

Chile: The Making of a Republic, 1830–1865

Politics and Ideas

SIMON COLLIER



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Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	page xi
<i>Abbreviations Used in the Notes</i>	xiii
<i>Introduction</i>	xv
PART I THE NEW REPUBLIC, 1830-1865	
1 The Early Republic: A Sketch	03
2 The Conservative System	22
PART II FROM PORTALES TO MONTT, 1835-1851	
3 Authoritarians and Moderates, 1835-1846	47
4 The Liberal Challenge, 1846-1851	76
PART III MID-CENTURY ATTITUDES	
5 Progress and Its Instruments	105
6 Political Argument	122
7 Model Republic	145
8 Looking Outward	167
PART IV ORDER AND LIBERTY, 1851-1864	
9 The Conservative Defection, 1851-1858	191
10 The Triumph of Liberty, 1859-1864	223
<i>Sources</i>	253
<i>Index</i>	263

I

The Early Republic: A Sketch

On Saturday, April 17, 1830, a three-hour battle was fought near the confluence of the Claro and Lircay rivers, just outside the town of Talca in the Central Valley of Chile. The smaller of the two armies was led by General Ramón Freire, the liberal-minded hero of the wars of independence who had been Chile's president a few years earlier. His adversary, General Joaquín Prieto, another veteran of independence, was the champion of the Conservatives who had recently seized power in Santiago, the capital, bringing to an end the series of false starts that had marked Chilean politics since 1823, mostly under the leadership of politicians calling themselves Liberals. With reinforcements brought by Colonel José María de la Cruz from Chillán, Prieto had assembled a force of around twenty-two hundred. It quickly overwhelmed Freire's seventeen hundred soldiers, many of whom fled for their lives across the little Lircay river, leaving behind them around two hundred dead.¹

General Prieto's victory at the Battle of Lircay (as it became known) assured the triumph of the new Conservative regime. Eleven days earlier, the Valparaíso trader Diego Portales had taken over two of the three portfolios in the Chilean cabinet, thus becoming the most powerful figure in the country. At Portales's behest, General Prieto would soon be elected president of the republic. His victory at Lircay and Portales's rise to power ushered in more than a quarter century of Conservative rule in Chile. During these years and the few years that followed, the Chilean republican tradition was made. The way it was made, and the contest between order and liberty that lay at the heart of the politics of the period, would affect Chilean history from that day to this.

Agriculture, Mining, Trade

The Chile of 1830 was a poor country on one of the remotest peripheries of the Western world. Separated from the rich plains of Argentina by the

1 Barros Arana, *Historia*, XV, 564–71.

Cordillera of the Andes, and from Bolivia and Peru by a vast swathe of unfriendly desert, the fledgling republic was still very isolated from the rest of the world, an isolation only partly tempered by the widening of trade that had followed independence (1818), when foreign merchantmen began calling regularly at Valparaiso and other ports – about 200 each year in the late 1820s, well over 2000 by the 1850s. In the 1830s Chile was still usually more than three months by sailing ship from Europe or the eastern United States. In June 1843 the *Swallow* (famous for her fast passages)² furlled her sails in Valparaiso bay, having done the trip from Liverpool in 107 days. Soon enough, however, sail began to give way to steam (for travelers at least), as nineteenth-century technology made its inevitable mark. In 1840 the British-financed Pacific Steam Navigation Company (P.S.N.C.) began a regular service between Chile and Peru. The arrival on Thursday, October 15, 1840 of its first two 700-ton paddle-steamers caused great excitement in Valparaiso and along (“down,” as sailors in those days said) the coast to the north. The next day, for the first time, the Valparaiso newspaper *El Mercurio* proudly printed “Steamship *Peru* . . . Steamship *Chile*” at the head of its front-page shipping column. A one-way passage to Peru in the early years was advertised at 70 pesos;³ passengers were asked not to wear shoes in bed.⁴ A few years later, when the P.S.N.C. extended its route to Panama, it became possible (given a quick trans-isthmus connection) to reach Europe or the eastern United States in about forty days. *El Mercurio*, commenting on the completion of the first (unsuccessful) transatlantic cable in 1858, estimated that it normally took about thirty-six days for European news to reach Chile.⁵

Chile’s effective national territory in the 1830s was the 700-mile strip between the Atacama Desert in the north and the so-called “Frontier” along the Bío Bío river in the south, beyond which the Mapuche (as they had called themselves since the eighteenth century) or Araucanians (as the Spaniards had called them since the sixteenth) still retained their stubborn independence, while also taking part in a thriving cross-frontier trade. Communications within the national territory were poor. Highways worthy of the name scarcely existed, apart from the well-used route between Santiago and Valparaiso, much traveled by *birlochos* (two-wheeled carriages) and a few larger coaches. When a local famine occurred in 1838–9 in the south, relief could not be shifted to the area in time to help. Though a certain amount of road construction (and improvement) took place with the creation of a

2 MV, No. 4459, June 7, 1843.

3 Throughout the period, the Chilean peso was worth about 45d (£0.3.9) sterling (18½p, post-1971) or about US\$0.90, with only very minor fluctuations.

