

# **Chile's Penguin Revolution: Student Response to Incomplete Democratization**

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Between April and June 2006, nearly one million Chilean high school students captivated the nation as they organized in protest and temporarily placed many schools on strike. The students, protesting against the unjust structure of the education system, were soon nicknamed “pingüinos” after the movement earned the name “Penguin Revolution” for the black and white school worn by the participants as they marched through the streets and occupied their school buildings. Within a matter of weeks, the movement grew from a single protest march in the streets of Santiago, the country’s capital, to a nationwide campaign that placed nearly half of the schools in the country under occupation or on strike. No other organized movement had gained momentum so quickly or reached such size since the re-democratization period had begun sixteen years before.<sup>1</sup> Their tactics were eventually enough to gain the attention of the government, enabling the possibility for them to negotiate the policies to which they were opposed.

Including both short- and long-term goals, the movement’s demands ranged from government funded transportation for all students to an entire restructuring of the privatized education system, which had barely been reformed since its creation under the military dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet over two decades before. The students believed that this system was unequal, undemocratic, and a negative reminder of the dictatorship that had ended sixteen years before. Having attempted to change these policies through more formal political means in the past, the students believed that a mass uprising was the only method that would gain sufficient government attention to make a difference. The students’ ability to mobilize quickly, recruit nearly one million nationwide participants, and organize their demands to negotiate was

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<sup>1</sup> I use the term *re*-democratization because this was the second time that Chile had “democratized.” It is considered to have operated as a civilian democracy from 1932 until the 1973 military overthrow of democratically elected socialist President Salvador Allende.

unprecedented in the largely “demobilized” democratic era. This strategy suggests that these students, who have grown up entirely under democratic rule, are unsatisfied with the effectiveness of traditional channels of democratic representation, and that they feel comfortable going outside of these methods to express their views without risking democratic regression. Both the purpose for which they mobilized and the method of mobilization revealed their belief in a system that functions properly for the people it serves. Above all, the emergence of the Penguin Revolution demonstrates the dissatisfaction of a new generation with the unfulfilled expectations of democracy.

In the first section of this paper, I will briefly present the context in which the Penguin Revolution emerged, which was characterized by a slow pace of democratic consolidation partly due to a largely demobilized civil society. The second section will provide a thorough sequence of events by which the Penguin Revolution was executed, with a detailed description of the motives behind their actions. The third section will give an explanation of the policies created during Augusto Pinochet’s dictatorship that outlived his reign and persisted through the political transition of 1990, contributing to ineffectiveness of formal democratic procedures and the lingering legacy of authoritarianism. In the fourth section, I will describe the structure of one such policy – the unequal, privatized education system, which epitomizes the market-based nature of the economic and social policy reforms made under Pinochet, and is believed by many students to be unjust and undemocratic. The fifth section will integrate these two elements in order to explain the motives of the pinguinos, including what factors drove them to protest after never having witnessed a similar movement in the politically “demobilized” era that had characterized the country during their lifetime. In the same section, I will examine how the successful response of the government may affect the potential for similar mobilizations to

emerge in the future. Finally, I will make conclusions about the problems with unfulfilled expectations of democracy for members of this generation and projections about what other advances should be made in order to minimize the existing rift in Chilean society.

My analysis of the Penguin Revolution has been influenced by a variety of sources. As there is little scholarly analysis of the movement due to its recency, I have chosen to use academic analyses of the political context for the emergence of the revolution and to evaluate the quality and equity of the education system. For my analysis of the motives of the movement, I will use interviews that I and other researchers have conducted with various student participants.<sup>2</sup> This combination of resources will give insight into the political setting under which the Penguin Revolution emerged, the beliefs of the new generation, and the potential the movement has to influence the deepening of democracy in Chile.

