From Hegemony to Frustration: Educational Policy-Making under the Concertacion, 1990-2007

Guy Burton
PhD Candidate, Government Department, London School of Economics

In April and May 2006 Chile’s democracy looked on the verge of change. After 16 years since the end of military rule it appeared that social mobilisations had returned to challenge the political status quo. With an estimated one million mainly secondary school-aged protestors demonstrating in the streets and occupying schools throughout the country, it seemed that Chilean democracy was finally awaking from the deep freeze that the military dictatorship (1973-90) and the emphasis on consensual politics under the Concentracion was beginning to thaw. Months earlier the country had elected its first woman president, Michelle Bachelet, whose campaign discourse of ‘citizenship’ and ‘participation’ appeared to offer a break with the past.

The origin of the protests stemmed from a growing divergence between the government and wider society about the nature of the educational system. While the Concertacion saw it as concerned with issues of quality, many of the protestors saw the problem as one of weak state involvement and social inequality (Cox 2007; Bloque Social 2006). The new government was surprised by the intensity of the demonstrations and quickly responded. Eschewing the conventional path through representative political institutions, a presidential advisory commission was convened with representation across civil society and a remit to analyse the situation and make recommendations. Did this herald a new beginning for relations between government and social actors in Chile? On the surface it did present a new model of participation and offered a more visible opportunity for those educational actors who self-consciously identified with the Left and social movements to engage with the

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government. However, from the perspective of late 2007 it remains debatable whether much has indeed changed. In November 2007 the Concertacion opted for consensus within political society once again, by signing an agreement with its congressional rivals on the Right and thereby marginalising the social movement-based Left.

What prompted this initial opening and subsequent closure with regard to the Concertacion’s policymaking process and relations with social movements of the Left? Why did the government appear more inclined in 2006 to respond to the demands of social groups that it had hitherto disregarded? And what implications do the events of 2006 have on the future state of government-social movement relations and the nature of democracy in Chile?

This article addresses these questions by examining the development of the government’s social relations in the educational sector since 1990. First, it considers the nature of Chile’s society, politics and educational system generally. Second, it looks at the development of the government’s relations with social actors in the education system between 1990 and 2006, identifying three main phases: between 1990 and 1995 when the Concertacion concerned itself with a narrow policy agenda driven by ‘inputs’ (i.e. increases in expenditure and material resources) and consequently faced little obstruction from other educational actors (whose own leaderships were dominated by the Concertacion); from 1995 and 2000 when the Concertacion’s changing policy agenda towards a greater concern with ‘outputs’ (e.g. improvements in test results, teaching performance) coincided with a more confrontational stance from particular social movements that remained relatively weak organisationally and isolated socially; and since 2000 with the emergence of a more organised social movement-based Left whose concerns connected with wider society and culminated in the 2006 presidential advisory committee. The paper concludes by noting that although there have been changes within the Concertacion
itself and the policy and actor context, its approach to policy making remains broadly the same.

1. **General social, political and educational changes in Chile**

This section considers the nature of Chile’s social changes, political structure and educational model. First, Chilean society has become increasingly liberal, individualist and consumerist while also becoming less authoritarian and conservative since the 1970s-80s. This is evident in the declining role played by traditional actors such as the Church and the rise in unmarried cohabitation and children outside of wedlock. These changes have been confirmed through legislation, such as the divorce bill, during the Lagos presidency (Funk 2006; Salcedo 2005; Tironi 2005).

Second, the relative liberalisation of Chilean society has not been reflected in any corresponding changes in either of Chile’s political or educational system. Politically, the Church continues to have a role to play, not only within the Christian Democrat party, but on sensitive issues such as abortion and the morning after pill. Institutionally, although there is less fear of a return to authoritarianism today than in 1990, with the disappearance of Pinochet from politics and new forms of social activism and organisation, Chile remains characterised as having a low intensity form of democracy in which technocratic models of decision-making predominate and wider social actors are largely absent from the policymaking process (Moulian 2002; Salcedo 2005; Águila 2005; Fernandez 2004; Taylor 2003; Nef 2003; Barrett 2001; Silva 2003; Olavarria 2003). By ‘technocratic’, I suggest that power is concentrated in the hands of officials who base their decisions on their claim to expertise in a given area. This is in contrast to a more ‘political’ approach to decision-making in which political parties, social movements and other groups and individuals have a role in the policy-making process.

