos with European immigrants. He underlines the 'worship' of German or Anglo-Saxon peoples in late-nineteenth-century Chile, citing *El Mercurio*, which assured its readers in 1898 that 'the Italian and the Spaniard' were 'too much like us in habits, customs, ideas and industries' and that 'the northern European' was 'a preferable immigrant'.⁸

In some ways, however, the results of these immigration policies were disappointing. The number of settlers fell short of government expectations and by 1907 fewer than 2 per cent of Cautín's landowners were foreign-descended. Their wealth and possessions rested on far shakier foundations than those of the old landowning class of the Central Valley. To the cultivation of virgin land in hostile climatic conditions was added an 'Indian problem', which the colonisers' state sponsors had tacitly acknowledged by providing them with rifles and ammunition. However, they owned nearly 7 per cent of the total land area (a far higher proportion of productive agricultural land) and played a key role in providing new services and infrastructure, such as schools, fire stations and hospitals.⁹ Coming as they generally did from humble and sometimes even non-agricultural backgrounds (helped, it should be noted, by government land grants and technical assistance), they considered themselves self-made pioneers who had earned political influence through taking on high risks and working hard.

Crucially, Solberg charts not only the rise but also the fall of foreign colonisation policy between 1870 and 1914. By the end of this period, nationalism was reshaping

⁷A useful comparative study is Alberto Harambour's work on the colonisation of Patagonia by Chile and Argentina. There were clearly many parallels with the case of Cautín: here, too, a process of nation-building involving the encouragement of 'desirable races' to bring productive farming and civilisation to the territory led to a 'working-class insurgency [which] threatened the local order built jointly by the nation-state and imperial capital' to which the answer was violence. Alberto Harambour, 'Borderland Sovereignties. Postcolonial Colonialism and State Making in Patagonia. Argentina and Chile, 1840s–1922', PhD diss., Stony Brook University, 2012, p. 119.

⁸Carl Solberg, *Immigration and Nationalism, Argentina and Chile, 1890–1914* (Austin, TX: University of Austin Press, 1970), p. 19.

⁹*Ibid.*, p. 59.

Chilean frontier land policy. With the dawning of widespread awareness about problems associated with mass poverty known broadly as the Social Question, legislation increasingly envisioned using the public domain to further the economic welfare of the masses. Subsequently, during the 1920s and 1930s, the government ended foreign colonisation and settled thousands of native-born Chileans on public frontier lands. Nevertheless, powerful landed interests such as the SNA continually prevented any kind of agrarian reform from replicating social modernisation policies, such as unionisation or land redistribution, in the countryside.¹⁰

Of course, the state is a broad and heterogeneous entity, which includes the forces of law and order. As Thomas Klubock points out in his recent history of social and forestry policy in southern Chile, the state's hegemony over its southern frontier remained limited even following the so-called 'pacification'. He suggests that the state's weaker presence in these regions meant that it was readier to resort to violence and that it exercised authority in more explicit ways than in central Chile, and claims that countless acts of low-level violence against *campesinos* were being carried out. This came to a head in the Ránquil massacre of 1934, which took place high up in the Andes near the source of the Bio Bio river, and from which one of the main national peasant unions would take its name. Attempts to quash a massive land takeover by rural workers and Mapuches, who had been coordinated in large part by the recently-formed Chilean Communist Party, led the protestors to march on Temuco. The government of Arturo Alessandri panicked, sending further police reinforcements. It is estimated that they killed close to 500 protestors and imprisoned a similar number, because of fears that the rebellion could spread. A key consequence was the postponement of legislation to allow rural unions until the agrarian reform of the 1960s. Klubock contrasts this with the situation in the Central Valley, where landowners held the power of coercion and built paternalist relations with their *inquilinos* (resident estate labourers who worked for their *patrón* in exchange for food and shelter but rarely for money wages). On the frontier, estate owners systematically usurped land from the *reducciones* through tactics that included fraud, coercion and boundary alterations. As a result, both landowners' and the state's authority were frequently challenged in many local-level rebellions, land invasions and protests. Klubock concludes, 'it is no accident of history that waves of land occupations by southern *campesinos* impelled the radicalisation of Chile's land reform between 1967 and 1973'.¹¹ By the time agrarian reform arrived, hundreds of communities had land claims going through the slow and inefficient *juzgados de indios* (Indian courts). Over the decade from 1961 to 1971, disputes amounted to a total of no fewer than 1,434.¹² It should be unsurprising that those communities would not only welcome but overwhelm the process of agrarian reform when it finally arrived, and that the reaction against it on the part of those who stood to lose out would also be substantial. In a recent account of the origins of the

¹⁰Carl Solberg, 'A Discriminatory Frontier Land Policy: Chile, 1870–1914', *The Americas*, 26: 2 (July 1969), p. 133.

¹¹Thomas Miller Klubock, *La Frontera. Forests and Ecological Conflict in Chile's Frontier Territory* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), p. 15.

¹²Jesús Ángel Redondo, 'Las tomas de fundos en la provincial de Cautín (Chile), 1967–1973', *Cuadernos de Historia* (Departamento de Ciencias Históricas, Universidad de Chile), 42 (June 2015), p. 161.

contemporary Mapuche movement, Fernando Pairicán suggests that it was not only the Mapuches who became politicised. He affirms that

the reaction of the landowners at the time was to go on the offensive. They also became politicised, resulting in a resurgence of attitudes, views and beliefs that led them to dust off the shotguns – if they had ever been put away in the first place – that their fathers had used in the years after the occupation of the Araucanía.¹³

From these studies we can posit three hypotheses relevant to the reaction of this landowning class to agrarian reform in the 1960s and 1970s. The first of these is that the farmers of German, Swiss, Italian, French and other European origins arrived with a clear notion of their privileged status and of their role as civilising agents, and that this sense of mission, identity and entitlement was transmitted to their descendants, affecting their response to the prospect of land expropriation. The second is that such a response was conditioned by their sense of being embattled on two fronts. On the one hand they felt threatened by the Indians who surrounded them and contested their land, as well as by the legacy of frontier banditry (the outlaws and squatters whose way of life had also been upset by nineteenth-settlement policies and who had often formed into violent gangs dedicated to theft and murder). Yet on the other hand, though for very different reasons, they felt oppressed by an increasingly indifferent or even hostile government concerned more about social justice than about governing by populat-ing. By the 1960s the tables had turned entirely against them with developmentalist, and later socialist, governments advocating mass land expropriation and the creation of peasant unions. To these concerns may be added a third factor particularly relevant to this study: the rise of political groupings who saw the unresolved conflicts of the frontier as the basis of their revolutionary agendas. What groups such as the MIR saw as political agitation the landowners understood as a declaration of war against their very livelihoods, and acted accordingly.

This final point reminds us of the Cold War context of the events described. Throughout Latin America, the landowning class could observe the leftward shift taking place in the wake of the Cuban Revolution, which appeared to bring with it the political organisation of the poor and the end of the old order. In Chile, landowners conflated the idea of the nation with that of the hacienda, and that of democracy with the social tranquillity and deference which they expected to find therein.¹⁴ In the case of Cautín, the legacy of ‘pacification’ led settler-farmers to believe that ‘their own’ peasants and the nearby indigenous communities could be kept under control through a combination of traditional deference and old-fashioned coercion inherited from Hernán Trizano – mercenary and adventurer who had fought successful campaigns during the War of the Pacific (fought 1879–83 between Chile and the Peru–Bolivia alliance) – and his rural vigilantes, volunteer ruffians who patrolled the newly-conquered frontier territories between

¹³Fernando Pairicán Padilla, *La rebelión del movimiento mapuche, 1990–2013* (Santiago: Pehuén, 2014), p. 43.