### **Context of a “Demobilized” Society**

The method by which the Penguin Revolution was conducted was unprecedented in the context of Chilean democracy. The movement was not only astounding because it developed to such a large scale in such a short amount of time, but also because the democratization period had been characterized by such low levels of mobilization. This was largely due to the forced depoliticization of civil society during the Pinochet regime, the demobilization campaigns during the democratic transition, and the subsequent ineffectiveness of formal party representation throughout the democratic era. All of these factors have contributed to the incompleteness of a

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<sup>2</sup> The interviews I conducted myself were completely done on a voluntary basis. I recognize the biases that may exist when interview participation is voluntary; however, this was the best method to which I had access. To understand the motives behind the movement, I also used the views represented in the book by Tamara Gutiérrez Portillo and Cristina Caviedes Reyes (cited below), and the documentary *La Revolución de los Pingüinos*, directed by Jaime Diaz and released in Chile in 2008.

substantive democracy in Chile.<sup>3</sup> The Penguin Revolution is relevant in Chilean democratic consolidation because it reveals not only the dissatisfaction of a new generation with old policies, but also the potential future increase in political participation and the strengthening of substantive democracy.

Manuel Garretón, Chilean political scientist and author of *Incomplete Democracy: Democratization in Chile and Latin America*, suggests that though the *transition* to democracy is complete in Chile, its *consolidation* still is not because it lacks a participatory political society.<sup>4</sup> Many scholars agree with Garretón, maintaining that a substantive democracy requires a democratically active society that is involved in political processes. Patricio Silva describes the political deactivation of Chile since the 1970s, which began with Pinochet's conscious depoliticization of society, and the initial democratic governments' failure to encourage political participation for fear of disrupting stability and national reconciliation in the transitional period.<sup>5</sup> Patricia Hipscher's analysis of the decline of social movements during the democratic transition shows the discouragement that incoming democratic political leaders exercised in opposition to mobilization tactics and in favor of formal party representation.<sup>6</sup>

While these analyses explain the context and some of the factors behind the demobilization of Chilean society in the democratic era, a clear explanation for the resurrection

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<sup>3</sup> Manuel Garretón describes a substantive democracy as one that experiences a social transformation in which not only are institutions democratized, but civil society becomes democratic, as well, and exhibits this through their attitudes and behaviors. Manuel Antonio Garretón, *Incomplete Democracy: Political Democratization in Chile and Latin America*. Translated by R. Kelly Washbourne with Gregory Horvath (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 142.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Patricio Silva, "Doing Politics in a Depoliticised Society: Social Change and Political Deactivation in Chile," *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 23:1 (2004), 64-65.

<sup>6</sup> Patricia L. Hipscher, "Democratization and the Decline of Urban Social Movements in Chile and Spain," *Comparative Politics* 28:3 (1996), PAGE?

of mobilized action via The Penguin Revolution, has not yet been made. Though social movements existed throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, none were able to mobilize to such a large degree and garner similar government attention as the Penguin Revolution. As the movement is somewhat recent and has not been succeeded by any follow-up movements of comparable size, little scholarly literature exists to explain its effects on Chilean society. A press release by the Council on Hemispheric Affairs from July 2006, said that the protests had reinforced Chilean democracy and may represent a change in the manner in which government interacts with certain groups in society.<sup>7</sup> At the very least, the unyielding actions taken by the students, as described in the following section, indicate the new generation's greater willingness to actively participate for causes that are important to them, whether they find institutional or extra-institutional channels more effective.

### **The Penguin Revolution**

On April 26, 2006, students from fifteen high schools in Santiago marched down the city's largest avenue in protest of the scant government support for student transportation and a recent announcement concerning the increase in the cost to take the PSU (Prueba de Selección Universitaria), the college admissions exam required for admittance to any university in Chile.<sup>8</sup> Believing that these expenses were unfair for low-income students, the marchers demanded that they be free, at least for members of the lowest socioeconomic classes. As this march did not gain much attention from the government, which likely believed the movement would fizzle away as others had in the past, the students chose to further organize and take more drastic

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<sup>7</sup> Timothy Hatfield, "Chile's Student Protests and the Democratization of a Semi-Democratic Society," Council on Hemispheric Affairs Press Release, July 2006. INCLUDE WEBSITE?

<sup>8</sup> Carlos E. Ruiz, "¿Que hay detrás del malestar con la educación?" in *Análisis del año 2005: Política, economía, sociedad, temas*. (Santiago: Universidad de Chile, 2007), 40.

measures. The movement quickly became a nationwide phenomenon that the government could not ignore.