Both of the two main Chilean political party coalitions, the Concertacion and the Alianza, remain dominated by the same elites since the early 1990s and maintain
broadly the same rhetoric (Hidalgo 2005; Salcedo 2005). This is echoed in evidence which suggests that despite liberalisation within Chilean society, individuals remain largely conservative in their ideology across the political spectrum (Palacios and Martinez 2006). The result is consequently a lack of pressure or incentive for political parties to adjust. In the case of the Concertacion, this has been characterised by its association with the social democratic-lite Third Way model which, ‘does not mobilize or broadly consult its citizens; instead, it relies on an elite-driven traditional party politics that largely controls populist tendencies.’ (Sandbrook et al 2006: 27) This owes much to its nature as a coalition, ensuring that it is constantly seeking to balance the various ideological and factional differences within itself.

Educationally, the Concertacion has kept the same educational model inherited from the dictatorship broadly in place. In the early 1980s the military introduced reforms that decentralised the administration of public schools to the municipal level and encouraged involvement by the private sector in primary, secondary and higher education. In the school system this resulted in a three-fold division between publicly funded municipal schools, state-funded private schools and independent private schools. These reforms prompted a substantial increase in private school coverage: between 1981 and 1990 the number of students in municipal schools fell by over a fifth while the number matriculated in subsidised private schools more than doubled. During the first 15 years of Concertacion government the number of municipal school students remained broadly steady, but the drive towards subsidised private schools continued, with the number enrolled rising by more than half again (Figure 1).

Figure 1
Part of the reason for the increase in students in subsidised private schools during the Concertacion period may be found in the 1993 tax reform. The government had declared itself for greater involvement of family and private sector contributions in education (Un Gobierno para los Nuevos Tiempos 199?).

The effect of the segmentation of schools has had social and academic consequences. Socially, 1980s reforms contributed to social segmentation (Table 1), with students from poorer family backgrounds in municipal schools and those from the wealthier classes in private schools. Academically, the situation has been exacerbated in terms of student performance: students from poorer backgrounds and municipal schools have tended to receive lower results than those attending state-subsidised and private schools in the national SIMCE tests (Aedo 1998).

Table 1: Significant social class segregation by school type (2003):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quintile</th>
<th>% Municipal school enrolment</th>
<th>% Subsidised school enrolment</th>
<th>% Private school enrolment</th>
<th>% as a total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A – Low</td>
<td>79.4</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B – Lower</td>
<td>81.9</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2. Concertacion hegemony in policymaking and weak social movements, 1990-1995

Despite the various ministerial changes that have occurred within Mineduc under the Concertacion, policy continuity was assured from 1990 until the early 2000s through the presence of a cohesive core of academics and scholars that stood at the centre of decision making. They came mainly from centrist Christian Democrat party (PDC) and the two centre-left parties, the Socialists and the PPD. Their most visible members, Cristian Cox, José Joaquín Brunner, Ivan Nuñez Prieto, Carlos Eugenio Baker and Juan Eduardo Garcia-Huibodro, all shared a common historical experience, having been activists in the late 1960s and at the time of the military coup and subsequently experiencing detainment by the military, going into exile or studying abroad. In the 1980s they clustered around the various research centres, including FLACSO, PIIE and CIDE, where they collaborated together on analysing the educational reforms undertaken by the military. Their personal, historical and professional knowledge of each other arguably transcended the ideological differences that existed between them, enabling them to collaborate despite ideological differences that ranged from a state-led form of education to a more market-driven model (Cox, Brunner, Elacqua, Muñoz, interviews, 2007).

Outside the Concertacion, the government was aided by the relative weakness of the main social groups in the educational sector during the early 1990s: teachers and students. This was due to overlapping political configurations between these two movements and the government which contributed to collaboration, its impact on the movements’ capacity to mobilise. The teachers’ union, the Colegio de Profesores, had a leadership dominated by Concertacion allies led by Oswaldo
Vertugo since the first direct elections in the mid-1980s. This ensured relatively low levels of conflict between the government and Colegio (Palamidessi 2003). At the same time teachers were organisationally weak: the structural changes within the education system during the 1980s, including both the municipalisation of schools and the growth of state-subsidised private schools, had contributed towards a more precarious situation in relation to salaries and employment; the teaching body had been reduced by a quarter owing to economic rationalisation, political exclusion of its most politically active and critical members and restricting those without a recognised teaching qualification. The result was a teachers’ movement with weak bonds of solidarity in 1990 (CENDA 2000; Rojas 1998; Soto interview; La Opinion 1987; Escobar 1987; Lomnitz and Melnick 1991). The students’ movement was mainly concentrated in the student unions found within the traditional universities, with arguably the most prominent being that in the University of Chile, FECH. By contrast there was – and remains – relatively weak levels of organisation in the growing private sector (Grau interview). Furthermore, like the teachers, the main student unions were led by Concertacion supporters, ensuring their relative acquiescence.

