

Organizing Community: Defying Dictatorship in Working-Class Chile, 1973-1983

“Organizing Community: Defying Dictatorship in Working-Class Chile, 1973-1983” unearths and analyzes key processes of social and political opposition organization in working-class neighborhoods in Santiago de Chile between the military coup of 1973, which brought General Augusto Pinochet to power, and the first National Protests of 1983-1987. Neighborhood residents who participated in these organizational networks became primary protagonists in the National Protests, which paved the way to the Chilean transition to democracy. “Organizing Community” delves back to the 1930s and 1940s to trace political culture, local organizations, and people that played important roles during the 1973-83 period. The study reconfigures three dominant arguments about the National Protests: that they were spontaneous; that they were the work of the Chilean Communist Party; or that they were the work of social organizations free of political-party influence. Instead, “Organizing Community” argues that the National Protests were the fruit of a decade of cooperative work to first (re)construct and then mobilize both old and new social and political networks –a process that revolved primarily around women and youth in working-class neighborhoods and depended on ideological shifts and alliances between progressive Catholics, Marxist Catholics, and the atheist Left. “Organizing Community” addresses the origins of the National Protests from the bottom up and, as a result, it rewrites a key part of Chile’s historic journey back to democratic rule.

“Organizing Community” is based on extensive archival research including church, government, and human-rights organization documents; mainstream, Catholic, NGO, and clandestine press; left-wing party documents; print material produced in the neighborhoods; and over one hundred oral history interviews with direct participants in representative neighborhoods across Santiago. The study focuses in-depth on La Legua and Villa Francia, which are located in the major National Protest zones of southern and western Santiago, respectively. “Organizing Community” dialogues with historians, political scientists, and anthropologists across geographical specialties about the construction of social movements; resistance to authoritarianism; gender; generation; political violence; Cold War Latin America; working-class political culture and social organization; the Catholic Church; and the Left.

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I. Introduction

Discussion of historiography, and conceptual and methodological frameworks.
Presentation of principal case studies (La Legua and Villa Francia).

II. Chapter One: September 11, 1973

The day of the military coup from the perspective of two working-class Santiago neighborhoods, La Legua and Villa Francia. The two neighborhoods experienced the coup very differently: armed combat in La Legua, and relative quiet in Villa Francia, which set the stage for subsequent neighborhood organization.

III. **Chapter Two: Repression, 1973-1983**

Systematic state repression unleashed specifically on poor and working-class Santiago neighborhoods in the wake of the coup, which defined the context in which post-1973 organization and mobilization occurred.

IV. **Chapter Three: Survival, 1973-1975**

The first attempts at social and political organization in the context of intense state repression and severe economic recession. The regime's attempts to further consolidate its rule by attracting working-class support with social programs while hiding poverty and erasing Left working-class history.

V. **Chapter Four: Solidarity, 1975-1978**

In the context of continuing repression and economic crisis, the Left and the Catholic Church offer alternatives. The role of the Lutheran and Catholic churches and Left political parties in social organization work in poblaciones, in which women are primary protagonists. The consolidation of social and political networks and cooperation between progressive Catholics, Marxist Catholics, and the atheist/agnostic Left.

VI. **Chapter Five: Mobilization, 1978-1983**

The expansion of social and political networks and the rise of the next generation of youth. Left political parties begin recruitment, straining relations within neighborhood organizations. In 1978, the first mass protests occur in Santiago, increasing in both size and audacity until the first National Protests in 1983. Under strong domestic and international pressure, the regime institutionalizes its rule even as protest activity accelerates and the economy implodes.

VII. **Chapter Six: National Protest, 1983**

Mobilization reaches an unprecedented peak in 1983 during the first National Protests, concentrated in working-class neighborhoods. Political parties strengthen their presence as such, provoking increased debate and tension within local organizations as social and political networks expand and change.

VIII. **Conclusion**

Both Chile-specific and general conclusions regarding especially the construction of social movements; poor and working-class politics; and the Catholic Church and the Left.