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RACE AND INMIGRATION DURING
THE WAR OF THE PACIFIC

From 1879 to 1881, Chile devoted its energies to its war against Bolivia and Peru. The fall of Lima, while not ending the conflict — regrettably this struggle would drag on for almost three bloody years — signalled at least a return to a semblance of pre-war normality. The Moneda, for example, largely disbanded its army and fleet, so that the soldiers and sailors could return to their peacetime occupations.

The nation to which these victorious warriors returned had changed enormously. The Moneda had absorbed not only Antofagasta and Tarapacá but Tacna, Arica as well as parts of Peru. After 1881, Chile conquered Arauco, opening up the Indian lands to settlement. Thus, in addition to its normal economic endeavors, the nation had to exploit the *salitreras* as well as cultivate the newly conquered south. These endeavors obviously absorbed enormous quantities of manpower.

Logically the demobilization of the armed forces should have saturated the labor market. Yet, while many soldiers docilely returned to their *fundos*, other veterans refused to resume their civilian occupations. Consequently, a shortage of labor developed which became a major source of acute concern. The pages of the provincial press were filled with lamentations of the frustrated — housewives complaining that they could not find maids, the *hacendado*, anxious to bring in his harvest, desperately in search of the casual laborer; and the urban employer looking for an artisan — none of these could find workers “aunque se ofresca peso de oro de su servicio”¹. This situation became so desperate that in one town the authorities raided taverns in order to force the idle workers out of the bars and into the fields and factories².

In part, the cause of the labor shortage was quite simple: after 1880 the *salitreras* rivaled the *fundo* as a source of employment. Both men and women — the absence of the latter became a source of enormous discomfort because it deprived many households of maids —

¹ ESPER, 27 May. 1882.

² JUV, 26 Nov. 1882; COR, 1 Jan. 1881.

moved north in search of higher pay and better hours. The nitrate mines were not the only ones absorbing the nation's work force. The wealth that the northern *salitreras* created, flowed to the south where it funded a construction boom in various urban centers, particularly Santiago. In addition, the Moneda, flush with new revenues — again generated by the export tax on *salitre*— could finance various public work projects, such as the building of railroads, telegraph lines, highways, as well as urban sanitation and beautification projects. This construction provided new sources of employment. Yet, precisely because the salitreras and urban building projects opened new economic opportunities for the worker, it complicated the situation for the *hacendado* who, prior to the war, monopolized the labor market³.

Another element, this time external, also eroded the landowner's dominance: contractors of the Panama Canal project began actively recruiting workers in Chile. It is difficult to estimate the number of men who signed on to work in Darien's fetid jungles. The De Lesseps' undertaking, however, revived memories of the thousands who left Chile, never to return, in order to build Peru's railroads. Consequently the press launched a vigorous campaign to educate the peons, warning them that they would face "una muerte casi segura" if they left Chile for the isthmus⁴. Others suddenly became solicitous about the once ignored peasant. The Archbishop of Concepción published a pastoral letter beseeching the *inquilinos* to remain in Chile, a stance which even the anti clerical press seconded⁵.

Other observers saw the situation more accurately: laborers abounded; they simply would no longer accept the old ways. The war had altered the soldier's expectations. An American, visiting Chile during the war, had presciently wondered if the veterans would "return to their old *enkelinaje* (sic) or will they not, like the Russians after the late war, want to try some of those visionary and impracticable theories of which they will have heard so much in Lima from which their leaders in the past have so sedulously endeavored to protect them?". Apparently many simply refused to work again as agrarian laborers, preferring to subsist as vagrants or beggars⁶. Others, using

³ CQ, 5 Feb. 7 Dec. 1882; CHT, 11 March 1882; CUR, 8 Jan. 1882; LAP, 19 Jan. 1882; TEL, 13 Feb. 1882; DIQ, 28 June 1881.

⁴ FEN, 13 Dec. 1881.

⁵ DIS, 18 Jan. 1881.