Notwithstanding the diversity of schools that made up the memberships of the two main organisations associated with the private sector, the FIDE and CONACEP, they were able to coalesce their demands around three main areas: school autonomy and the right to profit and select (Velasco, Bosch, interviews, 2007). Like the teacher and student organisations, neither organisation was especially prominent in shaping policy demands during the 1990s. This owed much to the Concertacion’s acceptance of the former regime’s education model which had enabled private sector to flourish during the period. However, in addition the government had a vested interest in maintaining the system; according to CONACEP’s current president, Rodrigo Bosch, its membership includes supporters from across the political mainstream, on both the Right and Centre-Left, including the Christian Democrats and the PPD in the latter (interview, 2007).
While education-related organisations were relatively absent in the policy arena in 1990, the new Concertacion government had to contend with a still influential political Right. Pinochet continued to be chief of the army while the 1980 constitution provided for the military the designation of several senators. Meanwhile the Right had organised itself into two main parties, the UDI and the RN, composed of Pinochet’s supporters in the former and those more ambivalent to his rule in the latter. Furthermore, the binominal electoral system bequeathed by the military regime ensured that the Right would be overrepresented in Congress. The Concertacion’s decision to accept the 1980 constitution meant that it could not disregard the Right, prompting it to seek consensus in its policies. Finally, the 1980 constitution required that high thresholds be met to pass amendments or overturn constitution-based laws. In education the implications of such thresholds had implications following the introduction of a constitutional law (LOCE) by the outgoing military regime in March 1990; many on the Left saw it as confirmation of the public education system’s dismantlement and its replacement by a more market-oriented model (Bloque Social 2006).

Given these various factors – the Concertacion’s acceptance of political system, the presence of the Right, the composition of the inner core in Mineduc and the relatively weak state of teachers and students – it was perhaps unsurprising that the government’s policy agenda in education in this first phase was relatively narrow and encouraged it to occasionally bypass the legislative path in favour of the use of executive discretion (Scope 1997). This limited the range of policy options available, ensuring that reform of LOCE was abandoned and conceding to the Right’s demand for co-financing of subsidised schools as part of a 1993 tax reform (Nuñez, interview 1, 2007; Elacqua, Brunner, interviews, 2007; Cortes 1996).

The reduced policy arena coincided with the Concertacion’s priorities: to rectify years of underinvestment in education and the teaching profession. This was seen as a result of the decline of state involvement in education since the 1980s and
was reflected in the material concerns of teachers and students during these early years: in 1991 teachers went on strike demanding increased pay while the students took to the streets in 1992 against a credit system deemed to be insufficient (Arrate 1993b; Roco Fossa 2005; Nuñez, interview 1, 2007). The government’s response was to concentrate on quantity or ‘input’ issues, such as increasing overall spending, expanding the grants and credit system for university students and targeting greater resources to schools in poorer areas through the MECE and P900 programmes. But perhaps the most visible – and polemical – reform was the introduction of a Teachers’ Statute in 1991, which sought to address the financial and labour insecurity faced by teachers (Aylwin 1994a; Aylwin 1994b).

Notwithstanding the introduction of the Teachers Statute, it was primarily the Concertacion’s creation rather than a collaborative project between it and teachers (Soto, interview; Nuñez, interview 2). The debate on the Statute’s content had been held mainly within the government, in particular over whether wage negotiations should be conducted at the national or municipal level (Nuñez, interview 2, 2007). Since it was shaped within the government the Statute was perceived by teachers as being both limited and rigid: it neither covered state-funded private and private school teachers and nor provided for a teaching career path; furthermore, the minimum salary was seen as insufficient (Aedo 1998; CTERA et al 2005; Ministerio de Secretaria General de Gobierno 1993; Cortes 1994; Colegio de Profesores 2003).

Indeed, the association of the Colegio with the public sector and the growth in the private school sector meant that the Colegio arguably represented a smaller proportion of the teaching profession (Bosch, interview, 2007). Against this, it was arguably a gain for the union movement: the Right had been critical of its introduction, which it saw as introducing specific and unequal legislation for different groups while providing both higher financial costs and few incentives on the part of teachers to improve teaching (Larraín 1997). The Right’s position also put it against the private school associations: CONACEP supported the need for greater financial and labour
security for teachers, although it criticised the greater amount of legislation to which state-subsidised private schools were subjected to – including the Labour Code (which all private enterprises were obliged to adhere to) as well as the Teachers Statute – when compared to municipal schools (Bosch, interview, 2007). Finally, despite the Concertacion’s acceptance of the previous regime’s education framework, the Statute challenged some of those tenants, in particular the notion of an administratively decentralised municipal school system.