¹⁴Tinsman, *La tierra para él que la trabaja*, pp. 37–8.

the 1890s and the 1920s, when they were incorporated into the *carabineros* (the regular police force).¹⁵ However, that did not make the potential for rebellion of the Mapuches or mestizos any less worrying: landowners were acutely aware of the fragile basis on which their hard-earned wealth was based, susceptible to the supposed forces of barbarism which international communism had the ability to harness for its own benefit. Alongside this fear of a return to barbarism, hostility therefore tended to be focused on those in a position to influence the poorest and subvert what they considered to be the natural social order: a new middle class of left-wing activists and government employees.

The 'Revolution in Liberty' and Agrarian Reform in Cautín

As part of its non-capitalist but anti-Marxist 'Revolution in Liberty', the Christian Democrat Party passed Agrarian Reform Law No. 16.040 in July 1967, which proposed to end *latifundismo* by expropriating all large private farms, replacing them with communities of small property-owning producers.¹⁶ Other legislation allowed rural workers to set up their own unions, thus finally introducing collective bargaining – enjoyed for decades in the mines and factories – into the countryside. But the law entirely overlooked the problem of ancestral land disputes in the old indigenous territories. Amongst the key promoters of the Revolution in Liberty was a young Cautín landowner and politician named Jorge Lavandero, who had been involved in acquiring land and housing for the rural poor.

Yet even the paternalistic Lavandero did not escape the bottled-up anger of the Mapuche communities. An account from *Punto Final* claimed that Lavandero's grandfather had usurped 500 hectares of land from the Chucauco community that bordered the family estate in Quepe. On learning that members of this community were planning a land invasion (or *toma*), Lavandero attempted to give away the land to his own workers as a Christmas present, provoking a conflict between them and the Mapuches.¹⁷ This reflects the complexity of the situation and the fact that technocratic Christian Democrat agrarian reform legislation was wholly inadequate to address the legacy of land usurpation in Cautín. An article in *Punto Final* lists nine cases where communities recovered land through direct occupation in the first months of Allende's presidency. All of them had lost land totalling 100 hectares or more within the previous 40 years. In the case of the aptly named 'Poco a Poco' (Little by Little) estate, an original acquisition of 20 hectares was said to have grown to 130 hectares solely through the usurpation of Mapuche land. The owner at the time of agrarian reform, José Fernando Datwiller – a descendant of German settlers – had demonstrated his attitude to his Mapuche neighbours by regularly driving his jeep into their animals.¹⁸

Opinions expressed in the columns of the conservative *Diario Austral* closely reflected those of the National Party, newly formed in 1966 by right-wingers

¹⁵Jorge Pinto Rodríguez, *El bandolerismo de la frontera (1880–1920)* (Temuco: Ediciones Universidad de la Frontera, 1985).

¹⁶The crucial benchmark for the definition of 'large', and hence for expropriation, was '80 basic irrigated hectares'.

¹⁷'La derecha conspira para detener la reforma agraria', *Punto Final*, no. 122, 19 Jan. 1971.

¹⁸*Ibid.*

nostalgic for the times of Frei's conservative predecessor, Jorge Alessandri, and for the days of their unquestioned entitlement to authority and respect. Its editorial expressed the indignation felt by the region's landowners: 'the farmer has been labelled as backward, as lacking in entrepreneurial spirit, as being inactive and of lacking initiative. This is patently false since Chilean agriculture clearly exhibits the highest productivity in Latin America thanks precisely to the efforts of its landowners.' It also contained harsh criticism and dark forebodings for the future of both agriculture and social stability in Chile.

Regrettably, agrarian reform has been conceived as a social and political project, and not as the technical project that it should be. It was written by a group of foreign officials employed by international institutions ... all united by a common characteristic: their total ignorance of farm work and of the realities of Chilean agriculture. There has been an intensive propaganda campaign aimed at disrupting the normal cycle of agricultural work. Christian Democrat activists acting as civil servants, together with professional agitators in the pay of international communism, have disrupted farm work in every possible way.¹⁹

The text demonstrates an incipient discourse of nationalism and anti-communism in its references to foreign officials and the conflation of civil servants and communist agitators. There can be no doubt that a widespread and active hostility existed towards those government functionaries who worked for the new organisations associated with the Ministry of Agriculture – Instituto Nacional de Desarrollo Agropecuario (National Institute of Agricultural Development, INDAP) and the Corporación de Reforma Agraria (Agrarian Reform Corporation, CORA) – from the moment Law No. 16.040 was passed. Jacques Chonchol, the main architect of agrarian reform, who was to become minister of agriculture under Allende following a split in the Christian Democrat Party, was clearly one of the politicians most resented by the Cautín landowners throughout this period. Under the headline 'Communist Agitation in the Fields', *El Diario Austral* complained that 'rather than establishing the conditions necessary for making the land more productive, state employees in the agricultural sector, directed by Marxist and Christian Democrat members of parliament, prefer to expend their efforts on political agitation'.²⁰

Cautín landowners were bothered not only by the idea that these almost entirely young, recently graduated and often urban government employees were practising political agitation instead of doing their job. They also felt indignant about the appearance of 'outsiders' on their land, who typically arrived without warning to take measurements and interview tenants. Even the relatively progressive Lavandero found it intrusive when his workers were visited by a member of INDAP and an inspector from the Ministry of Work. On one visit, Lavandero complained to the provincial Work Inspectorate, 'I simply will not accept that government inspectors come to this farm and put pressure on my workers without giving

¹⁹*El Diario Austral*, 6 July 1967.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 10 Aug. 1967.

prior notice [...] The interrogations have been so degrading that some employees had to ask the Inspector to leave.²¹

More typical of the southern landowning class was Nicanor Allende, president of CAS. In an opinion piece for the *Diario Austral*, he had compared the 'creation of productive agricultural land' with 'creating a fatherland', suggesting the incipient creation of a nationalist ideology directly opposed to popular ideas about nationhood, which saw the traditional landowning class as the cause of, rather than the solution to, underdevelopment. He exhorted fellow farmers 'not to be cowed into accepting threats to progress'.²² The formation of a National Party in 1966 had been a reflection of the landowning class's strategy of winning electoral support by portraying the opposition as unpatriotic. Electoral propaganda for the 1969 elections for the Chamber of Deputies included a bitter response to the claim of the ruling Christian Democrat Party that, thanks to the Frei presidency, Chile had witnessed '100 years of decline and four years of progress' in reference to the challenge to landowner hegemony represented by land reform and other modernising policies.²³ The National Party railed against 'the resentment, insolence and arrogance used by the Christian Democrat Party to denigrate the honourable history of our nation and the attempt to justify the material destruction and spiritual vengeance suffered by Chile under the "Revolution in Liberty"', and continued, 'as Chileans, we cannot allow this attempt to denigrate a historical trajectory which honours us and makes us proud'. The article continues with a list of historical gains, which include victory in the War of the Pacific, consolidation of a sovereign state based on law and respect for liberty, the highest agricultural productivity in Latin America, and the efficiency and discipline of the armed forces. The suggestion is that that these historical achievements would be lost if the lower orders continued to increase their (still rather meagre) share of land and power. In order to recover this historical advance, the propaganda exhorts followers 'to rebel against the campaign of resignation and defeatism which attempts to inculcate public opinion with the absurd idea that the demagogic initiatives of the [Christian Democrat] Party of Government constitute "irreversible deeds"'.²⁴ One response to the call for 'rebellion' was action by leading Cautín landowners and National Party members from Cautín, who blocked the Pan-American Highway in protest at the low wheat prices enforced by the government as part of its social policy. Thirteen of them were arrested; these came to be known heroically amongst their supporters as 'Los Trece'.²⁵

Alongside the strategies of gaining electoral support for the National Party, committing acts of civil disobedience, and creating an alternative, conservative national narrative, lay a more sinister strategy: the violent intimidation of peasants and government employees involved in executing agrarian reform policy. An indignant letter signed by leaders of Christian Democrat peasant unions in the neighbouring province of Malleco, for example, accuses Oscar Schleyer (a German-descended

²¹Oficios recibidos, Archivo de la Intendencia de Cautín (AIC), folder 221, 1966 (exact date unknown).