On May 19, students at two prominent high schools in Santiago occupied their school buildings, attempting to encourage the recently inaugurated president, Michelle Bachelet, to address the movement and the general issue of education in her speech to the nation two days later. When she failed to do so, the students at these institutions declared an indefinite strike on instruction, largely with the approval of their instructors, and encouraged other schools to do the same. A week later, over 100 schools throughout the country had joined the effort. Despite the movement's growing influence, government administrators maintained their refusal to meet with mobilized students, stating that the movement was undemocratic and destructive.<sup>9</sup> When their expectation for the movement's abatement was unfulfilled after more than a week, Martin Zilic, Minister of Education, finally announced his willingness to negotiate in a meeting scheduled for May 29; however, on that day, he chose to send his sub-secretary instead. The students viewed this as a sign that they were not being taken seriously. In response, the Coordinated Assembly of Secondary Students (Asamblea Coordinada de Estudiantes Secundarios, ACES) called for the largest nationwide strike to date on the following day – Tuesday, May 30. On that day, approximately 800,000 students from all over the country (nearly 250,000 from within Santiago), at over 250 schools, demonstrated their opposition to various government policies on education by marching in the streets and occupying their school buildings.<sup>10</sup>

On the same day, student representatives began serious negotiations with Zilic, who was finally willing to cooperate. Due to the unyielding attitude of the elected student leaders, these

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<sup>9</sup> Michelle Bachelet, address to the nation, 21 May 2006, <http://www.presidencia.cl/documentos/mensaje-presidencial-archivos/21Mayo2006.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> Tamara Gutiérrez Portillo and Cristina Caviedes Reyes, *Revolución Pingüina: La primera gran movilización del siglo XXI en Chile*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. (Editorial Ayun, 2006), 113-117.

negotiations continued for over a week, during which time the participants refused to demobilize. They maintained their initial demands for the elimination of the cost of the PSU and for free public transportation for all students. They also stood behind their long-term demands for the abolishment of the extended school day (Jornada Escolar Completa, JEC), and a general restructuring of the decentralized education system, which they believed was undemocratic and exacerbated economic inequalities. This was indicated in their opposition to the Organic Constitutional Law of Education (Ley Orgánico Constitucional de Enseñanza, LOCE), a law that had been created the day before Pinochet left office to further assure that the system of education he had created would remain after the democratic transition.<sup>11</sup> While the short term material demands were those that began the movement, it was the long-term, more deep-seated ones that kept the movement going and drew the attention and support of the public.

The Ministry of Education (Mineduc) gradually began to cooperate with the demands of the students, announcing that the PSU would be free for members of the bottom four economic quintiles in the country, and that limited transportation would be funded through the “pase escolar,” a student pass for entrance into public transportation. Michelle Bachelet’s announcement of the creation of a Presidential Advisory Council on Education (Consejo Asesor Presidencial de Educación), which would include student representatives and whose purpose would be to write an education law to replace the LOCE, led to the students agreement to end the current phase of mobilization. On June 9, the ACES announced the official demobilization of the movement and a return to normal classes, provided that the government follow-through with its promises and include student representatives in all decision-making regarding education.

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<sup>11</sup> Ruiz, “¿Que hay detrás del malestar con la educación?” 41.

The eventual replacement of the LOCE came with the creation of the Ley General de Educación, which was finalized by the end of the year, but not ratified until 2007. Though many Chileans remain unsatisfied with the minimal changes it made from the LOCE, the LGE established greater fairness in school selection of students and higher quality standards for instruction in schools at every level. Despite the achievement of most of the movement's intended goals, the general structure of the education system has remained largely the same, and many still believe it to be unjust.

The Penguin Revolution reveals the current generation's comfort with the democratic philosophy of liberty and equality. It shows their dissatisfaction with the policies that existed in Chile at the time, their urgency to change them, and the necessity to act in this fashion for the issue to be so urgently considered. "All other techniques had been exhausted and this was the only way that the authorities would take us seriously," explained Alonso, a *pingüino* from the Metropolitan region (Santiago), who was fifteen-years-old at the time of the movement. These students are members of the first modern generation to grow up entirely under democratic rule, and seem to be comfortable with the concept of democracy, and understand how it should operate. This comfort and understanding led to their extreme dissatisfaction with the unfulfilled expectations of this form of government in Chile caused by the failure to eradicate Pinochet-era policies, such as the blocks to legislative reform and policy-making, and the structure of the education system itself. These are described in greater detail in the two sections that follow.