The relative absence of external actors from the Concertacion’s policymaking approach was similarly apparent in reform of the primary school curriculum beginning in 1992 and the shape and outcome of the 1994 education commission chaired by José Joaquin Brunner. On reform of the primary school curriculum, when compared to the broader consultation that occurred over the secondary school curriculum in 1998, the teachers’ involvement was relatively limited (Cox, interview, 2007; Nuñez, interview 2, 2007). Indeed, the teachers’ response to the consultation was general agreement with the proposed changes and showed no substantial disagreement (Colegio de Profesores 1992). Meanwhile, the 1994 Brunner commission was notable in several ways. First, it did not deviate from the main parameters set out at the start of the Concertacion period (Rivero 1999). Brunner himself stressed that the main points of discussion in his commission had been over how to manage and finance decentralisation (interview, 2007). Indeed, it may be argued that the commission’s report provided the strategy and terms of reference for the coalition’s approach to educational policy until 2006 (Cox, interview, 2007). Second, the role played by actors such as the Colegio de Profesores was seen as marginal at best (Brunner, interview, 2007). Third, the commission’s analysis and findings were accepted in a cross-party Acuerdo Marco that was signed between the Concertacion and its congressional rivals in early 1995. In particular this accepted the decentralised school system, acknowledged municipal autonomy, flexibility in the labour regime and proposed a commitment to increase educational spending from
5% to 7%, with contributions from families, tax incentives and business (Acuerdo Marco 1995). This latter goal was assisted by the introduction of co-financing (whereby subsidised schools were able to raise additional funds through tuition fees), which arguably contributed to the increase of such schools during the 1990s (and increasing social segregation as a result).

3. Faint stirrings: the continuation of Concertacion policymaking and changes within social movements, 1995-2000

Although the Concertacion maintained its approach to policymaking throughout the 1990s, this increasingly came under threat from 1995 on. According to Cox, within the Concertacion this was seen as due to two main reasons: one, a change in the political leadership and ideology of key educational actors; and two, a shift in both the nature of the demands by these actors and the policy agenda pursued by Mineduc from the late 1990s on, which may be understood as emphasising issues of quality over quantity (Cox - ???).

In 1995 both the Colegio de Profesores and the most active students' union, FECH held elections which saw their Concertacion-aligned leaderships defeated. In the Colegio Oswaldo Verdugo was defeated by the Communist Party activist, Jorge Pavez. The division had predated the 1995 elections, with the Colegio leadership divided between those who supported and opposed the government and it persisted afterwards (Directorio Nacional, Colegio de Profesores 1993; Pavez 1998a; Pavez 1998b). Within FECH, a debate about whether to accept continuity or change of the education system coincided with a crisis in the financial management of the union, prompting its disbanding in 1993-94 and contributing to the defeat of the Concertacion's supporters in the 1995 elections to a non-party, social movement-based leftist coalition (Grau, interview, 2007).

The political changes in the Colegio de Profesores and FECH were reflected in the formation of the Fuerza Social that was dominated by the leaders of these organisations and a series of new policy demands. Within the Colegio de Profesores
a power struggle broke out among its leaders aligned to the Communist Party (CP). This was characterised by the nature of the relationship between social movements at the CP; while Pavez and his supporters argued that social movements should remain autonomous and represent their particular constituents (in the case of the Colegio, the teachers), they criticised their opponents for wanting to put social movements at the service of the CP and its own goals (Soto, interview, 2007).

The result was a split between the two and the formation of the Fuerza Social in 2001, which politically offered a non-party Left and educationally a greater emphasis on educational policy over corporate interests (Nuñez, interview 2, 2007). This was most apparent in the National Education Congress convened by the Colegio de Profesores in 1997 – the first time since the national debate in 1971 under the Allende government that education had been discussed in a formal setting by civil society (CTERA et al 2005).