4 MV, No. 4071, April 26, 1842.

5 MV, No. 9373, September 25, 1858.

small Corps of Engineers in the 1840s, overland journeys remained laborious until the Central Valley railroad began inching its way southward from Santiago after 1857, reaching Curicó (120 miles away) by 1866. Trains began running between Santiago and Valparaíso in September 1863. In many ways the easiest way of traveling up and down the country was by ship. By the 1850s and 1860s, the main ports were reasonably well connected by steamer. An electric telegraph linked Santiago and Valparaíso from June 1852 onward, installed by the American entrepreneur William Wheelwright, the creator of the P.S.N.C. A national telegraph network was gradually put together; by 1867 it reached both Concepción in the south and the mining town of Copiapó in the north. A reorganized post office introduced postage stamps in 1856. All of these things played their part in the consolidation of the republic.

The early Chilean censuses were only roughly accurate. The first (1835) gives a figure of just over one million. It was reported as a “common opinion” in 1850 that the population was in decline,⁶ but it rose to about 1.8 million by 1865. These figures do not include the several hundred thousand Mapuche south of the Bío Bío. Beyond the Indian homeland (two hundred miles long, north to south), there were three small, miserably poor appendages of the new republic, around Valdivia and Osorno and on the island of Chilóe. A fourth appendage, a penal settlement, was added after the Chilean flag was raised on the Magellan Strait in September 1843. The bulk of the population was concentrated (as it always had been and still is) in the Central Valley between Santiago and the Bío Bío. The overwhelming majority of Chileans were both poor and illiterate. It is a fair assumption that illiteracy was still well over 90 percent in 1830. The 1854 census (accurate to within eight per cent according to its supervisor)⁷ gives a literacy figure of 13.5 percent (17.3 percent for men, 9.7 percent for women). By the time of the 1865 census one fifth of the male (and one seventh of the female) population could officially read and write. (Such figures were not drastically different from those for southern Europe at the same period.) Not all of the supposedly literate could spell properly. A Santiago newspaper of 1856 reported a shop sign that read: “*Ay para senar asao ensalá i pescao frito*” (“*Hay para cenar asado, ensalada y pescado frito*”) – or as it might be rendered in similarly misspelled English, “Fore dynning there is roste, sallad and fried fish.”⁸

At least four fifths of all Chileans from the 1830s to the 1860s worked in the countryside, as *inquilinos* (“tenant-laborers” or “tied peasants”) and casual laborers (called by a variety of names) on the haciendas, or scratching a

6 *Comercio de Valparaíso*, No. 741, April 9, 1850.

7 *Censo general* . . . 1854, p. 8.

8 FE, No. 63, March 5, 1856.

living as best they could at subsistence level, sometimes falling into banditry or cattle rustling, a concern to the authorities throughout the nineteenth century. The ownership of a hacienda (or *fundo*, as it was also termed) was the clearest badge of membership of the new republic's governing class. There were perhaps about a thousand haciendas in the 1850s, with two hundred or so prime properties, and together they occupied at least three quarters of all agricultural land. Most were self-contained communities; there were no Mexican- or Peruvian-style villages in the Chilean countryside. In the 1830s and early 1840s, many haciendas were rather unprofitable, with only restricted markets for their produce. Smaller farms, *chacras* (sometimes called *quintas*), often owned by the hacendados, supplied the towns with fruit and vegetables, and often did better. Landowners' prospects improved notably in the later 1840s and in the 1850s. With the gold rushes in California (which attracted thousands of Chileans northward) and Australia, hacendados were able to capitalize on Chile's position as the only serious wheat-growing country on the west coast of the Americas. This surge of prosperity for the landowners was extended, after the inevitable end of the gold-rush booms, by the export of wheat and barley to England, at least until the mid-1870s.

Chile's rural economy was stimulated by these mid-century export booms, with the digging of irrigation canals and reservoirs, the domestication of new crops such as rice, and the arrival of Merino sheep. Poplar trees, introduced at the time of independence, spread fast through the mountain-framed Central Valley, giving a gracious appearance to its countryside. Starting in the 1850s, a number of landowners planted French vines, laying the foundations of a great viticultural tradition that would later produce some of the Western hemisphere's most respectable wines. A newspaper of 1858 optimistically suggested that Chile was destined to become "the Champagne of South America," outstripping Southern Europe with its "tired old lands."⁹ The cultivated land area in the Central Valley may have tripled (possibly even quadrupled) during the export booms, and the number of haciendas increased. Yet none of these developments implied deep change in rural society. Hacendados seem to have expanded *inquilinaje*, tightening up the conditions on which peasants were allowed to settle on haciendas. The peasants themselves lived much as they had always done, barely touched by education or even the ministrations of the clergy. Farming methods remained highly traditional. Rural laborers, thought an American visitor in the 1850s, had "an unconquerable aversion to innovations."¹⁰ But what incentive had they? "We have the Middle Ages enthroned in the nineteenth century," declared a Concepción newspaper in 1859, "and

9 FE, No. 929, December 21, 1858.

10 Smith, p. 102.

feudalism at its apogee amongst us." The sharp-eyed Vicente Pérez Rosales described the inquilino as "a true serf from the times of feudalism," and was doubtless correct in assuming that his precarious situation, subject to the hacendado's whim, meant that he "neither increases his comfort nor uses his labor except very superficially."¹¹ The landowners, according to Benjamín Vicuña Mackenna, were no better, working with "*une pénible langueur*" (as he wrote in an 1855 pamphlet for French readers), and with no real interest in improving their estates. A progovernment newspaper denounced them in 1854 for their "habits of idleness and unthinking routine," and two years later Manuel Miquel urged (to no avail) "the education of hacendados" as a national priority.¹² The slow-moving, patriarchal society of the countryside, the world of master and man, remained the deep background to the somewhat livelier culture of the cities, changing only slowly until the rural upheavals of our own time swept it away for ever.