²²*El Diario Austral*, 18 Aug. 1967.

²³*Ibid.*, 18 Nov. 1968.

²⁴*Ibid.*

²⁵*Ibid.*, 19 Jan. 1969.

landowner in Villarica and previous Intendente (regional governor) of Cautín) and others of shooting at their tenants. One was also accused of entering offices of CORA in an inebriated state with the intention of provoking a fight.²⁶ More dramatically, a couple of months later, in the southern town of Linares, CORA employee Hernán Mery was killed while taking legal possession of a farm. The death of Mery, and the refusal of a National Party parliamentary representative from Cautín to participate in an official act of homage, had already moved the conflict to a much higher level of confrontation and national importance over a year before Allende gained the presidency.

Hatred of government officials was in many cases extreme. A public announcement placed in *El Diario Austral* by the Federación de Sindicatos de Empleadores (Association of Agricultural Employers) in response to accusations of violence and intimidation towards CORA staff leaves us in little doubt about the levels of hostility felt by the former towards the new, young government functionaries in the months before the Popular Unity coalition came to power. A letter signed by various local landowners' associations likens 'the system of expropriation currently in use in our country to those of "totalitarian regimes"'. It is interesting to note that government policy was already being compared to such regimes some time before the prospect of a Marxist president in Chile became imminent, suggesting that, as far as the landowners were concerned, the mere act of violating property rights in itself constituted an attack on democracy. The missive continued: 'We know for a fact that there are around 400 farms expropriated by CORA which are unproductive, and that all farms administered by CORA are inefficient.' It concluded, in capital letters: 'HISTORY WILL DECIDE WHO THE BAD CHILEANS REALLY ARE: WHETHER IT IS WE, THE AGRICULTURAL EMPLOYERS, WHO HAVE MADE THIS REGION GREAT THANKS TO THE HARD WORK OF GENERATIONS, OR THESE NEW EPHEMERAL GODS, PLUNDERERS OF THE WORK OF OTHERS, PROFESSIONAL LIARS AND SOWERS OF FALSE HOPE.'²⁷

This also reveals the strong sense of injustice felt by those who saw themselves as the true owners of the province and rightful heirs to its wealth. It is not hard to imagine how these people would react in the years and months ahead when the electoral victory of Salvador Allende was followed by rumours of armed takeovers, and mass mobilisation of Mapuche communities became widespread.

'El Cautinazo'

There can be little doubt that, following the inauguration of Salvador Allende as president in November 1970, the situation of conflict in Cautín presented one of the biggest challenges to the Popular Unity's '*Vía chilena al socialismo*', a projected transition to a socialist system that would occur entirely within existing legal political arrangements. Hundreds of disputes had arisen as a result of land being taken from communities by adjoining estates, which was often later sold on, creating potentially explosive situations that could not be legally resolved. The situation was exploited by the extra-parliamentary MIR, which did not share the Allende

²⁶*Ibid.*, 27 March 1970.

²⁷*El Diario Austral*, 26 March 1970 (emphasis in original). The letter is signed by Omar Cancino, Presidente del Sindicato de Pequeños Proprietarios Agrícolas de Lautaro, and others.

government's faith in the *Vía chilena*. Indeed the MIR, or more specifically its peasant front, the Movimiento Campesino Revolucionario (Revolutionary Peasant Movement, MCR), had already targeted Cautín as an area it identified as ripe for revolution. Frustrated with the slow pace of change and sceptical about the ability of what it saw as bourgeois democratic institutions to bring about class revolution, its strategy was to facilitate the direct takeover of estates, with special emphasis on the Mapuche communities and their ongoing land demands.²⁸ Though mention of its presence and rumours of guerrilla activity had been appearing in *El Diario Austral* since 1967, its real mobilisational successes came in the immediate aftermath of Allende's victory, and can be measured by the number of land takeovers that took place in the months from November 1970 to April 1971.²⁹ The widespread conflicts surrounding these takeovers in the province of Cautín became known nationally as 'El Cautinazo'. Under the headline 'MIR territory', the *Diario Austral's* portrayal of the situation reads as a mix of real concern about Cautín becoming a kind of second Cuba and comic disdain toward the idealistic middle-class youngsters who had lately become ubiquitous around the remote countryside.

Eating large quantities of cattle every day, basking in the sun slouched in comfortable armchairs – like typical summer holiday-makers – and strutting their stuff the length and breadth of Cautín, the Miristas are the new lords and owners of the region. The activity of these groups, for the most part comprised of bearded youngsters, is intense and centres around the 'concientización' [political education] of the peasants, who are mostly Mapuches, to keep them constantly trained for action.³⁰

A contemporary account by a US journalist described how, on 30 November 1970, 20 Mapuche families from the Alhueco *reducción* – which had lost land to the Tres Hijuelas estate owned by Carlos Taladriz – pitched crude tents of wheat sacks and old blankets on the farm under the cover of dawn. They posted guards at the deserted farmhouse of the estate taking advantage of the fact that its owner was away in Santiago. The Mapuches then proceeded to festoon the house and the farm's principal installations with the red and black banners of the MIR and of its peasant affiliate, the MCR. The following day *El Diario Austral* printed a front-page photograph of the Mapuches, armed with cudgels and pitchforks, massed at the entrance to the farm, which had been blocked with eucalyptus poles bearing a portrait of Che Guevara. Above their heads a large banner was tied to the gateposts that read: 'Campamento Lautaro. Land or Death. Revolutionary Peasant Movement'. The newspaper reported total intransigence on the part of the new occupants, who alleged that the lands had been stolen from their community in

²⁸See Florencia E. Mallon, *Courage Tastes of Blood: The Mapuche Community of Nicolás Ailio and the Chilean State, 1906–2001* (Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press, 2005).

²⁹David Lehmann, 'Land Reform in Chile 1965–1972', unpubl. D.Phil thesis, University of Oxford, 1974, p. 185 cites the figure of 70 farm seizures in Cautín.

³⁰*El Diario Austral*, 24 March 1971.

the past and insisted upon remaining on the farm until it was expropriated by the CORA.³¹

Later, when the Ministry of Agriculture was moved to Temuco in January 1971 to deal with the problem of land invasions by Mapuche communities, Cautín's landowning oligarchy accused the government of 'punishing' the province for having returned the highest right-wing vote. *Punto Final* quoted an editorial from the *Diario Austral* in which the agriculture minister, Chonchol, was described as a *mapuchista*, a pun on the name of his breakaway party, the Movimiento de Acción Popular Unitaria (Unified Popular Action Movement, MAPU), composed of leftist ex-Christian Democrats such as himself who felt more comfortable working with the Allende coalition than against it.³²

The perception that Cautín landowners had of the threat is clearly exemplified in a letter sent to the Agrarian Tribunal, a special body set up by the military regime shortly after the coup to deal with disputed land claims. Carlos Taladriz pleaded for special consideration when requesting the return of land on his Tres Hijuelas estate on the grounds that he had been the first in the province 'against whom the political foot soldiers of the pro-coup [*sic*] movements MIR and MCR vented their rage'. To flesh out his case he recounted how, on 30 November 1970,

some 150 indigenous men and women from the neighbouring reserves arrived in the dead of night ... they TOOK OVER the Tres Hijuelas estate, occupying seed sheds and living quarters, they sealed the main gate, hanging new signs over it. They insulted my wife when she attempted to get to our house, which I have not been able to reach myself ... because I have been threatened with firearms every time I tried to return. They appropriated all the farm machinery: burning out or damaging the motors of two tractors; and they have also taken ploughs, rakes, seed drills etc. They appropriated all the animals, slaughtering several in quick succession in order to feed themselves. As if this were not enough: they forced entry into the main house and installed themselves there, using beds and other furniture belonging to my family.