Notwithstanding the emergence and organisational difference of the Fuerza Social, its capacity to challenge the CP’s dominance of the extra-parliamentary Left remained constrained. At no point did it have either a numerical advantage or clear ideological delineation from the CP. Yet even if it did not extend beyond Pavez and his supporters, it had a base elsewhere within the educational system, among university students. This was most apparent in the change taking place in the FECH’s leadership from a position concerned with inward-looking (or ‘input’-related) concerns such as student finances towards one that was more outward-looking and structural in its demands, seeking changes to the educational system as a whole (or ‘output’-concerned) (Grau, interview, 2007). Yet in the immediate years after 1995 the focus continued to remain material, with protests regarding university credit. The difference was that student mobilisation increased, most notably between 1997 and 2002, the most prominent occurring in 1999 when police shot protestors in Arica (Grau, interview, 2007; Roco Fossa 2005).
The Concertacion’s response to these changes was limited. Despite the new demands voiced by teachers and students, most visibly through the National Education Congress, its resolutions had a minimal effect on Mineduc officials who saw the Colegio’s role in more material than structural terms (Cox, Brunner, interviews, 2007). Indeed, the focus of Concertacion governments for much of the 1990s had been on finding ways to develop and improve teachers’ performance, through the use of more courses, incentives and performance-related pay (Un Gobierno para los Nuevos Tiempos; Arrate 1993a; Bitar interview).

Furthermore, the Concertacion overlooked the change at the top of these social movements by questioning the extent to which they represented their memberships (Cox, Brunner, interviews, 2007). In relation to teachers, in the late 1990s the Concertacion could point to figures that suggested nearly half (48%) of teachers surveyed had a ‘very good’ or ‘good’ view of the government’s educational reforms while almost the same number (45%) had a ‘regular’ view and only 7% felt that it was ‘bad’. Similarly, nearly a third of polled teachers thought Mineduc was most worried when it came to improving educational quality against a quarter who felt that the Colegio was similarly concerned (MORI 1998). Students also faced continuing difficulties in self-organisation: despite attempts to create a more co-ordinated approach through the creation of a cross-university students’ union, CONFECH, these efforts broke down in 1998 (Roco Fossa 2005). Meanwhile, in the larger sector of private higher education, few student organisations exist and those that do remain relatively weak (Grau 2005; Grau interview, 2007).

Notwithstanding the Concertacion’s dismissal of these traditional actors, its policy agenda in the late 1990s marked the end of the governing coalition’s first phase. It had focused on ‘inputs’ related to increasing quantity, such as greater resources and investment. Now it began a second phase, when it accepted the system and sought to reform rather than change it (Diaz, Soto, Garcia, interviews, 2007). The 1994 Brunner commission marked the moment from the mid-1990s when
the questions of whether the processes of decentralisation, choice and the market in education would be reversed or not, were resolved. Now began a search to improve the quality or ‘output’ of the education system rather than simply maximising coverage and spending. The period also coincided with the arrival of a new president, Eduardo Frei, who sought to prioritise education through new improvement programmes (including the continued use of additional resources to the poorest schools through the P900 programme and material support to secondary schools through MECE), curricular reform at both primary and secondary levels, measures to assist the professional development of teachers and the introduction of the Jornada Escolar Completa (Whole School Day or JEC) programme; this last would extend the school day and provide school meals for those students who needed them (Ministerio de Educacion 1998).

If domestic actors remained weak in the formation of these policies, those at the international level were prominent. Indeed, much of the reform package in this period was funded by the World Bank which introduced a degree of conditionality. This included a continuing commitment both to the subsidised school system and the programmes following the end of the Bank’s loan. In addition, the Bank sought greater emphasis be placed on primary over secondary education, which the Concertacion team within MEC rejected (Cox and Avalos 1999).

4. Still waters run deep: changes within the Concertacion and the wider education community, 2000-06

The two previous sections have observed the shift in relations between government and social actors from acquiescence by the latter in the early 1990s towards greater confrontation by the end of the century. This was due not only to internal changes within these actors, but also the changing nature of the debate within educational policy as ‘outputs’ (or quality issues) supplanted ‘inputs’ (or quantity issues) as the chief concern. However, at the same time as these social actors became more concerned with the educational system as a whole, their voices remained socially
isolated; this was echoed by the continuation of the Concertacion’s limited interaction with such groups.

This began to change from the early 2000s as a number of developments occurred which contributed towards a change in the way the Concertacion made policy and its relations with the wider educational community. This culminated in the widespread demonstrations led by secondary school students in 2006 which challenged the way the Concertacion makes policy. Internally the policymaking team within Mineduc gave way to other individuals and groups. Externally, there was a growth both in the number of interest groups associated with education and in society’s awareness of the problems faced by the education system.