### **Vestiges of Authoritarian Rule**

Democracy is largely based on legislative representation as the primary channel for political participation and the most formal method to influence policy-making. However, another

core element of democracy is having the ability to freely express ones opinions when he or she feels as if they are not being properly represented. Chile in the 1990s had attempted to rely on traditional democratic methods of representation; however, the lingering elements of authoritarianism in government prevented the effectiveness of this tactic. It was largely due to these vestiges that the *pingüinos* had to act through non-traditional means.

Chile's peaceful transition to civilian democracy came at a price – when negotiating the terms of the transition, the outgoing government required that incoming leaders make various policy concessions in order that former leaders could maintain a strong element of political control.<sup>12</sup> These policies became the primary reason for the slow democratic progress that ensued and, to this day, serve as the primary sources of incompleteness within the Chilean democratic system. Two Pinochet-instituted elements stand out as the primary contributors to tension within Chilean democratization: 1) the survival of various components of the 1980 constitution and their effects on effective legislative representation; and 2) the neoliberal economic model and its effect on the structure of social policy programs that have not been reformed in over two decades.

The 1980 Constitution was perhaps the country's first major step toward re-democratization, not because it immediately established a democratic government, but because it created the legal possibility for the military regime to be replaced by civilian government in the future. It also created rules by which Pinochet's regime would abide for the remainder of its time in power.<sup>13</sup> Among other things, the new constitution officially established that Pinochet would

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<sup>12</sup> Hipscher, "Democratization and the Decline of Urban Social Movements," 282.

<sup>13</sup> As an authoritarian regime is not typically governed by overpowering rules, but rather by the decisions of its rulers, this anomalous instrument suggested that a violent overthrow of the dictatorship might not be a necessary occurrence in Chile's political future, and implied that a transfer of power to civilian hands through legal means could potentially prevail.

incontestably maintain his position as the executive leader of Chile for the following eight years, at which point there would be a plebiscite that would determine whether he would remain in power for another eight-year term.<sup>14</sup> The 1988 plebiscite resulted unfavorably for Pinochet. When negotiations began leading up to the transition period, some reforms were made to the policies established by the constitution, but many outlived the regime under which they were created.

Many of such policies concerned legislative representation. While the military would officially be removed from power the following year, its leaders retained the power to appoint a selected number of the seats in the legislature, thus assuring that the ideological “right” maintain a significant level of power in the government. This control and the disadvantageous measures required for passing new legislation made it difficult to reform the existing policies once the democratic government took effect.<sup>15</sup> These disadvantageous requirements included a three-fifths or four-sevenths vote in the legislature, which could rarely be achieved due to party differences and legislative appointments in the post-dictatorship era. “Organic” laws, such as that which established the education system, required even greater support to be reformed.<sup>16</sup> Additionally, Pinochet was to maintain his position as chief executive of the military until at least 1997. The continuation of the Pinochet regime’s control over various functions of the government severely prevented a complete democratic transition and contributed to the difficulty the new government had in making reforms. While the country was labeled “democratic,” many

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<sup>14</sup> Brian Loveman, “Authoritarianism, Corporatism, and Chilean “Exceptionalism,” in *Authoritarianism and Corporatism in Latin America—Revisited*, ed. Howard J. Wiarda (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005), 125.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.

<sup>16</sup> Ruiz, “¿Que hay detrás del malestar con la educación?” 34.

of its policies did not fit this label.<sup>17</sup> The difficulty in changing Organic laws and reforming policy in general had inhibited previous attempts to significantly change the education system were influential in the decision of the student movement to mobilize in the way it did. They did not believe that they would get very far if they tried to operate through these traditional channels that were ineffective in representing their needs, and thus, undemocratic.