Yet the Central Valley was by no means the only face of Chile. The much more thinly populated northern provinces of Coquimbo and (after 1843) Atacama had been developing since colonial times as a mining area, whose fortunes were greatly boosted after independence by significant strikes and new international markets for Chilean silver and copper. Mining became the real pacesetter of the economy. In June 1832, a La Serena newspaper reported "an amazing discovery of silver mines"¹³ at Chañarcillo, in the arid hills to the southeast of Copiapó. In 1846, it was reported that there were 110 mines in operation there (with thirty-nine starting up), worked by thirteen hundred laborers.¹⁴ Numerous fortunes were made at Chañarcillo, one of them by Miguel Gallo (d. 1842), Chile's first millionaire. Other, smaller silver strikes were made in later years, most importantly at Tres Puntas, to the north of Copiapó (1848). Copper over the years was even more profitable, and made the fortune of entrepreneurs such as José Tomás Urmeneta (who made his big strike in 1852) and José Ramón Ovalle. The largest fortunes of the time all came from the mining zone. Chile's first railroad (1851), locally financed and linking Copiapó to its port, Caldera (fifty-one miles away), was an eloquent symbol of the new wealth of the north, and another achievement of the enterprising William Wheelwright.

Mining operations changed only slowly. Most mines were small and shallow. They also were numerous – more than a thousand in Atacama and

11 *El Correo del Sur*, February 19, 1859, reprinted in Grez Toso, "Cuestión Social," p. 160. Pérez Rosales, *Memoria*, p. 135.

12 Vicuña Mackenna, *Le Chili*, p. 53; *Mensajero*, No. 193, January 10, 1854; Miquel, p. 32.

13 *Bandera Tricolor*, No. 40, June 8, 1832.

14 Intendant of Atacama to Interior minister, May 16, 1846 AMI, Vol. 211.

Coquimbo Provinces in the early 1860s.¹⁵ The high-grade ores were not too difficult to mine, and it was in the processing of ores that the most important technical changes occurred. In copper smelting, for instance, the remarkable Franco-British entrepreneur Charles Lambert introduced (just before 1830) the reverberatory furnace long used in South Wales. From the 1840s onward, several large smelters were established both in the mining zone and in the south near Concepción, where coal mining began to develop in that decade. These plants were Chile's first "industrial" enterprises, along with the technically up-to-date flour mills on Talcahuano Bay and the Maule river, established at the time of the wheat booms. There was little or no manufacturing industry as such before the later 1860s. Interior minister Antonio Varas told the British *chargé d'affaires* that he doubted if Chile had anything to send to the Great Exhibition of 1851, and in fact Chile sent nothing.¹⁶ Apart from a few reaping and threshing machines, Chile's own small National Exhibition (1854) displayed nothing in the way of industrial manufactures. By 1861, however, there were at least 132 steam engines in use in the country, only thirty-eight of these on the railroads.¹⁷

Mining and agriculture were the foundation of Chile's foreign trade, on which the Conservative regime after 1830 pinned its main hopes for prosperity. While protectionist impulses never disappeared from the official mind (or public opinion), government policies were tailored to increase the flow of trade. Successive customs ordinances (1834, 1842, 1851, 1864) lowered the level of the basic external tariff (25 percent in 1864), with a range of items (often machinery) taxed at lower levels or not at all. In order to boost Valparaiso's growth as an *entrepôt* for the eastern Pacific, Manuel Rengifo, the Conservative regime's first serious Finance minister, regularized the system (introduced earlier) of bonded public warehouses (*almacenes fiscales*) where goods could be stored at low cost for (after 1833) up to six years before being imported into Chile or dispatched to other countries. Valparaiso became the nexus of a large regional market, its commercial tentacles reaching up the South American coast and out across the Pacific to Tahiti and beyond. This Pacific market shrank somewhat after the 1850s, with the development of Callao in Peru and San Francisco in California. Valparaiso's traders were vaguely aware that the building of a Panama Canal might some day undermine their prosperity. Such a canal, reasoned the newspaper *El Progreso*, might consign the port to the diminished status of the Mediterranean cities after the Portuguese discovery of the sea route to Asia. To fend off this challenge, an intermittent dream of the period (never realized) was for a fleet of steam tugs to tow sailing ships through the Magellan Strait, thus enabling

15 *Anuario estadístico*, entrega cuarta (1862), pp. 449–51.