Within the Concertacion changes occurred in the policymaking process. In particular the influence of the team that controlled education policy since 1990 began to decline from the early 2000s. The process began during the Lagos presidency (2000-06) and has continued under Bachelet. In part this is a generational effect, with younger scholars and researchers taking up official posts within the ministry and a broader range of actors, including from both the technical and political sides across government. First, these new individuals did not share a common historical experience of opposition against the dictatorship; Elacqua suggests that the lines of attachment were more ‘blurry’, being largely based on the extent to which they felt uncomfortable with the differences and inequalities within the political and educational situation (interview, 2007). This perspective might appear to indirectly support the social cleavage that persists within Chilean society between supporters and opponents of the Pinochet regime (Angell 2007). Second, as well as a generational change, there was a shift in the nature of governance. On one hand there was an increase in the number of political and technical individuals involved in the Concertacion’s educational policy-making beyond the traditional education and finance ministries to include the more direct input of the regional development
ministry and the presidency, through Bachelet’s advisors and the involvement of the educational advisory commission (Muñoz, interview, 2007).

The change in personnel within the Concertacion was also reflected in the priorities of the individuals involved in education policy. For the first Concertacion generation, the debate over the role of the state, the market and municipal administration in education had occurred within the Concertacion during the 1980s and resulted in the maintenance of the system after 1990. The space this left the new government was in the management and investment of that system, achieved chiefly through increased spending and incentives for teachers during the mid- and late-1990s (e.g. training courses, the Teachers Statute). Their successors (since 2000) were primarily concerned with a ‘second generation’ of reforms, such as the implementation of curricular, pedagogic and evaluative changes (Cox 2006). This occurred against a backdrop that sounded relatively similar: despite the rhetoric about participation and citizenship during Bachelet’s presidential campaign in 2005, the Concertacion’s presidential manifesto did not challenge the prevailing educational orthodoxy of the coalition and offered no fundamental change to the structure of the educational system other than to propose a differentiated subsidy scheme and more money for social programmes and improvements in general (Cox 2007; Cox, interview, 2007).

Outside the governing coalition changes were occurring in the educational community. Both the teachers’ and students’ movements had seen political and ideological changes in their composition during the 1990s away from support for the Concertacion. In 2001 this resulted in the formation of Fuerza Social, a coalition of social movements and former Communist party activists, although dominated mainly by Pavez and the Colegio de Profesores. While limited in challenging the dominance of the CP on the wider extra-parliamentary Left, owing to its origins within the educational movements, the Fuerza Social contributed towards the policy arena by
promoting a shift away from material (or ‘input’) concerns towards the equity and structure of the system (or ‘outputs’) as a whole.

Alongside the Fuerza Social, new social actors were also being formed in the late 1990s and 2000s which added to the wider (Left) educational community. In part these new actors, such as non-teaching staff, parents and secondary school students, began to organise in response to government action. Non-teaching staff formed their own association, CONFEMUCH, at the municipal level from 1997 in response to a government bill to regulate the role, responsibilities and remuneration of such workers a year earlier (Rodriguez, Cáceres, interviews, 2007). Parents and guardians also began to organise themselves to participate more effectively with regard to the finance, management and performance of schools within the school councils that the government perceived as the main form of participation within the school system. The result was the formation of a Metropolitan Association of Parents and Guardians in Santiago in 2000 which provides assistance and support at the school and municipal level (Velasco, Catalan, interviews, 2007). Meanwhile secondary school students, who had been relatively absent from the policy arena during the 1990s, became more visible after 2000. This was apparent in widespread protests again bus prices in 2002 and their greater organisation in this period. However, in all three cases, the extent of these movements’ organisation remained relatively weak and patchy across the country; CONFEMUCH, for example, is comprised of 16,000 members across 92 municipalities as of 2007 (Rodriguez, Cáceres, interviews, 2007). Parents’ organisations are also variable, with some municipal-based associations stronger than others.

Finally, although these organisations claimed to be autonomous, their concerns and critiques of the education system placed them in the same position as the non-party Left occupied by the teacher and university student movements. The relative absence of any organisations associated with the political Right in this period would suggest that its concerns – school autonomy and the right both to select
students and to profit by private schools – were not subject to any substantial challenge.