It was not only the undemocratic constitutional policies created under Pinochet that caused tension in Chile's democratization process, but also the extreme economic reforms made by his regime that resulted in harsh socioeconomic divisions. The introduction and development of *neoliberalism*, a market-based economic model that encourages privatization and free trade, was an important characteristic of the Pinochet era. Its expansion throughout various sectors of the economy resulted in extreme inequalities within the population, which continues today to contribute to Chile's position as one of Latin America's most economically unequal countries.<sup>18</sup> Though they were beneficial for the growth of the Chilean economy overall, they resulted negatively for those living in rural areas and for employees within specified industries. The 27% decrease in the public budget was detrimental to those already living in impoverished communities.<sup>19</sup>

When Patricio Aylwin was inaugurated in March of 1990, his administration promoted "growth with equity" as the motto that would inform its policy decisions for the first years of re-

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<sup>17</sup> Some reforms were made throughout the 1990s, though they were minimal, and perhaps the largest bulk of changes were passed in 2005, but did not take effect until March 2006, just a month before the Penguin Revolution began. This means that any positive effect they might have had on the tension and uncertainty in Chile's democracy would not yet have impacted Chilean society prior to the students' decision to protest.

<sup>18</sup> Margaret Olavarría, "Protected neoliberalism: Perverse institutionalization and the crisis of representation in postdictatorship Chile," *Latin American Perspectives* 30:6, (2003): 13.

<sup>19</sup> Donna Chovanec and Alexandra Benitez. "The Penguin Revolution in Chile: Exploring Intergenerational Learning in Social Movements," *Journal of Contemporary Issues in Education* 3:1 (2008): 41.

democratization.<sup>20</sup> Though the element of *equity* seems to imply that the new democratic government would actively seek to reduce previously created inequalities, the implications of the element of *growth* are a clear reminder of the growth-backed model of the former dictatorship. While Pinochet believed that inequality and redistribution could not occur until Chile had seen sufficient economic growth, the new administration sought to achieve both simultaneously. This motto contributed to the severe overlap of past concepts with progressive ones within the system and, due to the greater value placed on growth, was largely ineffective in reducing inequalities and uniting Chilean society.<sup>21</sup>

The success of the neoliberal reforms for the economy's *overall* growth and the relative improvement in the Chilean economy created somewhat of an obsession with market-based procedures throughout the country that eventually influenced other sectors. Initially, this model was applied solely in the *economic* sphere, but eventually began to influence the structure of *social* policy, as well, affecting healthcare, welfare programs and education (as described in the section that follows). The neoliberal social reforms inherited from the dictatorship have largely prevented the ability of the new administrations to achieve the levels of equity they claim to have sought.<sup>22</sup> The market-based mindset in Chile is reminiscent of the Pinochet era for most Chileans, and its policies promote inequalities within society that many believe to be undemocratic because they prevent the equality of opportunity. The undemocratic policies that slipped through the cracks during the democratic transition are lingering reminders of

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<sup>20</sup> Pilar Vergara, "In Pursuit of 'Growth with Equity': The Limits of Chile's Free Market Social Reforms," in *The Political Economy of Social Inequalities: Consequences for Health and Quality of Life*, ed. Vicente Navarro (New York: Baywood Publishing Company, Inc., 2002), 229.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 230.

authoritarianism. As the *pingüinos* were subject to one of these lingering reminders every day – the education system – they opposed the inequality that it promoted.

### **Market-based Education?**

The *pingüinos* recognized that the privatized structure of the education system was a reminder of Pinochet’s market-based legacy and the inequalities it promoted, and that it would remain so until it was fundamentally altered. The equity they sought was reflected in the demands they made to the government. While the movement first began with the monetary goals of removing the cost of transportation and the college admissions test, it quickly transformed into a campaign to change an extremely influential vestige of the Pinochet era – the LOCE and the education system it made legal.<sup>23</sup>

At the time of the Penguin Revolution (and to a lesser extent still today), the structure of the education system was that which had been implemented in the early 1980s under the military dictatorship. Based on decentralization and privatization, the operation of the schools was removed entirely from the state and distributed amongst municipal governments and private entities, creating three kinds of schools: free municipal schools, free private state-subsidized schools (which sometimes required a small extra fee), and fee-paying private schools. Fee-paying private schools were privately funded and operated, while municipal schools were free and operated by the municipal government. Private state-subsidized schools, on the other hand, were operated privately, but funded mostly by the government. As the funding was based on a voucher program, Private schools would receive payment from individual families, while municipal and subsidized schools would receive a fixed amount per student from the

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<sup>23</sup> Chovanec and Benitez, “The Penguin Revolution in Chile,” 38.

government. Families were able to select, based on preference and financial ability, to which school they wished to send their student. The intention of this system was that schools would compete to have higher quality standards, and thus would attract more students; in receiving more students, they would in turn receive more funding. This competitive model was inspired by the market structure for which the Pinochet era is famous.<sup>24</sup> In order to maintain an important element of control in the education system, the national Ministry of Education military government maintained control of the curriculum requirements and the evaluation methods.<sup>25</sup> Unfortunately, the outcome of the new system did not follow the intended universal improvement, and actually resulted in greater disparities between schools, which the *pingüinos* ultimately decided to combat.