⁶ James Douglas, "Chile - Its Geography, People, and Institutions", Bulletin of the American Geographical Society (New York, 1881), 91-92; CQ, 2 June 1881; DIS, 8 Nov. 1881, 7 April, 24 Nov., 4 Dec. 1883; EPS, 24 Nov. 1882.

their newly acquired marital skills to form bands of brigands in order to rob towns and *fundos*, lead one journalist to conclude ruefully that "el proletariado chileno es inclinado por instinto al salteo, al robo, y al asesinato"⁷. In truth, the rural masses had tired of working for the prewar salaries, which it estimated ranged between 30 to 50 cents a day, when now they have the opportunity instead to earn a peso⁸. Indeed, many Chileans interpreted the exodus to Panama as an indictment of the nation's rural labor conditions. Thus, *El Nuble* blamed not De Lesseps' gold but the greedy landowners for "produciendo la emigración de operarios que este año se ha hecho notable". One newspaper became furious that the nation which produced such fine laborers would not reward them accordingly, a situation which another expected to remain the same "mientras el patrón chileno no abandone el camino de una explotación enojosa y criminal"⁹.

Improving conditions of the rural working class might have stanchd the demographic hemorrhage but only a few *hacendados* considered this alternative and even less adopted it. Critics alleged that "were the landed proprietors to treat their dependents less like cattle, provide them decent housing to ward off poor weather, and exert themselves to get all their children properly vaccinated, each census might exhibit a marked increase in population"¹⁰. Unless this were done, Chile's farmlands would remain underpopulated. Even the *Boletín de la Sociedad Nacional de Agricultura*, hardly a radical journal, blamed the terrible plight of the rural lower classes on poor treatment, abysmal working conditions, and inadequate rations. Domestic inflation had halved salaries' real purchasing power while prices had increased. Yet, landlords adamantly refused to increase the rural workers' wages. In Chile, the agricultural journal noted, unlike advanced farming nations like the United States, *inquilinos* were treated as objects, rather than humanbeings¹¹.

The *terratenientes*, however, discovered an solution to their labor shortages: the government should encourage foreigners to come to Chile. Advocates of immigration argued that the new arrivals would bring not only strong arms but also needed technical skills and, perhaps, even a bit of capital. Citing the successful experiences of the United

⁷ CUR, 19 Feb. 1881; CQ 5, 24 Sept. 1882; LAP, 24 Sept. 1881.

⁸ ECAT, 13 Jan. 1881; INDEP, 8, 9 Dec. 1881.

⁹ NUB, 4 Feb. 1882; CONS, 7 Jan. 1881.

¹⁰ CHT, 4 June 1881.

¹¹ BSNA, 12 (1881), pp. 391-392, 394-395; 14 (1883), p. 171.

States and Argentina, both of which benefited from immigration, proponents also pointed to the German settlements in Valdivia and Llanquihue which had spearheaded the development of Chile's south¹².

For a variety of reasons, certain elements of Chilean society objected to the various immigrations projects. *El Precursor*, which claimed to represent the interests of the working class, violently opposed admitting foreigners. Too often, it noted, the nation had accepted penniless immigrants who, unable to find employment, ended up begging on the streets. Even worse, those foreigners who did encounter work, received preferential treatment and higher wages than Chileans doing the same job. Some suggested that the nation admit only a few technicians who could train Chilean workers. The recent war had shown that Chile needed to develop industries; "Es lo único que nos dará definitivamente en lo futuro la preponderancia en el Pacífico"¹³.