I have learnt that the main farmhouse, like the other buildings, is now in a worse state than a pigsty or a hen-house. The occupants: all of them are thieves and rustlers, most of whom have a long police record. Every one of the sixteen or eighteen are indigenous people, who have their own property on the neighbouring reserves.³³

This indignant account reflects the mixture of disdain for young revolutionaries and the fear of a return to barbarism typical of many landowners at the time. Taladriz contrasts this chaotic scene with his own record: 'I had built new, comfortable and hygienic homes with running water and electricity for my own workers

³¹Norman Gall, 'The Agrarian Revolt in Cautín. Part 2: Land Reform and the MIR', Fieldstaff Reports. West Coast South America Series, no. 19, Washington, DC, 1972.

³²La derecha conspira para detener la reforma agraria'.

³³Archivo Servicio Agrícola Ganadero, expedientes CORA. No. 290-5, Provincia de Lautaro, Fundo 'Tres Hijuelas'.

who lived on this farm. They were varnished and painted.’ Taladriz’s testimony clearly indicates a conflation between conservative paternalism, the ‘civilisation-versus-barbarism’ discourse and anti-communism. It is to these ideological links between old-fashioned racism and the notion of the ‘communist enemy within’ characteristic of the Cold War period that I shall now turn.

Defending Family Tradition

The life stories and testimonies of landowners who experienced land reform make clear the link between defence of family tradition, consciousness of a civilising mission and anti-communist ideology. Jaime Baier, born in 1943, is a successful landowner descended from German immigrants. He recounted how his family arrived in the early twentieth century, emphasising a strong work ethic.

The governor at the time brought people over from Germany. He liked Germans because they were industrious, talented, hardworking men of few vices. Above all they were entrepreneurs. The economic and social conditions in Chile at the time meant that work had its reward. If you worked hard, you could make a fortune. So the secret was to work, work and work, and buy machinery and contract people. My grandfather first renounced his German citizenship and title with the aim of becoming a coloniser. And for each child he was given 40 hectares. So with his five children, he got 200 hectares. But because I’m third generation, we moved out and started our own businesses [elsewhere].

Later during the interview, Baier contrasted the experience of his grandfather with his own experience as a young farmer in Cautín during the 1960s, revealing a strongly conservative nationalist ideology influenced by the Cold War context.

At 25 I had bought an estate of 1,500 hectares. My parents and grandparents had worked peacefully in Chile for some 80 years, but my generation was confronted with the problem of imported political ideas. At that time we had the Vietnam war; in South America the Montoneros and Tupamaros had got started, not to mention the Cubans. And it was mainly the Cubans who exported revolution to South America. I think they were fundamentally evil, because they wanted to eliminate every hardworking business person. Because they thought we were exploiting others.³⁴

Baier claims that none of his 82 workers were interested in the agrarian reform. In Baier’s words ‘they were almost all children of old colonisers, of Italians or Spaniards, some Europeans; they had a different kind of culture. To start with, they weren’t Marxists. They believed in the right to property and they believed in hard work.’ The problem was that some 40 families were ‘brought in’ from outside to colonise part of his land, in what appears to have been a *toma*. Echoing criticism typical of right-wing memory in Cautín, Baier reported how these outsiders abused and destroyed property.

³⁴Interview with Jaime Baier, Temuco, 17 Nov. 2009.

The first afternoon they arrived, they took the part of the farm where I had 400 goats. They killed 15 of them to feed their dogs. Then they took four or five calves to eat. They drank. [...] They knew they would have an easy time of it because whoever became boss of the settlement (*asentamiento*) would have no problem laying their hands on 50, 60, 200, 300 dollars. So they were sheltered absolutely 100 per cent by the government because they had all become *asentados* [state-sponsored settlers]. All they had to do was support the government.³⁵

The narrative is clear. Only those descended from Europeans – particularly Germans – possessed the culture and attitudes necessary to expand production and create wealth on the land. Those without property found themselves in that situation because they did not deserve it due to their incapacity, demonstrated by the fact that they saw livestock as an immediate source of food for themselves and their dogs, rather than as capital for future wealth. Marxists and government officials used these people to amass their own power, thus opening the door to the triumph of barbarism and chaos. Baier's reflections on the 'Revolution in Liberty' clearly reflect his supremacist worldview:

I think it [the Revolution in Liberty] was a utopia. I don't believe that the culture or genes of the poor permit hunger or poverty to be overcome. They are a people who do not want to work. The weak man will never overcome his poverty. He prefers to be herded around; ill-treated perhaps, but with the protection of a *patrón* who pays him, even if not very much. You give him some land, but if he is incapable of producing anything on it, then what's the point? He will remain poor. The political argument at the time was that we were descended from foreigners and we had robbed the people, right? And we treated them badly and kept them like slaves. The fact was that we simply knew how to work and we were more cultured.³⁶

Germán Becker, mayor of Temuco during most of the agrarian reform period and also of German descent, was a second-generation immigrant farmer, owner of a 950-hectare estate, and member of the Radical Party faction that opposed Allende. The years of Popular Unity government were particularly tough for the Becker family: in April 1971, Germán Becker had lost the mayoralty of Temuco to a working-class socialist, Carlos Riffo; in July, his brother Osvaldo had to be hospitalised with a nervous breakdown when his estate was expropriated³⁷ and his widowed mother, Augusta Baechler, who had arrived in childhood along with his father as 'pioneers of the Frontier', had died. In her obituary, the *Diario Austral* suggested that she had 'died of a broken heart' upon witnessing the tumultuous events around her. It reaffirms the importance of the 'pioneer' narrative on the old frontier. It stated that Augusta, together with her future husband Oscar Becker,

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *El Diario Austral*, 2 July 1971.

travelled from foreign parts to colonise the south of our country, eager for the opportunity to work in a distant land [...] This group was formed by men of great dreams. There is no other way to explain their motivation, as the activity they sought was hard and demanded sacrifice. They had to clear trees, uproot trunks, erect fences and only then begin the long road towards making their fields productive, in constant struggle with [...] a series of enemies, including other men.³⁸

Clearly these 'men' were the bandits and Indians who inhabited the dangerous frontier where Oscar and Augusta had come to settle and farm. The obituary alludes to Hernán Trizano, founder of the rural vigilantes.

We have often paid homage to Hernán Trizano, forerunner to the *carabineros*. Let us recall that he appeared in our region in response to an indisputable need: the armed repression of banditry which for so long had had tragic consequences in the countryside. Colonisers, the Beckers amongst them, had to struggle against all these inconveniences in a primitive environment lacking even in roads.³⁹

The British journalist and historian Alistair Horne interviewed Germán Becker in January 1971, while researching his well-known contemporary book on the Allende period *A Small Earthquake in Chile*. It seems clear that, on account of the mushrooming number of land takeovers, Cautín had rapidly moved to the centre of national politics. Horne quotes from the MIR's *Punto Final*: 'What is happening down there [in Cautín] ... constitutes the trial by fire of the Chilean revolution, which, over the next months, will define its course.'⁴⁰ Claiming that the *carabineros* had received specific instructions from the MIR not to defend property owners, he confided that they were 'very unhappy' with the role they had to play. His comments on the Mapuches, and on the country of his family's origin, appear to demonstrate that concern about the forces of barbarism was greater than that about the ideological forces of the Left. Horne wrote:

[Becker] deplores the mischief that agitators are creating among the Mapuche Indians, for whom he has little admiration. The Mapuche have never been much interested in clearing virgin territory; they only keep sheep on odd patches of land, and few ever work properly. Drunkenness is a terrible problem: 'There is no race in the world quite so bad' ... 'We Germans are so disciplined, so at least *Kommunismus* is working over there [in East Germany] ... Here everybody wants to take, but not to work. In the past the Chileans never discovered a system for making people work, so ... the future must be worse here than in East Germany. I have seven sons, they will all leave, and so would

³⁸*Ibid.*, 3 July 1971.

³⁹*Ibid.*

⁴⁰*Punto Final*, no. 124, 16 Feb. 1971. Quoted in Alistair Horne, *Small Earthquake in Chile* (London: Papermac, 1990), p. 174.