16 TRI, No. 304, May 10, 1850. See also Mayo, p. 68.

17 *Anuario estadístico*, entrega cuarta (1862), p. 457.

them to avoid the stormy Cape Horn passage. Others were more sanguine about a possible Panama Canal. "Fortunately for us," as Valparaiso's great organ *El Mercurio* explained in 1858, it would almost certainly never be built, owing to "the unhealthy climate of the isthmus."¹⁸

Chile's external trade grew in value from an annual average of 18.6 million pesos (£8.3 million or \$20.6 million) in 1844–50 to 42 million (£19 million or \$46.6 million) in 1861–5. From the mid-1840s to the late-1850s, the country experienced boom conditions. At the end of the 1850s, there was a serious recession, caused by two bad harvests, the fading of the Australian market for wheat, and a downturn in silver production, all of which was made worse by the international recession of 1857. The recession led to numerous bankruptcies and flattened the trade figures for three or four years, but high growth resumed by the mid-1860s and ended only with the more devastating economic crisis of ten years later. Government revenues, about two thirds of which came from commercial imposts, rose from around 3 million pesos in the early 1840s to more than 6 million in the early 1860s. In conventional economic terms, the record of the early republic was an impressive one. With banks and joint-stock companies appearing in the 1850s and 1860s, as well as railroads and telegraphs, with a new Commercial Code (1865) smoothing the path for entrepreneurs and traders,¹⁹ it seemed obvious that Chile was acquiring many of the outward and visible signs of nineteenth-century modernity. Commercial expansion was probably a significant factor in the consolidation of the republic. Positive business prospects could sometimes distract the upper class from politics. Had Chile experienced the stagnation common in so many of the other Spanish American countries in the half century after independence, the story might possibly have been different.

Urban Life and Civilization

In many ways, Valparaiso, the focus of the expanding export economy, was the republic's liveliest city. Ever since independence it had been a fast-growing port, visited by the sailors of half the world, flocked to by the foreign (not least British) traders whose several dozen import-export houses (along with a dozen or so Chilean firms) held the commanding heights of the export economy and an important position, too, in the mining

18 "Revolución obrada por el vapor," PR, No. 3, November 12, 1842, and the series "Navegación y colonización del Estrecho de Magallanes," PR, Nos. 6, 7, 9, 11 and 16, November 16, 17, 19, 22, and 28, 1842; MV, February 1852; José Casimiro Mena, CN/D, July 1858; see also Véliz, pp. 74–75. For the canal prediction, see English Part, M(V), No. 101, July 15, 1858.

19 For an excellent analysis of the *Código del Comercio*, see Cavieres, "Anverso," pp. 47–56, and for a succinct overview of economic history, Ortega.

industry through the *habilitación* business, the extension of credit to mine owners. Valparaíso was sometimes the springboard for mighty non-Chilean enterprises: the Frenchman Antoine-Dominique Bordes, who arrived there in 1835 and ran an import-export house, would later build one of Europe's largest fleets of sailing ships.²⁰ Valparaíso was not an ideal port. Until the building of wharves (1870s–1880s), ships could not tie up. Before breakwaters jutted out into the bay (1910s–1920s), there was no protection against northerly winds, which could wreak havoc among the ships at anchor and dash them on to the beach. Heavy rains could bring mudslides from the encircling hills behind the foreshore. An English visitor in 1845 was “much disappointed both with the town and people,” and found the port “a disagreeable place.”²¹ It was ahead of Santiago, however, in its municipal improvements – daily newspapers, bookstores, a fire brigade, a proper theater (1844), gas lighting, and water supply; the last two of these were further ventures by the amazing Wheelwright, who thoroughly deserved his statue in the port (1877). By the mid-1850s, a poet could write:

... es bello . . . mirar tus naves,
 Tus aguas cristalinas, tus banderas,
 Tus calles populosas, tus vergeles,
 Tus paseos, tus teatros, tus hoteles.

... it is beautiful . . . to see your ships,
 Your crystalline waters, your flags,
 Your crowded streets, your orchards,
 Your walks, your theaters, your hotels.²²

Another English visitor around this time admired the “stately houses” and “other buildings of even more imposing aspect” that lined the main street, but did not fail to note “sailors’ boarding houses and gambling hells of the dirtiest and most pernicious description.”²³ Brothels (licensed by the municipality) could be found downtown easily enough. *El Mercurio* in 1860 thought this a disgrace to “the Pearl of the Pacific,” and recommended that they should be relegated to the hillsides.²⁴

Valparaíso's population rose to about seventy thousand in 1865. Its cosmopolitan nature set up some interesting contrasts. A trader visiting in

20 For *habilitación*, see Cavieres, *Comercio*, ch. 4; for Bordes, Barbance, chs. iv–vi.

21 *Recollections of a Ramble*, pp. 12, 18.

22 Francisco Palma, “A Valparaíso,” *Mensajero*, No. 739, November 12, 1855. For interesting photographs of Valparaíso in 1860–1, see Alvaro Jara, *Chile en 1860. William L. Oliver. Un precursor de la fotografía* (1973), pp. 70–78.

23 Cornwallis, II, 17–18.

24 MV, No. 9805, May 12, 1860.

1828 thought of it as more “a foreign factory than a Chilean city.” Fourteen years later, *El Mercurio* described it as more “a Hanseatic city” than part of Chile. Another of the port’s newspapers found Valparaíso society “English, almost.”²⁵ This was never really true, although English was the foreign language most often heard in the streets. In fact, while the commercial quarter closest to the Customs House came to remind travelers (it still does) of a small corner of London, the teeming Almendral district to the north was never less than completely Chilean in character.