Others opposed the immigration projects, viewing them as palliatives to mask the basic issue: the wretched status of the nation's peasantry. Even *El Independiente* joined the anti-immigration chorus. Zorababel Rodríguez, who generally opposed all forms of government intervention — including forced compulsory vaccination and health inspection of prostitutes — nonetheless called for the Moneda to improve the lot of the working class. Immigrants, he argued, would not only seek special concessions, but would avoid the farm, preferring to work instead in commerce or finance. Thus *hacendados* erred when they complained about not finding enough willing hands: "es que faltan brazos que trabajen por el mismo salario nominal de 25 o de 30 centavos, con ración de porotos, que rejía antes de la guerra". If the rural landowners paid more generous wages, they would find more enough peons. But rather than raise salaries, the *hacendados* wanted the government to provide them with cheap labor by sponsoring immigration projects. The *terratenientes*, one journalist argued, should stop trying to save agriculture by exploiting the lower class but instead should modernize their farms, introduce new techniques, and provide their *inquilinos* "habitaciones propias de hombres civilizados i cristianos"¹⁴. *El Padre Cobos* shared this belief, arguing that "las ambiciones bastardas de un grupo de miserables especuladores" supported immigration projects as a way to depress the price of labor. Instead of the state al-

¹² CHT, 30 April, 16 July, 11 June 1881; HER, 26 May. 1882.

¹³ PRE, 19 Aug., 12 Oct. 1882; LIB, 2 May. 1882; RVS, 15 Sept. 1883.

¹⁴ INDEP, 14, 22, 28 April 1882.

locating money to defray the cost of immigration, it should use these funds to help Chileans. The journal even suggested offering prizes to families which had raised a majority of their children to the age of 15 or 20. "Chile para los Chilenos y Chilenos para Chile", the paper urged¹⁵.

Many opposed immigration because they regarded foreigners as a menace. Citing the examples of the United States and Argentina, they argued that immigrants were criminals, paupers, or radicals — the dregs of European society — who would introduce revolutionary ideas, victimize the Chileans, or precipitate a crime wave. Some of the press feared that immigrants would displace Chileans from their nativland. Each European immigrant arriving in the south, forced two Chileans to migrate to nearby Argentina. Thus, the Chileans who had spilled their blood to conquer Arauco, received nothing in return¹⁶.

Racial pride also motivated anti immigrant sentiment. Chileans considered themselves unique, disparaging their Andean neighbors for being Indians, blacks, or zambos, while conveniently forgetting their own mixed racial background. The war had enhanced Chile's sense of racial superiority which immigration now threatened not only to undermine through race mixture, but also to introduce crime, disease, and pauperism. As Rodríguez noted, no immigrant could match a Chilean created by its own "hijos, cada vez más fuerte, más unido, i más chileno"¹⁷.

Such sentiments were not typical only of Chile. Other nations which had received large numbers of foreigners, Argentina and the United States, for example, also had adopted racial stereotypes when describing potential immigrants. Predictably, therefore, a pecking order, which evaluated foreigners as potential immigrants, emerged.

Of the various possible immigrants, the Chinese, despite their support of the Chilean cause during the War of the Pacific, suffered from the dubious honor of being considered the least acceptable; a nation devoid of "los atributos y virtudes del trabajo". Francisco Casanova submitted a report which advocated denying entry to the Oriental who, he claimed, would underprice Chilean labor, act unscrupulously, and worse, suffered from ethnocentricity. To others the faults of the Chinese seemed countless: predatory businessmen they would cheat the hapless Chilean. At the same time, because they would work for

¹⁵ PC, 3 10 Nov., 7 Dec. 1881, 22 April 1882.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 25, 27, 29 April, 4 May. 1882.

¹⁷ INDEP. 28 April 1882; BSNA, 11 (1880), pp. 357-362; ECAT, 25 April 1882.

less — since they lived on rice and rats — they would drive down the price of native labor¹⁸. Thus workers were urged to unite in order to protect themselves from ruthless business men who would import Chinese labor into Chile¹⁹.

The presence of Chinese would also constitute a potentially divisive influence: "La raza asiática no tiene asimilación posible con la araucana y mucho menos deben tener cruce con las mujeres descendientes de las Fresias, Tegualda, Janequeo, etc. Los chinos, en suma, están bien en el celeste imperio". It would be foolhardy, argued another, to displace Chileans for opium smoking Chinese²⁰.