I if I were younger ... We all worked fantastically hard ... built up everything from nothing.⁴¹

Evidently, however, not all those who stood to lose out under the Allende government either could leave or wanted to do so. Another prominent young landowner and politician from Cautín was Víctor Carmine, the National Party *diputado* who refused to pay homage to the assassinated CORA official, Hernán Mery. Carmine remembers queues at the airport to leave the country immediately after the 1970 election. He describes his family background thus:

My paternal grandfather was of Swiss origin, a Swiss-Italian. I still have my grandfather's work contract from the year he arrived, in 1884 (he was amongst the first in this region). He came to Chile because he had been told he wouldn't have to pay any taxes! He arrived in the area of Ercilla, where the Mapuche conflict is going on, in Chamichaco. Later he bought another piece of land around here, near Temuco, and all his children became farmers. That's where the tradition began. They were not big farmers, uh? They were small farmers. Nowadays we have grown a little more!⁴²

Carmine saw land reform as a policy imposed on a reluctant Jorge Alessandri by US President John F. Kennedy, which became really dangerous following the constitutional amendment that allowed land to be expropriated before negotiations with the owners took place. He expresses his fear at the time in terms of an existential threat. 'Here, the governors wanted to take over all the farms: the large ones first, the middle-sized ones next and finally the smallest ones. We were like the kulaks in the Russian Revolution. I mean we were going to be wiped out, first of all economically, and in some cases physically!' He felt that the legal and state institutions had lost legitimacy because of their ideological bias. 'After expropriation, you could go to a tribunal and say "I have the right to a reserve" and all that. But you found you were up against the functionaries, the state, against everything. Their aim was to expropriate everything.' In Carmine's case, desperation turned into a determination to fight:

We started to get organised. [We had a slogan:] 'Chile is not lost as long as there is a Chilean who will not surrender' or something like that. The ruling class who had the money upped and left. But many of us in the ruling class did not have the money to leave! So we had no option but to stay and fight. And that's what we did.⁴³

Armed Resistance

Carmine's testimony above concerns the *retoma*, or 'taking back', of the Rucalan estate in Carahue on Christmas Eve of 1970; it illustrates the resolve, organisation

⁴¹*Ibid.*, p. 182.

⁴²Interview with Víctor Carmine, Temuco, 19 Dec. 2009.

⁴³*Ibid.*

and logic that the landowning class had already developed in Cautín at the beginning of Allende's presidency. The estate had undergone a high-profile takeover by members of neighbouring Mapuche community and activists from the MCR. According to accounts of the event, the family house was surrounded at dawn and its occupants given 20 minutes to vacate the premises.⁴⁴ Like many friends and colleagues in the National Party such as Carlos Podlech (lawyer and *diputado* like Carmine himself), membership of parliament and of the legal profession was no barrier to the use of organised, armed resistance. As Carmine's jovial reminiscence makes clear, the peasant and Mapuche families who were enjoying their Christmas feast were held in contempt, spoken of as if they were a herd of animals that had gone astray. Similar contempt was held for the state apparatus, which is portrayed as acting illegally by daring to investigate the event.

We simply said 'Let's take back the farm'. So we got organised. I don't know, there must have been about 80 volunteers and we just went and took back the farm fair and square, reinstated the owners and left. What happened as a result? The government immediately spoke out, not against those who had illegally taken the farm, but against those of us who had taken it back. And I'm talking about: the Law of Domestic Security; 30 detectives; a visit by a minister; I mean the full force of the State against those of us who had put things in their rightful place. We were all united by the cause, and we noticed that things were getting serious, I mean the law was a disguise, a mask. The occupiers had slaughtered one of the owner's cows, they had installed themselves in his house to eat the animal for their Christmas feast [*asado*]. The government was at their service, quite clearly. We probably fired about 200 shots and they responded. At one moment (they were in the middle of the feast) they were seized by panic. There must have been 100 or 120 people there inside – men, women and children – whom I saw just break right through the chicken wire fence all at once from sheer terror!⁴⁵

The furore following Hernán Mery's death, described above, was not forgotten when, in February of the following year at the height of the land seizures, Víctor Carmine (who had been suspended by his party for refusing to pay condolences to Mery's family) and others used firearms to threaten agronomists driving a United Nations vehicle that had been sent on a technical mission to negotiate with Mapuches and MCR activists on the San Andrés estate in Loncoche county, recently seized in an illegal takeover. Some 4 km from the estate, the vehicle was intercepted by a group of armed landowners led by Carmine, who pointed a gun at an employee of the Instituto de Capacitación e Investigación en Reforma Agraria (Agrarian Reform Research and Training Institute, ICIRA), demanding he identify himself. When he refused to oblige, Carmine proffered insults and proceeded to fire at the vehicle's tyres, leaving it and its occupants stranded in open country.⁴⁶

⁴⁴A detailed account of this event, from a variety of perspectives, can be found in Mallon, *Courage Tastes of Blood*, pp. 1–8.

⁴⁵Interview with Víctor Carmine, Temuco, 19 Dec. 2009.

⁴⁶Oficios despachados, AIC, folder 336, 'Caso Carmine', 1971 (exact date unknown).

The pro-government press was quick to make a connection between 'Cowboy Carmine's previous declaration that 'Hernán Mery will not be the first [victim of violence]' and his attack on the ICIRA vehicle. Drawing attention to the hypocrisy of his comments describing government employees as the true 'usurpers', newspapers supporting Allende reminded readers that he and his kind were ready to continue 'shooting down Mapuches as had been their custom throughout history'.⁴⁷ Official sources made the case that Carmine's actions were an act of sedition designed to ignite an armed conflict in which landowners would clearly have the upper hand. A memorandum from the Intendencia to the Ministry of Agriculture declared that Carmine's actions were just part of a concerted effort to oppose reform in Cautín which were 'evidently designed to create a climate of insecurity and confusion; they are acts of violence and disorder aimed at upsetting the peace'. The report speaks of the creation of rumours designed to create 'real psychosis', including false rumours of expropriation, the sighting of 'Cubans' in the area, or acts designed to create a climate of fear and insecurity. Posters and graffiti had appeared all around Temuco inciting others to follow Carmine's example. The memo suggested that all of this was designed to bring about a climate of sedition aimed at bringing down the government, a theory backed openly by Carmine himself, who had made declarations to the press stating 'sooner rather than later the people of Chile will find a way to expel the Marxists from power'.⁴⁸

The MIR itself had already warned, following the failed coup attempt centred on the murder of army commander-in-chief René Schneider, that a right-wing conspiracy against the Allende government was now pinning its hopes on 'the peasant zones, where the agrarian reform process will have to confront an intransigent opposition'. It singled out the big landowners of Cautín, many of whom sustained openly fascist points of view on topics such as the relationship between race and civilisation, along with plans to destabilise and overthrow the government. The group was said to be led by Carlos Podlech, instigator of road blockades against price controls during the Frei government, and his brother, Alfonso Podlech, the main lawyer defending landowners in the province, descendants of German settlers. Carlos Podlech was said to have made public declarations that the government would be forced to listen to the voice of machine guns if it tried to take away land in Cautín. Allegedly, the Podlech brothers were in contact with similar organisations throughout the country.⁴⁹

It would not be long before the National Party had a martyr to the cause. On 19 April 1971, a young member of the party, Rolando Matus, was shot dead defending his land from Miristas in Currarehue, in the county of Pucón. Already described as 'martyr of Cautín' on the day of his funeral, armed National Party members promptly formed the Rolando Matus Brigade, a makeshift paramilitary organisation that worked in parallel with the neo-fascist *Patria y Libertad* (Homeland and Freedom) group – perpetrator of frequent acts of violence and sabotage in Temuco – to 'defend' land from extremists and Mapuches. In the eyes of some they were defending not simply property, but the very concept of civilisation itself.

⁴⁷*La Nación*, 17 Feb. 1971.

⁴⁸Oficios despachados, AIC, folder 336, 'Caso Carmine'.