By mid-century Valparaíso had long since supplanted once-proud Concepción as Chile’s second city. Relatively isolated from Santiago, and the focus of the southern economy in later colonial times, Concepción remained an important military center, with its garrison watching over the Frontier, something that gave its inhabitants, the *penquistas*, illusions of power. Twice in the 1820s, Concepción’s military muscle had overthrown governments, with General Ramón Freire’s revolt against the liberator-dictator Bernardo O’Higgins in 1823, and again with General Joaquín Prieto’s Conservative pronunciamiento of 1829. Concepción’s third attempt, in 1851, was a failure. An earthquake in February 1835 completely devastated the city: “a state of complete ruin, not a single building standing,” observed some British sailors passing through.²⁶ Ten years later, the main plaza was still full of “piles of stones and bricks.”²⁷ Concepción revived fairly notably with the coming of the wheat booms and the milling industry, but even in 1865 its population was still no more than fourteen thousand, much the same as that of flourishing Copiapó in the north or the sleepy Central Valley towns of Talca and Chillán.

Nobody remembering the colonial era would have found the republic’s capital dramatically changed in the 1830s and 1840s, although its view of the glittering snows of the Cordillera invariably provoked gasps of admiration from foreign visitors. Nearly all its houses were still one story, of adobe construction, with barred windows and secluded patios, sometimes incorporating rented shops facing the street. Santiago’s population rose from about seventy thousand in the mid-1830s to nearly 120,000 in 1865. Its main avenue, the Alameda, planned by the liberator O’Higgins, developed into a handsome, poplar-shaded boulevard in the decades after independence. An 1847 guidebook praised its benches (some stone, others brick) and its two parallel streams of running water, whose murmur made it “doubly agreeable . . . , particularly on summer nights.”²⁸ The historian Father José

25 Moerenhout, p. 24; MV, No. 4206, September 13, 1842; *Gaceta del Comercio*, No. 1072, July 22, 1845.

26 *Diary of the Wreck*, p. 76.

27 Domeyko, *Mis viajes*, II, 631.

28 *Guía general* 1847, p. 293.

Javier Guzmán claimed in the mid-1830s that a visitor to Santiago would note “more police, more cleanliness in the streets, more lighting . . . , more squares and markets” than at the time of independence.²⁹ In the 1840s, the authorities cleared a space southwest of downtown for military maneuvers and parades. Known at first as the Campo de Marte, or more colloquially as La Pampilla, it later (1873) became the city’s main park.

Very little in the way of new public architecture appeared in Santiago before the 1850s, when the commercial boom had a tonic effect on the capital. Splendid new mansions were then constructed by the boom’s beneficiaries. Gas lighting and horse-drawn streetcars were introduced in 1857. In March that year, the fine Municipal Theater was opened, to cater to the upper class’s strong taste for drama (mostly Spanish or French) and opera (mostly Italian). “The progress of the last five years can be called fabulous,” wrote (also in 1857) a resident not normally given to hyperbole. “Magnificent buildings are rising everywhere . . . ; the number of coaches for hire . . . is more than 300; the carriages belonging to individuals are numerous and splendid. To see the Alameda on certain days of the year makes one imagine oneself to be in one of the great European cities.”³⁰ In one respect, however, the capital long remained without a vital service. On December 8, 1863, at an evening ceremony concluding a month of devotions to the Virgin Mary, a fire broke out in the crowded church of La Compañía. Some two thousand worshipers, most of them women wearing highly inflammable crinolines, were burned to death or asphyxiated – the most dreadful holocaust in Santiago’s history. It was a high price to pay for the creation of the city’s first fire companies, soon afterward.

The cities, inevitably, were the focus of most of the limited educational and cultural advance that occurred in the postindependence decades. According to Eduardo Hamuy’s calculations, approximately 10 percent of the appropriate age group in Chile was receiving some kind of primary education in 1865.³¹ *Escuelas normales* (teacher training colleges) were established in 1842 for men and in 1854 for women. During President Manuel Montt’s active government (1851–61), the number of primary schools rose from 571 to 911, 648 of which were public schools. Public secondary education (regulated by the not well-enforced decree of February 1843) expanded more slowly, with (by 1865) eighteen high schools (styled *liceos* or *institutos*) operating from Copiapó in the north to Valdivia in the south – all for boys, none yet for girls. Private education (some of it for girls) also developed fairly strongly, some schools established by the religious orders, others, such as Valparaiso’s Mackay School (1857), nourished by the foreign

29 Guzmán, II, 487.

30 Andrés Bello to Miguel Rodríguez, May 30, 1857. BACH, No. 51 (1930), p. 303.

31 Hamuy, p. 8.

trading communities. The key secondary institution of the early republic, the Instituto Nacional in Santiago, also provided the only secular higher education in the country, under the control of the University of Chile.

The University, one of the early republic's great achievements, was solemnly inaugurated in September 1843. Its first Rector, the Venezuelan polymath Andrés Bello, by then Latin America's most distinguished living intellectual, had settled in Chile in 1829. A tireless and conscientious (though never uncritical) servant of the Conservative regime, he was the obvious man for the job. His enormous contribution to the making of the republic included his single-handed compilation of its Civil Code (1855). His intellectual influence on educated Chileans for the rest of the nineteenth century was incalculable. The University, modeled to some extent on the Institut de France, was initially a deliberative body, charged with overseeing the entire educational system. Only after Bello's death (1865) did it begin to teach its students in a building of its own, still the University's headquarters today. Its work reflected the rather limited educational priorities of the upper class. Nearly two thirds of the 859 degrees it awarded between 1843 and 1857 were in law.³² There were many in Chile, wrote Manuel Miquel in 1860, who believed that "you can't *be* anything, be *worth* anything, or *think* anything without being a lawyer."³³