Italians enjoyed only a slightly more esteem than the Chinese. In part this antipathy developed during the course of the War of the Pacific. The press reported that Lima's Italian community's fire company had fought against Chilean troops at Chorrillos and Miraflores. For some obscure reasons this act outraged the Chilean troops who presumably massacred the survivors, an act which won the approval of some of the press²¹.

Although the Italian minister denied that his fellow countrymen had fought against the Chilean army, the rumor persisted and reinforced existing anti Italian animus. Thus while some Chileans noted the Italian contribution to the United States, others questioned the wisdom of permitting them to immigrate. *El Padre Cobos*, for example, described them as congenital criminals if not revolutionaries while another proclaimed: "Antes, pues, que los italianos vengan los chinos, y hasta caribes, si fuera necesario. Fuera los italianos"²².

Another groups which did not engender much enthusiasm as prospective immigrants were Jews. During the 1880s, large numbers of Jews fled Tsarist religious persecution in Russia for the United States or Argentina. The news that a Chilean diplomat, Guillermo Matta, wanted to encourage some of these people to migrate to Chile, unleashed a firestorm of protest; Jews the "única plaga que nos faltaba para no tener nada de que quejarnos"²³. Indeed, Jews appeared even less attractive than the Italians; "el solo nombre de esa jente causa repulsión a todas las clases sociales". Jews, it seemed, suffered from a variety of flaws:

¹⁸ INDEP, 7 Dec. 1880; RVS, 29 Jan. 1881.

¹⁹ DIS, 30 March, 22 April 1882; RVS, 25 March 1882.

²⁰ CQ, 30 April 1882; FERR, 29 Nov. 1880; VM, 20 March 1881.

²¹ ESMEP, 23 Feb., 2 March 1881.

²² CHT, 26 Feb., 19 March 1881; CQ, 13 Feb. 1881; PC, 20, 27 April 1882.

²³ INDEP, 2 June 1882.

they fostered political unrest; they would destroy the Indians, apparently a right reserved only for native born Chileans; they would not assimilate; they would never labor as farmers if, in fact, they were willing to work; and finally they would introduce "los misterios de la sinagoga i las sutilezas del Talmud" into Chile. Indeed, Zorobabel Rodríguez visualized the Jews reconstructing their Temple not in Jerusalem, to which they yearned to return each Passover, but on the banks of Chile's Cautin River²⁴.

Like many other late nineteenth century nations, Chile, where there were apparently only a few Jews, also had its anti Semites. Jews attracted hostility in part because of the War of the Pacific. One newspaper, for example described a Semitic conspiracy directed against Chile by the Jewish financier Dreyfus, who had lent money to Peru²⁵. Some Chilean anti Semitism seemed based on the image of Jews as Shylock; the incarnation of mercantile values. One journal, for example, even blamed Jews for the 1866 Banking law as well as the 1878 measure declaring the inconvertibility of papel money²⁶. Another newspaper, reflecting this traditional anti-Semitism, warned that a wave of kaftan clad Chasidim would inundate the nation, "los cuales fundarán casa de préstamos a interés en todos los pueblos i aldeas de frontera. ¡Lindo remedio!" Even journals like *El Padre Cobos*, which made priest baiting to an editorial policy, disliked the Jews because they presumably earned their money not through honest labor but the practice of usury. The satirical newspaper ironically likened the Jews to the Catholic Conservatives, claiming that both owed their loyalties to a foreign government, followed their own laws, and were hypocrites. In perhaps one its best examples of double think, the journal warned that the "judío es sinónimo de jesuita"²⁷.

Who, then, was acceptable? The Germans who had lived in Chile since the early 1840s, enjoyed a positive albeit stodgy image. Not only had they developed the south under adverse conditions, but they also had assimilated into Chilean life, defending their new homeland against Peru, "son defensores del país y respetan las instituciones". Others, however, feared that Berlin might intervene to protect Germans residing in Chile²⁸.

²⁴ CQ, 9 July 1882; INDEP, 3 May. 1882.

²⁵ VM, 28 May. 1881.