Various elements of this new system, however, contribute to the inequalities that plague the education system. Though vouchers allow greater choice in theory, they only do so for families that have access to each of the different schools based on proximity, number of available spaces within the school, and the ability to pay the family contribution that some private and private-subsidized schools require.<sup>26</sup> Children living in rural areas, for example, must attend whichever school is geographically accessible to them, which is often only a single municipal school that does not have sufficient funding to provide a quality education because it receives insufficient financial or administrative help from the government.

Additionally, the reforms made to the education system have increased the disparity between the funding available to different kinds of schools. Ideally, allowing for greater private

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<sup>24</sup> Camilla T. Helgø, "Market-Oriented Education Reforms and Social Inequalities among the Young Populations in Chile," in *Social Policy Reform and Market Governance in Latin America*, ed. Louise Haagh and Camilla Helgø (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 125.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ann Matear, "Equity in Education in Chile: The Tensions Between Policy and Practice," *International Journal of Educational Development* 27 (2007): 104.

participation within the education system increases the sources of funding contributing to the system throughout the country, and makes it more well-off overall. It is important to consider, however, the manner in which the funding is allocated. Between 1990 and 2001, public spending on education doubled (as a percentage of GDP), whereas spending on private education tripled.<sup>27</sup> Though both of these quantities *increased*, the unequal ratio of this increase broadens the disparity between the two kinds of schools, thus increasing performance inequalities present between them. This has also contributed to greater differences in quality of education, relative student performance, and general opportunities available to each student. The equity of the education system, thus, has decreased significantly.

A study done by social policy analyst Camilla Helgø found that the drastic structural disparities within the Chilean education system result in significant trends in performance differences among students who attend different kinds of schools. The investigation was done on the basis of PAA test scores, years of education, and hourly salary following graduation.<sup>28</sup> She found that while students attending municipal schools and private-subsidized schools actually had comparable results in all of these areas, those that had attended private fee-paying schools had performed much better in all respects.<sup>29</sup> Scores from nationally administered tests reflect similar discrepancies. In both language and mathematics, while average private school test scores

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<sup>27</sup> In 1990, public spending on education was 2.4% of GDP, and private spending on education was 1.4% of GDP. In 2001, public spending was 4.4%, and private spending was 3.3%. Although it is positive for the system that spending increased for both, the proportionate increase (which is greater in private spending than in public spending), expands existing educational inequalities. *Ibid.*, 106.

<sup>28</sup> Helgø, "Market Oriented Education Reforms," 124.

<sup>29</sup> Helgø's investigation found that students who attended private fee-paying schools were more likely to attend school for a greater number of years, and more likely to pursue a university education. The investigation also found that there was a large difference between the academic performance (based on a nationally administered test) between municipal students in high-income municipalities and those in low-income municipalities. Helgø attributes this to greater financial capital and the ability to attract more skilled and motivated teachers. *Ibid.*, 127-132

have been gradually increasing since 1998, average municipal scores have been decreasing.<sup>30</sup>

This suggests that the severity of the gap has been steadily *widening*.<sup>31</sup> In comparing students of differing socioeconomic backgrounds, a similar pattern can be found. The percentage of students attending municipal schools has been steadily dropping since the initial reforms were made in the 1980s because Chileans do not trust that they will provide a quality education.<sup>32</sup> For some families, however, municipal schools are the only feasible option.

These unfortunate circumstances brought the *pingüinos* to react. Though the students that initiated the movement were mostly from municipal schools, by the end, the movement had gained the support of students from all socioeconomic backgrounds. Of the 250 schools participating by May 30, 100 were municipal high schools, 50 were private-subsidized high schools, 50 were private high schools, and 50 were technical schools.<sup>33</sup>

### **No Other Option**

The Penguin Revolution reveals the ideology of a new generation and their dissatisfaction with the consolidation of the political system that defines their generation. Although still not eligible to vote, these youth were old enough to express their qualms with the government and its policies, and did not hesitate to do so when they did not believe their rights were being respected.