With a gradually growing readership available, the press – "a thermometer, marking the degrees of a people's civilization," according to an 1849 magazine³⁴ – played its part in the pattern of urban life. Dámaso Encina, the fictional mid-century magnate of Alberto Blest Gana's novel *Martín Rivas* (1862), seems to have taken all his distinctly variable opinions from the daily press. The great pioneer newspaper, Valparaiso's *El Mercurio*, had been founded in 1827 and appeared daily from 1829. The paper always had a high opinion of itself – as "the liveliest representative of the country," as "the patriarch of the Chilean press."³⁵ It still does, having long since become the Spanish-speaking world's oldest newspaper. By the end of 1860 it had produced ten thousand issues, and by then was publishing both a special edition for Santiago and (from 1848 to 1882) a *Mercurio del Vapor* ("Steamship *Mercurio*"), partly in English, which sold up the west coast as far as Panama. Bought in 1842 by an enterprising thirty-four-year-old Spanish immigrant, Santos Tornero (who had earlier opened Chile's

32 *Memoria* [annual report to Congress] of Justice minister (1858). DP, VI, 326. For Bello's work, see the excellent biography, Jakšić, *Bello: Scholarship*; its Spanish translation, *Bello: pasión*, includes a few previously unpublished letters.

33 *Semana*, No. 46, May 19, 1860.

34 *Picaflor*, No. 1, May 1, 1849.

35 MV, No. 4314, January 1, 1843; No. 4541, August 29, 1843.

first real bookstore), it remained his property until 1865, when it passed to his sons.

El Mercurio was the only daily newspaper in Chile until joined by Valparaiso's *La Gaceta del Comercio* in February 1842. Santiago did not get its first, *El Progreso*, until November that year, and in the mid-1850s once again briefly lacked one. The gap was filled in 1855 with *El Ferrocarril*, a distinguished newspaper that ran until 1911. *El Progreso*, we might note, was the first daily to print *folletines* (serials) of novels, a practice rapidly taken up by other papers. French novels (especially those of Alexandre Dumas *père* and Eugène Sue) and historical works enjoyed a particular vogue in the 1840s and 1850s. Spanish romantic novelists and the entirely inescapable Sir Walter Scott also were popular.³⁶ Such writings had definite effects on both taste and politics.

Apart from the house journal of the Catholic Church, *La Revista Católica* (whose first series lasted from 1843 to 1874), the magazines of the early republic tended to be ephemeral. Not much is known about the circulations of either magazines or newspapers. In the 1840s, *El Mercurio* sold around one thousand copies each day. *El Ferrocarril* claimed nineteen hundred by the end of its first year.³⁷ The government actually subsidized a number of newspapers in the 1840s and 1850s. Short-term, ad hoc newspapers often appeared at election time or at other moments of political tension. They will be described here as “news-sheets,” even though they mostly contained views (usually very partisan) rather than news. Such news-sheets had proliferated in the 1820s. Their number fell sharply in the 1830s, but rose again in the 1840s. *El Mercurio* suggested in 1841 that such publications were a sign that “people are beginning to read and to interest themselves in public affairs, and that means a lot for the future of the Republic.”³⁸ Maybe it did, but the Conservative governments of the early republic did not always see it that way.

“People,” “The People,” and the “Working Class”

In any account of politics and ideas, we obviously need to know the nature of the political actors and thinkers, and who made up the “political class,” or “politically relevant population,” or what French scholars sometimes call the “political nation.” In Chile's early republic, we do not need to look much beyond the upper class. The new Chilean nation was riddled with

36 See Barros Arana, *Decenio*, II, 48–49, and Zamudio, pp. 29–40. The first French novel to be translated in Chile was *The Three Musketeers* (1845).

37 FE, No. 309, December 22, 1856.

38 MV, No. 3769, June 21, 1841.

class distinctions, although money could usually soften them. The French savant Claude Gay described the upper class of the time as a “moneyed aristocracy, whether by hereditary right, or by having made a fortune in trade, or having acquired an even greater fortune in the exploitation of mines,” and it is hard to better this description, although, since titles of nobility had been abolished at the time of independence, Ambrosio Montt was correct in saying (in 1859) that there was no “true nobility, no aristocracy in Chile.”³⁹ Older upper-class families with colonial lineages had aristocratic pretensions and often saw themselves (some still do) as a superior caste, but it was never difficult for successful traders or miners to be accepted socially. Many of them originated in the upper class anyway, and even when they did not they invariably became landowners. The mining magnates of the north who sunk some of their money into vineyards would form a salient group, at least in retrospect, though they were by no means the only vineyard owners.⁴⁰ During the early republic, “new money” certainly began to modify the character of the upper class, although this was perhaps even more noticeable in the decades that followed.⁴¹

Whether they were traders, miners, or landowners (or all three at once, as sometimes happened), upper-class Chileans all had a direct or indirect stake in the export economy, and it is difficult to find economic cleavages (minor regional ones apart) within the national elite. Contemporaries could not detect any such cleavages. “How many traders are there who are not also landowners?” asked a progovernment news-sheet in 1835.⁴² “Among the material interests of the country,” commented an opposition newspaper of 1858, “there is no antagonism whatever.”⁴³ All the evidence suggests that Chile possessed that “sense of common identity in those who wielded economic, social, and political power” which the late J. H. Plumb identified as one of the three fundamental factors in the attainment of political stability in eighteenth-century England, the other factors being “single-party government” and “the legislature firmly under executive control,”⁴⁴ — both of which, rather strikingly, also applied in the case of nineteenth-century Chile, as we shall see in Chapter 2. What tied the upper class together, its material interests apart, was landownership and family connections. Hacienda ownership, as already mentioned, was the clearest sign of upper-class status. Family connections crisscrossed the commercial

39 Gay, I, 102; A. Montt, *Gobierno*, p. 61.

40 See del Pozo, pp. 77–90.

41 See Villalobos R., *Orígenes*.

42 *Farol*, No. 2, September 7, 1835.