²⁶ NFERR, 26 Feb. 1880.

²⁷ INDEP, 3 June 1882; PC, 17 Nov. 1881.

²⁸ FERR, 3 Dec. 1882; INDEP, 7 Dec. 1882.

A polemic developed between the pro German *El Ferrocarril* and *El Independiente* which favored the migration of Spaniards, particularly Basques. This affection for Basques seemed appropriate because many of Chile's leading families could trace their ancestry to that region. Rafael Gumucio argued not only that Basques had assimilated into Chilean life more rapidly than the Germans, but that they also were hard working and possessed many "Chilean" characteristics. Rodríguez echoed this sentiment, praising the Basques' flexibility, education, skill, hard work, and the fact that they would be entering a culture where they would probably succeed²⁹. The government agreed to bring some Basque settlers to Chile, providing them \$ 50 for expenses, 38 hectares of land, free lodgings and medical care, professional assistance, and tools. The colonists had five years to repay the cost of the oxen and cash advances, terms which one newspaper considered so generous that it predicted that it would entice every Basque to leave Spain for Chile³⁰.

Such fears proved premature. One boatload of Basques' enroute to Valparaíso, stopped in Montevideo where, contrary to their contract, they remained. This change of mind infuriated and embarrassed their advocates in Chile. It also reinforced the anti immigrant sentiment. Instead of trying to lure foreigners, numerous journals called for programs to assist Chileans. "Protección al proletariado i al trabajador nacional" wrote one journal³¹.

Eventually, various Chileans noticed the paradox of encouraging foreigners to migrate to the country when ample native labor already abounded. "Si hai dinero para colonos por qué habría de faltar para auxilio de los pobres que nacen en nuestro pueblo"³². Suggestions to help the poor, instead of foreigners, even enjoyed the support of the normally laissez faire *El Independiente* although it, like *La Libertad*, believed that private enterprise, not the state, should participate in some of these projects³³.

Reformers also called for the state to grant the peasants land in the south, "the only just, logical thing; a most decent and useful act which would end *inquilinaje*, and with it 'la gran carcoma que desde hace

²⁹ FERR, 20, 30 Nov., 3, 5 Dec. 1882; INDEP, 7 Dec. 1882.

³⁰ CHT, 13 Oct. 1883.

³¹ FEN, 17 Oct. 1883; INDEP, 26 Sept. 1883.

³² COM, 8 Feb. 1882; FERR, 3, 10 Aug., 7 Nov. 1883; LIBT, 2 May., 30 Aug., 25 Nov. 1882; CUR, 8 Feb. 1882.

³³ INDEP, 7 Aug. 1883; LIBT, 25 Nov. 1883.

tiempo nos roe más i más —la vagancia i el bandidaje y la otra plaga: emigración' ”³⁴. Other journalists complained that foreign settlers were displacing or victimizing those Chileans who bleed to conquer the southern lands. A few suggested providing demobilized soldiers with land in the south and Ramón Barros Luco even introduced a measure to implement this program. Unfortunately, this proposal never came to fruition³⁵. Others urged the government to create a special ministry to direct the creation and administration of public services, to help those who “viven desamparados i oprimidos por los ricos hacendados, usufructuarios del sudor i trabajo del paciente inquilino”, to reform an agrarian system which forced people from the farm either to starve in the city or migrate³⁶.

The country, many reasoned, should stop squandering its human resources and instead should industrialize in order to convert Chile's raw materials into finished products, thus satisfying the domestic market while providing employment. Others suggested that the government provide adequate housing for the working class as well as a safer work environment. *La Epoca* praised one intendent who, by limiting the work day, ensured that “que sirven nuestros hijos no para sembrar cementerios sino para dar vida a la industria i aprovechar los mil recursos de este suelo feliz e inesplotado”³⁷. The lash and good works, noted E. Foster Recabarren, were but a “una gota de agua que apenas se alcanzaba a refrescar los ardientes fauces”³⁸.