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<sup>30</sup> The reported results are based on scores from the SIMCE (Sistema de Medición de la Calidad de Educación, System for Measuring the Quality of Education) test, which is administered by the Chilean Ministry of Education in order to evaluate student performance based on the Curriculum Framework outlined by the national government. Data used in this study came from the mathematics and language scores for 1998, 2001 and 2003. Matear, "Equity in Education," 109.

<sup>31</sup> Average test scores for private-subsidized schools have stayed fairly stable, with no significant changes between 1998 and 2003, when the comparison was conducted. Matear, "Equity in Education," 107.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Technical schools are a fourth secondary-education option in which students learn skills for a specific career, often a manual trade. Ruiz, "¿Que hay detrás del malestar con la educación?" 41.

They were dissatisfied with the policy ambiguities between authoritarianism and democracy that plagued the society in which they had been raised, and they recognized the urgency to change them. Above all, both the purpose for the movement and the manner in which they chose to react are evidence for this generation's dissatisfaction and willingness to mobilize in protest. When they saw that there was no other option and that the representative means on which they had relied had gotten them close to nowhere, they took it into their own hands, despite not having witnessed such a strong, organized mobilization in their lifetime. The student's belief in true democracy is evident by the purpose for the movement, the manner in which they executed it, and the organization within the movement.

The demobilization period began in Chile at the onset of the democratic transition. Throughout the 1980s, the country's political society had been extremely active, specifically in movements for worker's rights, greater housing equality, and the acceleration of the democratic transition.<sup>34</sup> However, upon Pinochet's loss in the plebiscite and the resulting negotiations for the transfer to democratic rule, mobilized groups began to discontinue demonstrating as they had been. The decline in mass protests upon the onset of democratization can largely be attributed to the expectations that Chileans had in the re-democratization of their country, including the representative model. As many social movement leaders were those participating in democratic negotiations, they encouraged the movements of which they were a part to discontinue mobilizing illegally. Following the official transition, they maintained this stance, fearing that with Pinochet regime members still in control of some aspects of government, any actions taken outside of traditional means would risk authoritarian regression.<sup>35</sup> Though Chileans chose to mobilize highly under repressive dictatorship, they surprisingly chose to abandon this method

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<sup>34</sup> Hipscher, "Democratization and the Decline of Urban Social Movements," 281.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 292.

when given greater protection under democratic government though problems and injustices persisted.

Upon the official transition to democracy, Chilean democratic society began relying on democratic representation and became accustomed to this shift in political participation. However, legislative representation proved largely ineffective for those seeking to reform policies created throughout the previous two decades. The aforementioned remnants of Pinochet-era policy made the establishment of new legislation and realization of constitutional reform nearly impossible because of party polarization and unelected legislators.<sup>36</sup>

Also, Chile sought to protect its representative democracy by forcing its many parties into few large conglomerates to compete in elections. This method produced what Margot Olavarría calls “exclusionary institutions designed to ‘protect’ a restricted democracy,” further distancing individuals from their party representatives and making policy-makers less aware of the needs of their constituents.<sup>37</sup> After many years of democratic governance, the existence of the positions for non-elected senators was no longer seen as a *transitional* element of Chilean politics, but rather a permanent fixture, further polluting the Chilean definition of “democracy” with the authoritarian element of appointment. The inability for the legislature to properly represent the country’s constituents made it impossible to realize the popular belief that education should be reformed.

The emergence of the Penguin Revolution exhibits that traditional means of representation were not sufficiently effective to meet the urgent demands of the student movement. The students felt as if the grave issue of quality and equitable education was being ignored. Not only had legislators not paid attention to the education movement, but at the time of

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<sup>36</sup> Loveman, “Authoritarianism, Corporatism, and Chilean “Exceptionalism,” 130.