5. Hegemony undermined? The 2006 demonstrations and their aftermath

The rise of these new (Left) social actors meant a wider social concern with the state of Chilean education. This was assisted as well by a growing awareness of its limitations and a lack of ‘quality’ following the international tests and evaluations that the government has participated in since 2000 (Bitar, Cox, interviews, 2007). In addition, the more confrontational stance of these actors was reflected in a rejection of the Concertacion’s approach to participation. Whereas the early years after democracy’s return and the relative absence of social pressure and demands had accommodated the Concertacion’s style of policymaking, by 2006 this no longer seemed sustainable. Representative democracy was increasingly being seen as constrained and insufficient to accommodate wider social demands. Indeed, more radical supporters of democracy maintained that it expanded as a result of social mobilisation (Observatorio Chileno de Politicas Educativas 2007). Indeed, among the Concertacion’s original policymaking team this was to be expected: since 1990 educational opportunities had expanded, ensuring wider coverage reaches and levels of knowledge. As a result it was only be expected that society’s demands would shift and new demands would emerge (Cox, interview, 2007; Cox 2007). Furthermore, as noted above, the Concertacion’s rhetoric during the 2005-06 presented a new discourse, suggesting greater commitment to societal engagement (Garcia-Huibodro, interview, 2007).

It was in this context that Chile experienced widespread demonstrations and protests led by between 600,000 and one million secondary school students in 2006. Although the basis of this activity was initially material, with students disgruntled at the disconnection between policies and their implementation (e.g. the deficiencies of the JEC programme) increasing cost of the university entrance exams (PSU) and transport fares, it quickly came to encompass broader criticisms of the education
This included a concern that the system was not only failing to deliver improvements (as expressed through rising domestic and international test scores by Chilean students), but also in the growing social segregation as a result of the segmented school system.

The demonstrations arguably marked a generational shift in Chilean politics: the ‘pingüino revolution’ was led by a generation that had no direct experience with the military regime. As a result there was a difference in the expectations between the Concertacion’s ‘dictatorship’ generation and the young students concerning the quality of the education system, with the latter both more dissatisfied and inclined to protest (Bitar, Cox, interviews, 2007). This was possibly aided by the level of support experienced by the younger cohort: unlike their 1980s forebears, the 2006 protestors could not only count on the support of their parents and the media, but operated in a less politically risky and repressive environment (Pancani, interview, 2007). Indeed, police action against demonstrators prompted Bachelet to fire the chief of the riot police as a result (BBC News Online). Against this though many student activists were expelled from school, including all those in their municipality.

The scale and support for the demonstrations contributed to the creation of a presidential advisory committee presided over by Juan Eduardo Garcia-Huibodro that was broad in the range of social actors represented. Indeed, of the three advisory commissions enacted by Bachlelet during her first year of office, the one on education appeared to offer the most participatory model, with the others (on social security and health) functioning as expert-led organisations (Aguilera 2007). This was echoed by both the Concertacion government and students to have a wide-ranging discussion about the nature of the education system and propose changes (Grau, Diaz, Garcia-Huibodro, interviews, 2007). Nevertheless, sections of the Concertacion felt that the approach undermined representative political institutions
such as Congress, by introducing a new space in which policies would be debated and negotiated (Elacqua, interview, 2007).

The work of the commission coalesced around three main positions, including the Concertacion, the right-wing opposition (mainly the RN and UDI in Congress) and the social movement Left (Table 2). This last group was dominated by the Fuerza Social and organised itself into the Bloque Social to represent the concerns and interests of those actors that identified with the Left, including the Colegio de Profesores, students unions, teaching assistants, CONFEMUCH and parents and guardian associations (Bloque Social 2006).

Table 2: Key educational positions within the Garcia-Huibodro commission

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Blocue Social (extra-parliamentary Left)</th>
<th>Concertacion (centre and centre-left)</th>
<th>Alianza (Right)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oppose for-profit schools, school fees and co-financing</td>
<td>Differing internal positions on for-profit schools</td>
<td>Defend for-profit schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reform LOCE</td>
<td>Differing internal positions on LOCE reform</td>
<td>Reform LOCE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stronger state role/less municipalized system</td>
<td>Stronger state role/maintain municipalized system</td>
<td>Weaker state role/municipalized system and greater school autonomy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oppose selection</td>
<td>Regulate selection (in municipal and subsidised private schools)</td>
<td>Defend selection</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Right maintained its support of for-profit schools and greater school autonomy. Indeed, the Right questioned the extent to which the 'structure' of the educational system was discussed: they saw the demands as primarily political or ideological in scope and claimed to be uncertain what was sought beyond more investment in infrastructure and improvements in unspecified ‘quality’ (Dittborn, Velasco, interviews, 2007). The Bloque Social meanwhile rejected for-profit schools and sought greater control of the school system from the centre. It sees municipalisation as disconnecting the state from its obligation in providing adequate education and
encouraging segregation within the system. Furthermore, parental choice is seen as unviable, owing to the ability of schools to select and families' economic situations (Bloque Social 2006). The Concertacion, meanwhile, consisted of elements that ranged between these two particular poles, although the more politically powerful sectors tended to be less concerned with profit and municipalisation (or Bloque Social) (Garcia-Huibodro, Cox, interviews, 2007).