The various solutions —better living conditions, the creation of more hospitals, improved education, industrialization— all required the active participation of the state. Unfortunately, these reforms seemed beyond the imagination of the government. Although the Moneda of the 1880s might encourage immigration, it would not, however, protect those citizens already residing within its frontier. *La Patria*, hardy a radical journal, wondered why the government punished those who

³⁴ DIS, 27 Feb. 1883.

³⁵ DIS, 27 Feb. 1883; ARA, 16, 26 June 1880; RVS, 29 July 1881; CHT, 5 June 1881; FERR, 3 March 1883; EPS, 3, 4, 5 Jan. 1883, suggested that Chile might imitate US and Argentine land policies. The idea, it noted, was to put land under cultivation. It noted, however, that the rights of Indians should be disregarded because they cannot claim rights superior to white men.

³⁶ EPS, 10 Dec. 1881; ARA, 18 March 1883.

³⁷ EPS, 25 Jan. 1882.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 20 Dec. 1881.

murder with a knife but still allowed people to rent filthy homes "verdaderas sucursales de viruela y muerte"³⁹.

Chile needed labor to develop its resources. While the infusion of immigrants might prove useful, it seemed absurd for the government to encourage foreigners to emigrate when there was an ample native population. Regrettably, too few of these Chileans survived infancy; those who did, could not find work. The most obvious solution to the labor shortage was to reduce the infant mortality rate by improving health conditions. For the nation to progress the Chilean state needed to provide better housing, more hospitals as well as schools, access to land, or job opportunities in industries. Regrettably, the government lacked the mechanisms, the funds, and often the inclination to institute such changes. In the 1880s, Chile was a *laissez faire* state, a nation which still solicited charitable donations to finance its war with the allies, to pave its streets, and to build its hospitals. Consequently, no matter how important, many considered it literally unthinkable for the state to become involved in such activities. It was not until the 1925 Constitution that the government began to address these problems.

A labor shortage which occurred during the War of the Pacific forced the nation, albeit it very briefly, to confront the issue of manpower. As we have seen, some advocated immigration as a solution to the problem. Others, however, became aware that enticing foreigners to settle in Chile was, at best, a palliative and, at worst, socially disruptive if not unfair. Chile did not need immigrants, it only had to protect its citizens long enough to allow them to become productive members of society. Thus, perhaps for the first time, the issue of improving the condition of the lower classes —what subsequently emerged in the latter part of the 1880s as the *Cuestion Social*— began to preoccupy the Chilean public.

ABREVIATIONS

ARA.	El Araucano (Lebu)
BSNA.	Boletín de la Sociedad Nacional de Agricultura
CHT.	The Chilian Times (Valparaíso)

³⁹ LAP, 13 April 1883; LIBT, 2 May, 30 Aug. 1882, 25 Nov. 1883; EPS, 21 Dec. 1881; 2, 11 Aug. 1883; INDEP, 7 Aug. 1883.

COM.	El Comercio (San Felipe)
CON.	El Constituyente (Copiapó)
COR.	El Correo (Osorno)
CQ.	El Correo de Cauquenes
CUR.	El Curicano (Curicó)
DIQ.	El Dique (Talcahuano)
DIS.	La Discusión (Chillán)
ECAT.	El Estandarte Católico (Santiago)
EPS.	La Epoca (Santiago)
ESPER.	La Esperanza (Cauquenes)
FEN.	El Fénix (Rancagua)
FERR.	El Ferrocarril (Santiago)
HER.	El Heraldó (Santiago)
JUV.	La Juventud (San Fernando)
INDEP.	El Independiente (Santiago)
LAP.	La Patria (Valparaíso)
LIBT.	La Libertad (Talca)
NFERR.	El Nuevo Ferrocarril (Santiago)
NUB.	El Nuble (Chillán)
PC.	El Padre Cobos (Santiago)
PRE.	El Precursor (Santiago)
RVS.	La Revista del Sur (Concepción)
TEL.	El Telégrafo (Chillán)
VM.	El Veintiuno de Mayo (Iquique)