43 ACT, No. 93, May 20, 1858.

44 *The Growth of Political Stability in England* (Harmondsworth, 1969), p. 14.

and political life of the time in an endless though not quite a seamless web. President Manuel Bulnes (1841–51) was the nephew of his predecessor, the son-in-law of a Liberal president of the 1820s, the brother-in-law of a future president, a cousin of one of his Interior ministers, and a cousin of the general he fought on the battlefield in the civil war of 1851.

With the mid-century commercial boom, upper-class incomes rose appreciably, enabling more of the upper class to live in Santiago for much of the year – the great dream, according to *El Mercurio*, of “the southern landowner . . . , the northern miner,” and even “the village idiot.”⁴⁵ Mrs. Loretta Merwin, an American who spent three years in Chile in the mid-1850s, thought that “the great object of life” was “to accumulate wealth and remove to the capital, to lavish it in costly furniture, equipage and splendid living.”⁴⁶ The coming of the steamship made overseas travel much easier all round. The generation of Chileans born around 1830 (a notable one) was the first to make a habit of visiting Europe. “The desire all the inhabitants of the republic have to go to Europe,” commented a deputy in 1852, “is so extraordinary that if someone paid their passage they would all go.”⁴⁷ Political exile, not uncommon during Manuel Montt’s tough presidency in the 1850s, could sometimes be combined with a suitably educational Grand Tour in Europe or (less often) the United States. Such contacts with the outside world had their effect on upper-class tastes and fashions – the “European model” of society detected by another American visitor of the 1850s: “in Valparaíso the standard is rather English,” he added, “in Santiago it is decidedly French.”⁴⁸ England set the tone in masculine attire, the *frac* or frock-coat now becoming universal among upper-class men, and in the increasing popularity of tea drinking. (In 1844, the equipment of the Chamber of Deputies included two teapots and two milk jugs.)⁴⁹ If anything, however, France radiated a wider cultural influence – in styles of female dress, furniture, literary fashion, Catholic practice, even political rhetoric. In 1857, the young Vicente Reyes humorously noted the existence of a “special circle” of “Chilean dandies” who had visited Paris. These *Europistas* (“Europists”), as he dubbed them, liked to give the impression that nobody who had been in Paris could possibly enjoy Chile. Another social set, the *Europistas copias* (“copy-Europists”), who had never been abroad, did their best to ape those who had.⁵⁰

45 MV, No. 4048, April 3, 1842.

46 Merwin, p. 95.

47 Máximo Mujica, CN/D, June 25, 1852.

48 Smith, p. 116.

49 Inventory of furniture, SCL, XXXIV, 666–67.

50 FE, No. 490, July 20, 1857.

In all these ways the Anglo-French impact was a notable one, and it had effects on many levels. The rising novelist Alberto Blest Gana tried to put it in context in an article written in 1861:

Contact with European people, the study of their literature, the influence of their trade, the ease of journeys to the old world and our constant communications with it – these things have worked a radical revolution in our habits, while at the same time various spheres of society still maintain notable vestiges of the customs of the colonial era.⁵¹

Blest Gana was especially interested in the challenge that this changing social scene posed to novelists like himself, in search of suitable subject matter. In a more significant way, however, his “radical revolution” can be regarded as one of the keys to the political sea change that occurred at the end of the 1850s and beginning of the 1860s.

Any definition of the “politically active” upper class would have to include some of its more impoverished members, and also men who were making their way into it by successfully practicing law or (less certainly after the 1830s) by winning military renown. By no means the whole of the upper class was seriously involved in political life. The effective “political class” was a smaller group consisting of its more articulate members, lawyers (as in so many political cultures) forming a strong component. It also must be noted that politics (until well into the twentieth century) was almost entirely a masculine affair. Society matrons such as Mercedes Marín del Solar (who acquired renown as a poetess) or Enriqueta Bulnes (first lady in the 1840s) sometimes hosted political and literary salons, and presumably joined in political conversations, but that was the extent of their influence.