⁴⁹La derecha conspira para detener la reforma agraria'.

One-time National Party candidate Miguel Huerta even compared Matus to 'El Cid, who would [also] win his struggle for the preservation of Christian civilisation'.⁵⁰

Such a struggle was causing death and injury by the end of 1971. In an event that caused national uproar, MCR member and Mapuche Moisés Huentelaf was shot at the occupied Chesque estate in Loncoche on 22 October 1971. Days later, a group of Mapuches, allegedly mobilised by the Maoist group Netuain mapu (meaning 'Take back the land'), occupied usurped land on the Huilío estate near Imperial in early November 1971. Landowner Gustavo Navarrete summoned a group of seven or eight armed accomplices and drove them to the site, where they began to fire on the Mapuche community which had gathered to set up a *campamento* (makeshift housing erected on occupied land). According to an Intendencia report, the majority fled, leaving a small group armed with just one serviceable weapon. It was at this point that an eight-months pregnant woman was seriously injured. The violence did not stop at this. Having run out of ammunition, the assailants were reported to have attacked the Mapuches with heavy objects, causing serious injury. They then set fire to the Mapuches' belongings, including their *carretas* (wooden carts), a vital means of transport and important cultural symbol.⁵¹

According to a report by Alfonso Podlech, key lawyer in the defence of landowners, governmental indifference to the conflict in Cautín had resulted in six deaths and 19 serious injuries by January 1972.⁵² Though reflecting a dramatic and ongoing situation, these figures hardly constitute the alleged state of 'civil war' that a number of commentators were playing up. (The same Podlech, who had defended landowners throughout the agrarian reform period, would later use this justification to condemn to death for treason a number of MIR activists after the coup, in his new role as military judge.)⁵³

An opinion column appearing in *El Diario Austral* linked the Huilío and Chesque incidents to the history of the frontier and the Battle of Arauco, in which the conquistadors first attempted to subdue the Mapuche people. Under the headline 'The Struggle for the South', it began, 'There is no doubt that behind the agitation in the countryside of the South lurks a far greater and more complex danger than in the Central Valley.' It concluded with a stark warning that if the government did not find solutions to conflict in the south, it risked 'going back in time and offering up a part of Chile as fair game for new colonisers' – a reference to the nineteenth-century French adventurer Orélie Antoine de Tounens, who had put himself forward as king of an independent Mapuche nation.⁵⁴

It was clear what was meant by 'new colonisers' in the twentieth century: revolutionaries in the pay of Moscow, Peking or Havana. Eyewitness reports seemed to corroborate rumours of ubiquitous guerrilla training camps throughout the countryside, most notably in the vast forestry reserves in Panguipulli, where the already mythical 'Comandante Pepe' was widely regarded as the Chilean answer to Che Guevara. An encounter by British journalist Alistair Horne with the family of

⁵⁰*El Diario Austral*, 4 Dec. 1971.

⁵¹Oficios despachados, AIC, folder 288, 1971.

⁵²*El Diario Austral*, 10 Jan. 1972; 25 Oct. 1971.

⁵³Interview with Víctor Maturana, Temuco, 21 Oct. 2009.

⁵⁴*El Diario Austral*, 2 Dec. 1971.

Nicanor Allende (Vice-President of the Sociedad Nacional de Agricultura, as well as director of CAS) in the province of Valdivia is instructive of the link between landowners and the military.

We dine together rather tensely. Also present is an army major and his wife. We talk of the elusive Comandante Pepe. The major has heard of him, is certain he exists and reckons he may have five thousand men. However, he stated, 'we could round them up tomorrow if we didn't have strict orders from the government not to'. He believes the MIR has a 'school of indoctrination' somewhere up in the mountains where Pepe is operating. They chose Liquine because it is very isolated and very, very poor. 'It all started well before September [1970].' The major is frankly frightened. We go along with him to call in on the house of another local farmer. After the representative of law and order has left, our host brings out a large Mauser revolver from under his bed, and half-laughingly says: 'That's Chile today!' [Nicanor Allende's son] takes me to inspect the *fundo* armoury. And what does the armoury consist of? A gun cupboard with a handful of antique shotguns and rifles – and an old German cavalry sword. 'You see, we're ready for the MIR!' he says proudly.⁵⁵

Working alongside and sometimes in conjunction with the Rolando Matus Brigade was the more ideological Patria y Libertad. This extra-parliamentary nationalist group, which had been formed in 1970 specifically to oppose the Marxist government in Chile, developed a strategy of frequent, low-level acts of terrorism such as power blackouts, the placing of explosives or the derailment of trains, designed to create fear and confusion amongst the population. Almost all testimonies about Cautín during the Popular Unity period coincide in remembering the prominence of Patria y Libertad in this province. According to several accounts, they found the largely German-descended landowning class, and those in their orbit of influence, to be especially sympathetic to its fascist-inspired ideology. Temuco was the town chosen for a national conference of Patria y Libertad delegates during May 1973, and it was also in this town that its leading members announced their return to national territory following exile after the failed coup attempt of 29 June, in which they had been implicated. Their declaration was published, ominously, on the front page of the *Diario Austral* the day before the coup. Eduardo Díaz was president of Patria y Libertad following the sending into exile of the national leadership. Díaz, himself from Cautín, claimed that Temuco was a key target for the organisation because of the area's obvious potential for conflict, second only to Santiago in terms of membership and intensity of activity.⁵⁶

The gravity of the situation which had been caused by Patria y Libertad in the final weeks of the Allende regime was clearly outlined in a public communiqué by the Intendencia. It praised the bravery of volunteers prepared to confront the problems caused by Patria y Libertad by keeping watch over vulnerable points such as warehouses or railway lines. It then summarised some of the key events:

⁵⁵Horne, *Small Earthquake in Chile*, pp. 189–90.

⁵⁶Interview with Eduardo Díaz, Temuco, 27 May 2010.

Dynamite attacks ... on private homes, damaging entire housing sectors and bringing worry and anxiety to whole towns and neighbourhoods. Sabotage of the railway line [...] in the dead of night, designed to maximise the possibility of causing damage to morning passenger trains. Attacks with firearms against delivery drivers in both government and private vehicles have occurred. In Padre Las Casas a driver delivering meat was shot at in broad daylight. Under cover of darkness they fired on lorry drivers between Pitrufuquén and Gorbea ... Attacks on lorries carrying fuel have been reported [...] The most serious attack was the attempt to start a fire in a warehouse of the Imperial Hospital, where fuel was being stored.⁵⁷

To the 'more than 30' terrorist actions reported in the *Diario Austral* on 12 August, at least as many again were reported over the following month, before a frightened population was relieved of the chaos by military action. According to Tanya Harmer, Patria y Libertad launched a total of 316 attacks during August 1973, suggesting that Cautín hosted about 20 per cent of total national attacks, centred particularly on Temuco.⁵⁸

The romantic revolutionaries of the MIR were not the only ones to incur the wrath of the local landowning class, as the tragic story of the Popular Unity's Intendente of Cautín makes clear. According to testimonies, Gastón Lobos, 'Freemason, volunteer fireman and Radical' was an influential member of his community in Pitrufuquén, with a reputation for helping the less advantaged. The Popular Unity coalition delegated the highest level of authority of Cautín's provincial government to Lobos' Radical Party, probably because, as the most moderate element, it was better suited to the complex and delicate negotiations that would inevitably arise in a region polarised between a recalcitrant landowning class and a hostile, indigenous peasantry.