<sup>37</sup> Margaret Olavarría, “Protected Neoliberalism,” 10.

the Penguin Revolution, the recently elected president, Michelle Bachelet, had also not mentioned the issue of education in her address to the country. When the persistence of the movement moved the issue of education to the top of President Bachelet's agenda, the success of the movement became clear. Despite attempts to alter education reform in the recent past, the students became the first to affect real change. It became clear that drastic, organized mobilization was, in fact, more effective than the more traditional democratic methods that political society was expected to rely on. Álvaro, a student participant in the northernmost region, explained that, "a strike isn't the best solution, but we felt that it was the only one."

Perhaps the largest obstacle to reforming education policy was the number of government administrators that had a stake in the market-based, for-profit sector of the education system (and in the business sector in general). Many functionaries, including the Minister of Education himself, owned private schools throughout the country. Thus, they had no personal interest in reforming the existing legislation and would have likely preferred that it be privatized even further. It was partly for this reason that previous attempts to reform the LOCE had not been successful. All previous reforms had made minimal, unnoticeable changes that had not come close to reorganizing the structure of the system or the notion of the "libertad de enseñanza."<sup>38</sup> As Mario, another participant in the northernmost region of the country, explained, "Chilean politicians do not focus on the needs of the people unless those people, through their actions, damage the interests of the politicians." And so Chilean students took their cause to the streets, demonstrating publicly the severity they felt for the need to reform the education system.

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<sup>38</sup> The *libertad de enseñanz* is a component of the LOCE that gives schools the ability to reject students based on academic performance. It was partly reformed with the establishment of the LGE. Ruiz, "¿Que hay detrás del malestar con la educación?" 33.

The manner in which the movement was organized, to represent all of its participants, reveals the students' belief in true democracy. During the peak of mobilizations, the ACES hosted students from all over the country to assure that each region was properly represented. Additionally, the result of their negotiations with the government was the creation of a presidential advisory council concerning education, which they were happy with as long as students were given adequate representation. This reveals that they believe that representation is an effective method for governing and policy-making, so long as it is done properly and effectively represents the people for which policies are being made.

Though not all of the students' demands have been entirely fulfilled, the government reaction to the movement at least signifies a new approach to mobilizations in favor of social justice issues.<sup>39</sup> The students' sense of urgency and unyielding attitude to initial government disregard reveals the attitude of a new generation comfortable with the necessity to voice their opinions and persevere to have them considered. Additionally, their decision to mobilize disproved the apparent myth that their generation was made up of consumers who were apathetic towards political and social issues.

The political system under which the students were raised largely affected their decision to protest, as they did not believe that their government would revert to authoritarian methods of the past, and if it were to do so, they did not understand the consequences as someone who had lived under the Pinochet regime would. The fourteen- to eighteen-year-old participants had lived under a democratic government for their entire lifetimes. They were not afraid of a possible regression of the democracy that they had grown up with, but rather they were empowered by the ideology that had defined their generation.

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<sup>39</sup> Timothy Hatfield, "Chile's Student Protests."

## Conclusion

The Penguin Revolution was a complex and intriguing movement that reflected problems within a stalled process of democratic consolidation. Never having lived under dictatorship or severe repression, the students who participated in this movement and kept its momentum were children of democracy, and they believed in the necessity to outwardly oppose injustice no matter what it took. They had no prior experience in mobilization, yet they managed to maturely execute their intentions through proper negotiation with government officials.

The organization of this movement following sixteen years without having witnessed anything similar is significant for Chile's political culture and identity. The children of democracy were displeased. The Penguin Revolution changed the manner in which we must look at Chilean political society as it exists today and as it will likely develop in the near future. The democratic mindset of the upcoming generation and the further away the country gets from the former authoritarian years are likely to change the level and strength of democratic consolidation in the country.

The Penguin Revolution demonstrates the dissatisfaction of the youth in Chile with the unfulfilled expectations of democracy through both the policies against which they fought *and* the method they chose to demonstrate their opposition. They opposed the enduring elements of the Pinochet era that had led to the constant advantages for the rich and challenges for the poor, including the general market-basis for a social program that they believed should be equitable. These "children of democracy" never knew dictatorship, but they have seen the lasting effects of its policies. They seem to understand what it means to have a voice in the politics and government of their own country, and the students I have interviewed have expressed that they would participate in a similar movement if it proved to be necessary. When asked if he would

participate in a similar movement for a worthy cause, Alonso answered affirmatively: “This movement from 2006 showed up that with organization, a social conscience, and lots of hard work, we can achieve anything.”

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