

BOOK REVIEW

Marian E. Schlotterbeck, *Beyond the Vanguard: Everyday Revolutionaries in Allende's Chile* (University of California Press, 2018)

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MARIAN E. SCHLOTTERBECK'S SOCIAL HISTORY OF CHILE CAPTURES the massive popular participation, hope, commitment, and energy that characterized the late 1960s and especially the early 1970s, when the Popular Unity (Unidad Popular, UP) government took power with democratic socialist Salvador Allende at its helm (1970–1973). In her study of grassroots organizing, focusing on the Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria (MIR) in Concepción, the author highlights the agency of ordinary people as they began to transform their lives under the popular government. “The election of a *compañero* president, who promised that state force would no longer be used to repress, afforded an opening for grassroots movements on an unprecedented scale” (5), she explains. Schlotterbeck argues that revolutionary change took place in “the form of quotidian transformations in people’s everyday lives” (6), in workplaces, classrooms, public plazas, and homes. The book provides a welcome regional analysis, adding to scholarly knowledge about key events and social forces in an important industrial region in Chile’s south.

Schlotterbeck makes the key point that many studies, using retrospective lenses, have presented Chile’s experiment—to move toward socialism through constitutional institutions—as “an inevitable march toward destruction.... With time, the responsibility for its failure increasingly moved away from the military and civilian leaders who plotted and carried out the coup to rest instead on a divided, ideological Left and a ‘hypermobilized’ politicized citizenry” (3). Certainly, the Pinochet dictatorship drummed this perspective

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into the heads of Chileans for 17 years via a barrage of psychological warfare campaigns. Some analytical studies have also diminished the impact of the right-wing insurrectionary forces and focused on the Left as the cause of the coup. Schlotterbeck seeks to counter this view and recapture the participatory democracy that was taking root in Chile. She shows that unionized workers, peasants, *pobladores*, women, and students became increasingly well organized and politically conscious in the 1960s. They mobilized to demand their rights, but they were not violent. Decades of organizing by the Left, especially the Socialist and Communist Parties, had established a tradition of channeling social demands through the electoral system, a unique feature of Chile's long-standing constitutional (if elitist) democracy. The MIR rejected this strategy as reformist and called for armed struggle and revolution (e.g., 31, 45–46, 50).

Concepción was home to coal mines, a steel mill, and numerous textile mills as well as a militant working class. The Communist Party in particular was deeply rooted in the organized working class in the coal mines; it was the party most committed to Allende's vision of a constitutional transition to socialism. The book traces the interactions between radical students at the University of Concepción who joined the MIR and local workers, arguing that, unlike on the national scene, MIR established a cross-class coalition in the region (83–85). In fact, local MIR leaders and militants worked with parties of the UP, unlike in Santiago. The author provides many new data on the land occupations, anti-rightist marches, People's Assemblies, and seizures of workplaces and businesses that were initiated by students, workers, and *pobladores*, along with party militants from MIR and regional leaders from some of the parties in the UP coalition: the Popular Unitary Action Movement (MAPU), the Socialist Party, the Christian Left, and sometimes the Communist Party. In fact, the regional MIR acted increasingly as an ally of the UP, unlike the MIR national leadership (e.g., 126–27, 135, 141, 157). The author argues that cross-class coalitions were a key accomplishment of the MIR in the region; they stimulated grassroots democratization and participation imbued with a revolutionary worldview (e.g., 12). Local MIR leaders, Schlotterbeck maintains, diverged from the official national party structure and such vanguardist and militaristic leaders as Miguel Enríquez, who argued for organizing a guerrilla movement in Chile. Local leaders acted autonomously and defied “the rigid Marxist ideological orientation of national MIR leaders.... [Local leaders] sought to make revolutionary change more pragmatic and less dogmatic by challenging power relations in factories, communities, and even families” (13; see also 32–33, 52, 58,

62, 134). Schlotterbeck provides important details about the local MIR's struggles, internal disagreements, achievements, and autonomous action vis-à-vis the national leadership. She provides an unflinching critique of MIR's internal authoritarianism (see chapter 6). Interestingly, she shows how popular demands escaped the control of the MIR (as they did the UP government) as pent-up frustrations and long-term deprivations provoked marginalized people to seize businesses as small as "peanut vendors" (86, 88, 100, 113, 131–33). In August 1973, the military moved in to occupy Concepción—as it did in Punta Arenas and Valdivia—a full month before the coup. The militant social mobilization in the region struck fear into the hearts of long-standing elites and the armed forces.

At times the author seems to suggest that the UP implemented top-down policies (e.g., 92, 132–33), but I would argue, rather, that there was a reciprocal interrelation between the UP government, which supported popular struggles, and the mobilized society, which was committed to the UP. The UP government was deeply interlinked with organized workers, students, peasants, and others, responding to their interests, and the long-excluded poor and working classes of Chile, staunchly pro-Allende, considered the election of the UP as their triumph (53–56, 92, 113, 152). Allende struggled to implement his vision of a phased transition to socialism within the rule of law and had to manage disparate forces. On one side were the MIR and the left wing of the UP, which were pushing to expand popular power, establish a People's Assembly, and abolish Congress. Some of the popular movements, too, were impatient with the UP's gradual approach and wanted to move more quickly toward socialism. On the other side were a hostile military and powerful right-wing forces (supported and goaded by Washington, which supplied financing and organized destabilization campaigns). Allende's enemies blocked his every initiative in Congress, impeached his ministers, and fomented a coup. Allende, always a committed democrat, sought to transform the state and empower society peacefully while respecting constitutional norms and institutions in Chile. Many Chileans, and analysts, still debate whether this was possible.

In sum, this book provides rich new details about Chile's democratization process in the 1960s and 1970s. It is a thought-provoking addition to studies of the UP years.