The sheer volume of paperwork in the Intendencia archives relating to land disputes bears testimony to the almost impossible situation in which Lobos found himself during his entire tenure as its highest authority, right up to his relinquishing of the post, in November 1972. As a representative of the president in the province, he was charged with overseeing the legal and rapid execution of land reform, yet he constantly found himself caught between the irresistible force of illegal land invasions and the immovable object of organised landowners. The statistics clearly illustrate this: during the first ten months of his tenure, there were 95 illegal seizures of land in Cautín of which only 41 cases were resolved. This compares with a national figure of 649 illegal seizures of which 555 were resolved.⁵⁹

Lobos demonstrated a firm hand with the extreme Left by refusing to give a platform to the MIR and by removing doctors and other government workers from their posts if their opinions or actions threatened the government's credibility. Lobos managed to persuade Allende to exclude Cautín from Fidel Castro's

⁵⁷Oficios despachados, AIC, folder 485, mid-Aug. 1973 (exact date unknown).

⁵⁸Tanya Harmer, *Allende's Chile and the Inter-American Cold War* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), p. 236.

⁵⁹Figures from the Asociación de Empleadores Agrícolas (Association of Agricultural Employers) cited in Gall, 'The Agrarian Revolt in Cautín'.

tour of Chile in late 1971 on the grounds that his presence could spark any number of latent conflicts.⁶⁰ Lobos' wife, Irma Felber, reflected the anger and frustration of her husband at the excesses and immaturity shown by those in the MIR and sectors of the Socialist Party, whom she accused of undermining the legitimacy of the agrarian reform project.⁶¹ In declarations to the *Diario Austral*, Lobos declared 'we have chosen the longest route to Socialism, the democratic one. ... However, a number of our *compañeros*, especially those of little culture, believe the election of Allende is a licence to occupy land and farms.'⁶²

In spite of, or perhaps because of, the energy, restraint and diplomatic skill demonstrated by Lobos, he made plenty of enemies on the landowning Right. A profile of 'the new Intendente' in April 1971 lamented signs that he was tolerating or even justifying land takeovers, suggesting that, in some cases, although he had begun as a successful enforcer of legality, he was now 'committed to revolution'. The article concluded that he could not hope to please God and the Devil at the same time and that the real loser would be Chilean agriculture.⁶³ Shortly afterwards, his car was attacked by a number of unidentified gunmen. During the transport strike of October the following year, Lobos' attempts to use the Arms Control Law to search landowners' property for weapons received a perverse response in propaganda issued by *Patria y Libertad*, accusing him of turning a blind eye to the transport of arms in government vehicles by 'the bands of international communism'.⁶⁴

His eventual fate mirrored that of other victims of a vengeful military. On 13 September 1973 he was kidnapped and taken to the Túcapel regimental headquarters where his hair was shaved off. He was then paraded around the central streets of Temuco in an undignified manner before being placed under house arrest until 5 October, when he was re-arrested. He was reportedly released on 11 October just 20 minutes before the nightly curfew came into force but was never seen again. His fate remains a mystery.⁶⁵

Military Re-conquest of Cautín

Given the traditional reliance of Cautín's colonisers on the presence of an armed state apparatus (as detailed by Klubock's work, summarised above in the section 'Frontier Settlers in Cautín'), it is perhaps unsurprising that when the military coup of 11 September occurred, Cautín was already under effective occupation. In this part of Chile, where the *carabineros* had absorbed the fearsome 'rural vigilantes' of Hernán Trizano, towns such as Temuco had grown up around military forts founded to keep the Indians at bay and make life safe for the colonisers. Echoes of this were becoming increasingly evident as the national political crisis deepened during 1973,

⁶⁰Interview with Irma Felber, Temuco, 13 May 2010.

⁶¹*Ibid.*

⁶²*El Diario Austral*, 14 Feb. 1971.

⁶³*Ibid.*, 19 April 1971.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, 25 Oct. 1972.

⁶⁵Comment on <http://gastonlobos.blogspot.cl/2005/09/fundacin-gastn-lobos.html>. Posted 12 Sept. 2005; last access 31 May 2018.

with evidence that the army – and not just the *carabineros* – was increasingly being drafted in to deal with farms occupied by the MCR.⁶⁶

At the beginning of the month the press reported that a combined operation by the armed forces on the emblematic Jorge Fernández *asentamiento* had resulted in a large number of arrests and the discovery of a range of weaponry. It also reported that MIR activists had fled the area, speculating that ‘there is much talk that the operation will uncover guerrilla activity on an unsuspected scale’.⁶⁷ Front-page photographs the following day showed Colonel Pablo Iturriaga, co-ordinator of the operation and soon-to-be Deputy Intendente of Cautín for the Military Junta, showing journalists what he described as ‘anti-tank weapons’, which appeared to confirm that preparations were being made for some kind of all-out war.⁶⁸ Here again there is evidence that the peasant collective was being made to look like a military force. On closer inspection, these artefacts look more like objects one might expect to find in the kitchen than weapons to be launched at tanks in the battlefield. The testimony of local CORA Director Mario Rivas affirmed that these were homemade bombs made from cooking pots, and the idea that they could be used against tanks was laughable.⁶⁹

The army had already raided the CORA offices in August 1973. Rivas described the humiliation suffered by the employees who were held at gunpoint while soldiers searched the offices. When the Director protested at this treatment of his staff, he was ordered, at gunpoint, to lie face down on the floor. On the day of the operation, Intendente Sergio Fonseca asked Rivas to accompany the military patrol. He had already noticed the soldiers’ frosty attitude towards him when, in Carahue, he was ordered to leave the vehicle ‘owing to the strictly military nature of the operation’. However, he managed to borrow a truck to continue the 20 or 30 km toward the coast where the Jorge Fernández *asentamiento* was located. When he arrived, he was shocked to find peasants tied to trees and being whipped, as they were forced to confess to the possession of arms. Rivas realised that the Intendente had no effective authority in the countryside of the province (where the army had free rein), and that ideologues within the Popular Unity government who openly advocated ‘armed struggle’ – such as Socialist Party Secretary Carlos Altamirano – had no idea just how one-sided the conflict was in countryside of Cautín. In addition to those in Rivas’ testimony, important details of torture and illegal detention at several coastal locations emerged in a joint public declaration by various peasant and worker organisations. Accusations included prolonged detention, hanging by the feet, denial of food and medical assistance, and brutal house searches involving widespread robbery.⁷⁰

These facts were no secret to members of the Chilean public who had access to television. Rivas invited national television journalists to make a programme exposing the events, which was broadcast on 6 September. Reactions in the *Diario Austral* demonstrate the levels of hysteria and hatred which had been whipped

⁶⁶See for example ‘Ejército intervino en “tomas”’, *El Diario Austral*, 8 Aug. 1973.

⁶⁷*El Diario Austral*, 2 Sept. 1973.

⁶⁸*Ibid.*, 5 Sept. 1973.

⁶⁹Interview with Mario Rivas, Temuco, 2 Nov. 2009.

⁷⁰Oficios recibidos, AIC, folder 485, 10 Sept. 1973 (written 31 Aug. 1973), signed by ‘Comando Comunal de Trabajadores de Puerto Saavedra’ (Communal Workers’ Brigade of Puerto Saavedra) and others.

up by this time. One insertion by the Accountants' Association of Cautín declared that the interviews were 'prefabricated', furiously proclaiming 'Do not dare to touch our Armed Forces. They are of our own blood, shrine of the traditions of our land, mirror of our nationality, custodians of the honour and dignity of Chile.'⁷¹ However, before the veracity of the facts could be ascertained, let alone serious debate about them take place, Cautín, along with the rest of Chile, found itself under full-scale military occupation.

According to the testimony of Víctor Carmine, he and fellow National Party *diputado* Hardy Momberg, along with ex-mayor Germán Becker, had turned up at the Túcapel regimental headquarters in person, offering to help in what they presumably thought would be a return to the old order. In the event, they had been politely turned away. Carmine describes what happened after they had spoken on the radio in support of the coup.