At times, the boundaries of the “politically relevant population” (though not the political class as such) expanded to include other small sections of society. Between the *gente* (sometimes *gente decente*), as they called themselves (“people” or “decent people,” the upper class) and *el pueblo* (“the people,” the laboring poor), a number of intermediate social groups were (or at least became) visible in the decades after independence. We can hardly talk of a middle class as such, but there was at least a small “middle band” of society that grew more conspicuous with the mid-century’s commercial expansion. The owners of small businesses and farms, the clerical staff of government offices and trading houses, foreign engineers, schoolteachers, lower-ranking army officers – all of these, and others, were snobbishly dismissed by the upper class as *medio pelo*, a term that was still familiar to twentieth-century Chileans. The better-off fringe of the “middle band” certainly included its share of social climbers, eager to imitate and if possible

51 “Literatura chilena,” AUCH (1861), p. 90.

join the upper class. By the 1850s, these were a recognizable type, and were beginning to be described as *siúticos*, a word whose etymology is mysterious but whose introduction into common speech has traditionally been ascribed to the great Liberal publicist José Victorino Lastarria. In 1858 one of President Montt's ministers, Waldo Silva, was described as a *siútico* in print.⁵²

Although *el pueblo*, "the people," was constantly evoked as a positive symbol in political rhetoric, this never meant that the laboring poor – the inquilinos and casual workers of the countryside, the mine workers of the north, the *rotos* (the generic Chilean term for urban laborers) – were included in the political system. Educated Chileans coexisted with them, but were not (with a few honorable exceptions) much interested in them. "The fate of the underprivileged classes barely attracts the attention of our society," suggested *El Ferrocarril* in 1859. "Since nobody dies of hunger, it considers its duty fulfilled. . . . [In] our society, love of the people is generally lacking."⁵³ There is no reason to contest the consensus among Chilean scholars that "the social question" (as it later became known) was largely absent before the 1870s, with only a scattering of writings devoted to the country's large-scale poverty.⁵⁴

To what extent was "the people" feared? The authorities saw it (at least intermittently) as a potential threat, although only when stirred up by unscrupulous politicians opposed to the regime. The urban crowd in Santiago and Valparaíso had sometimes been stridently vocal during the 1820s. A serious disturbance had occurred in Santiago at one of the more uncertain moments (December 1829) during the Conservative takeover. The Conservative regime after 1830, no doubt aware of these precedents, attempted systematically (though not always successfully) to discipline the laboring poor wherever it could. Flogging remained a common penalty in town and country alike. Suppressed by large majorities in both houses of Congress in 1850, it was restored two years later. A fairly strict regime (one against which they occasionally revolted) was imposed on workers in the mining zone, who among other things had to carry identity papers.⁵⁵ Starting in 1837, Valparaíso's stevedores and boatmen (the latter indispensable in a port where ships could not tie up) were organized in a strictly supervised official *gremio* or guild.⁵⁶ The government also tried (to no great effect) to control the *fondas* and *chinganas*, the ramshackle taverns that proliferated in

52 *Copiapino*, No. 3123, November 20, 1858.

53 FE, No. 1138, August 24, 1859.

54 For a collection of writings on the "social question" in this period, see Grez Toso, "*Cuestión Social*," pp. 57–162.

55 See Illanes.

56 See Grez Toso, *De la "Regeneración,"* pp. 248–56.

and on the outskirts of the towns. Their music and dancing was appreciated by the better-off as well as the poor. They were sometimes fulminated against by the Church, and Andrés Bello once denounced them as little better than “authorized brothels.”⁵⁷ It was rumored in the 1830s that Diego Portales encouraged the *chinganas* as a means of distracting his adversaries from politics,⁵⁸ but in general the authorities made efforts to regulate them.

When educated Chileans used the term *clase obrera*, “working class,” they were not thinking of the laboring poor so much as the artisans and craftsmen of the towns, especially those of Santiago and Valparaíso. Cristián Gazmuri’s educated guess, extrapolated from the 1854 census, gives us a figure of about six thousand artisans and craftsmen in the Santiago of 1850,⁵⁹ with masons, carpenters, blacksmiths, and tailors in the largest categories. Immigrant foreign craftsmen took a place among them, catering especially to the tastes of the rich – to the extent that in 1854 a deputy complained that there were no truly Chilean workshops any more, that they all belonged to “a *Monsieur* This or a *Mister* That.”⁶⁰ This was a gross exaggeration. In Santiago, according to the 1854 census, only one person in seventy was foreign, although in Valparaíso (where foreign shopkeepers were common) it was one in fourteen. A register of *patentes* (business licenses) for 1849 shows around seventy foreign artisans in Santiago, the majority of them French.⁶¹ The artisanate as a whole shared, albeit modestly, in the rising prosperity of the period, and did its best, in public at least, to imitate fashionable styles of dress. Artisans themselves, as we know from some of the propaganda directed at them, were not eager to be confused with the laboring poor. Some of them certainly earned as much as minor government officials.

The *gremios* (guilds) into which artisans had been grouped in colonial times had either lapsed or were languishing. There were, however, some fitful attempts by artisans to organize themselves along more modern lines, in what would later be termed “mutualist” associations, to provide insurance and burial benefits for their members. Typographers, carpenters, and shipwrights in Valparaíso formed two ephemeral societies of this kind in 1850, and typographers in Santiago did likewise in 1853, their counterparts in Valparaíso following suit (their second attempt) soon afterward. A more general artisans’ association was formed in Valparaíso in

57 For example, “Chinganas,” RCAT, Nos. 115, 116, and 118, February 10 and 20, and March 12, 1847. Bello in AR, No. 69, January 7, 1832.

58 Zapiola, *Recuerdos*, p. 33.

59 Gazmuri, *El “48” chileno*, p. 51.

60 Alejandro Reyes, CN/D, August 8, 1854.

61 Grez Toso, *De la “Regeneración,”* p. 87.