Straight away we went to the Regiment and said to Coronel Iturriaga, 'We are here, we are at your orders, we support the coup, so if you want us for anything, we are right here at your side.' 'Well', he said, 'thank you for being on our side. If we need you for anything, we'll be in touch. Meanwhile you can all go home.' He sent us home! And of course I had a few slugs of whisky to celebrate what had happened. I thought it was marvellous.⁷²

Conclusions

Although it has been well established that opponents of the Chilean Left received generous financial and logistical help from outside sources such as the CIA,⁷³ this should not distract attention from the coordination, skill and determination on the ground by opponents of reform in sabotaging emancipatory programmes and regaining ideological hegemony through a combination of fear and coercion. This is especially clear in Cautín, where a slow-burning conflict which had been in progress since the 'pacification' flared up during the agrarian reform years, bringing a violent and nationalist response from the region's settlers. The determination of settler landowners to defend their farms and their political power was strengthened during the years of Popular Unity government due on the one hand to the determined efforts of the MCR to use the latent conflicts of the region for its revolutionary agenda, and on the other by the lack of resources at the disposal of the local administration to deal with the volume of land takeovers and counter-takeovers occurring simultaneously across a large and poorly connected territory.

⁷¹*El Diario Austral*, 7 Sept. 1973.

⁷²Interview with Víctor Carmine, Temuco, 19 Dec. 2009.

⁷³According to the Church Report (United States Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1976)), covert US involvement in Chile in the decade between 1963 and 1973 was extensive and continuous, including generous financial backing for centre and rightist political groups. The CIA was estimated to have spent \$8 million in support of the opposition in the three years between 1970 and the military coup in September 1973, in combination with provision of a wide range of logistical and intellectual support. See Anne Karalekas, *History of the Central Intelligence Agency* (Laguna Hills, CA: Aegean Park Press, 1977), p. 117.

For the landowners and the authoritarian Right of Cautín, active opposition to the rising tide of popular empowerment was about more than simply reacting to fear by clinging on to a mythical past of deference and social peace. They showed themselves capable of innovating, creating strategy and imitating the enemy in order to pave the way for the re-foundation of a nation according to their own 'national narrative', which was based on the discourse of civilisation versus barbarism, forged during the expansionism of the late nineteenth century. This narrative was implicit in, amongst other things, favourable comparisons made between the Latin American oligarchy and the Iberian dictators or the Greco-Roman emperors in the local press. At the practical level it was able to combine its power over infrastructure and local public opinion to de-legitimise the leftist modernisation project, combining this with disobedience and violent confrontation.

The relatively recent history in Cautín of the confinement of indigenous communities in *reducciones* following the seizure and occupation of their land – still well within the realm of living memory if we consider the recent dates of many land usurpations – meant that the peace and stability which had, in appearance, existed for centuries on the haciendas of the Central Valley could never be taken for granted amidst the poverty and administrative chaos of the frontier provinces. The landowning class in this province shared the concern of Central Valley *hacendados* with the imposition of 'un-Chilean' ideologies of class conflict and material redistribution. These ideologies were perceived to come from antagonists – regarded as enemies of the nation – who had to be defeated. Unlike their class allies in the Central Valley, however, Cautín's landowners possessed a pioneering work ethic which implied defending to the death their parents' and grandparents' gains from the ever-present threat of barbarism.

If they feared the forces of barbarism, it was the reformist middle class that they really resented. When young, idealistic government functionaries came to unionise their workers and divide up their land, or when students imbued with revolutionary ideas came down from the radicalised University of Concepción to infiltrate Mapuche communities and occupy their land, they felt an indignation that required a collective response. The columnists of the *Diario Austral* demonstrate clearly how the old civilisation-versus-barbarism ideology was adapted to the anti-communist discourse of the Cold War. Violent resistance to modernisation was coordinated through organisations such as the Rolando Matus Brigade or Patria y Libertad, whose actions anticipated the military coup of September 1973. Indeed, paranoia about 'guerrilla training camps', combined with the Arms Control Law, ensured that the armed forces were already torturing peasants and dismantling a number of agricultural production units weeks before the bombardment of the Moneda presidential palace. In this sense, reconquest of the frontier and the return of militarised society in Cautín anticipated the fate that was to befall all of Chile.

This close examination of the historical roots, thought and actions of the right-wing establishment in Cautín has drawn attention to the special circumstances of the frontier region. These include unresolved disputes over land, a greater sense of vulnerability amongst mainly immigrant-descended landowners, and a more recent historical link between the armed forces and the dominant social class. It was at the frontier where society remained dominated by the martial values rooted in 'pacification'. It was here, too, that a military solution to social conflict

seemed most logical and natural. It also revealed continuity in the brutality and triumphalism of both the landowning and military sectors. Yet these findings have at the same time revealed hidden aspects of the historical dynamics of power at national level, contributing to an understanding of why the project of popular empowerment failed. For in Cautín, perhaps more than in any other province, the hierarchical value system and true power of the Chilean Right, which lay beneath the thin veneer of stable democratic institutionality, was more evident than elsewhere. The supposed struggle of civilisation with barbarism on the frontier added an element of violence to the oppressive 'weight of the night' – the phrase encapsulating the oppressive authoritarian liberalism of nineteenth-century statesman Diego Portales which dominated elite politics in Chile for much of its history – that had continued to bear down on the Chilean peasantry until the arrival of agrarian reform. In this, the most indigenous of all Chilean provinces, the military coup of 11 September 1973 appeared in some ways a continuation of the implicit or explicit frontier violence that had been occurring for decades. It merely saw the armed forces, traditional guarantors of order on the frontier, regain their *de facto* control of the region. As Mapuche poet and writer Elicura Chihuailaf has suggested, if 1883 marked the 'pacification' of Mapuche territory, 1973 marked the 'pacification' of Chile as a whole.⁷⁴

Acknowledgements. I would like to thank all the staff at the Departamento de Ciencias Históricas at the Universidad de Chile, and also at the Facultad de Filosofía y Educación de la Universidad de la Frontera, who have been of considerable help with the research for this article. It has been made possible thanks to funding from the Comisión Nacional de Investigación Científica y Tecnológica, CONICYT (project number 3150572).

Spanish abstract

El artículo analiza el conflicto social y político en Chile durante el periodo de la reforma agraria de los años 1960 y 1970 a través de un caso de estudio de la provincia de Cautín, en el corazón de los territorios indígenas del sur. Utilizando una combinación de fuentes escritas y orales, analiza las respuestas y estrategias de terratenientes descendientes de colonos del siglo XIX a los proyectos emancipadores llevados a cabo durante las presidencias de Eduardo Frei y Salvador Allende. En el contexto de un programa de reforma agraria crecientemente radicalizado y de un mayor número de conflictos territoriales con las comunidades mapuche, este actor político poco estudiado desarrolló una identidad colectiva, un discurso ideológico y una voluntad para el uso de la violencia que proveen pistas importantes sobre las causas del golpe militar de 1973.

Spanish keywords: reforma agraria; terratenientes; campesinos; mapuches; Unidad Popular; MIR

Portuguese abstract

Este artigo analisa o conflito social e político no Chile durante o período de reforma agrária entre os anos 1960 e 1970, através de um estudo de caso da província de Cautín, nas terras indígenas centrais do sul do país. Usando uma combinação de fontes

⁷⁴Crow, *The Mapuche in Modern Chile*, p. 179.

escritas e orais, o artigo analisa as respostas e estratégias de latifundiários descendentes de colonos do século dezanove aos projetos emancipatórios realizados durante os governos dos presidentes Eduardo Frei e Salvador Allende. Dentro de um contexto de um programa de reforma agrária cada vez mais radicalizado e de um crescente número de conflitos territoriais com as comunidades Mapuche, este pouco estudado protagonista político desenvolveu uma identidade coletiva, um discurso ideológico e uma predisposição ao uso de violência que fornece informações importantes sobre as causas do golpe militar ocorrido em 1973.

Portuguese keywords: reforma agrária; latifundiários; camponeses; Mapuches; Unidade Popular; MIR

Cite this article: Carter D (2019). Violence, Ideology and Counterrevolution: Landowners and Agrarian Reform in Cautín Province, Chile, 1967–73. *Journal of Latin American Studies* 51, 109–135. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022216X18000652>