As a postscript, the differences that emerged within the commission between the Left, Centre and Right were reinforced by the eventual education agreement achieved between the Concertacion and Alianza a year later, in November 2007. Most notable from the negotiations surrounding the agreement is the persistence of the Concertacion’s approach to policy making, with its construction similar in tone to that achieved after the 1994 Brunner commission. In 2007, as in early 1995, an agreement was made and signed by the political parties of both the governing and opposition coalitions. The key difference though between 2007 and 1995 is the presence of a notable section of Chilean political opinion that sits outside that agreement, as represented by the Bloque Social. Such a position was arguably inevitable. Although the 2006 commission’s membership was notable in being drawn more widely from across both the political and social spectrum when compared to the other commissions introduced by President Bachelet, it introduced a wider range of demands than could possibly be met. The result was that the Concertacion was forced to choose between these contrasting positions; given its nature as a coalition and long-held commitment to consensus and working through representative institutions (such as Congress), it was perhaps unsurprising that it opted for the course that it did. In the short to medium term this suggests that the Concertacion will continue to internally produce and enact policy as it has done till now and externally seek to prioritise political stability with what it sees as its main rival: the congressional and party-based Right of the RN and UDI. From such a perspective the threat posed by the extra-parliamentary Left through the Fuerza Social (and its
educational component in the Bloque Social) and the Communist Party remains relatively negligible, since it presents little prospect of challenging the Concertacion in electoral terms. Indeed, the Concertacion’s focus on the Right in negotiating an agreement on education and its greater electoral threat lends support to the idea of Chile as a ‘stalemate society’ in which significant change may be achieved through either bargaining or elections is limited, with the attendant risk of a more political apathetic society (Epstein 2001).

6. Conclusion

The Concertacion has governed Chile for 16 years since 1990. During this period the country has undergone social changes although the political system remains largely frozen. This is apparent by the persistence of the two main coalitions in Congress, which owes much to the institutions put in place during the military regime, including a binominal election system that encourages coalition formation and over-represents the Right.

During this period the Concertacion has pursued a broadly technocratic and top-down approach to policymaking. First, this was aided by the relative absence of pressure from civil society after 1990. The broad opposition movement of the 1980s in which both political parties and social movements had collaborated faded away with the return of democracy. The political parties of the Concertacion possessed the legitimacy that the predecessor regime lacked, thereby neutralising any potential pressure that social movements might have had. Second, despite the military’s departure, there remained uncertainty and caution in Concertacion ranks since the Right retained considerable powers. Pinochet remained head of the armed forces until 1997 while the military retained the right to appoint several senators. Consequently, the Concertacion sought to consolidate the new democracy, by accepting the 1980 constitution and operating through representative institutions where possible. This entailed contact with the Right, prompting the government to seek consensus in its policies and reducing the potential for political conflict. The
relative weakness of civil society and (Left) social movements aided the Concertacion’s acceptance of the prevailing political and economic model and reduced potential opposition by the Right; furthermore, it restricted the new government’s hand to material changes in the social sphere, primarily through the use of greater investment and the targeted use of resources to poorer sectors. In education this meant the rectification of teachers’ financial and labour conditions and increased spending for poorer schools and overall infrastructure.

Although the Concertacion persisted with this model, by the late 1990s and early 2000s it was becoming increasingly untenable. Civil society was beginning to reassert itself in Chile for the first time since the 1980s. In the educational sector this owed much to the shift in the political leaderships and ideological perspectives of key social groups, most notably the Colegio de Profesores and the student movement. Furthermore, this was not a vision unique to Chile; across Latin America there was growing disillusionment on the Left with the state of representative democracy and the need for a more participative form instead (Petras 1999). Across the continent more radical forms of political engagement were being sought, from the development of participatory budgeting by the Brazilian Workers’ Party and the Bolivarian circles in Venezuela to the direct action of the landless in Brazil, the water anti-privatisation protestors in Bolivia in 2000 and the picateros after the 2001-02 Argentine financial crisis. In Chile this was echoed in the formation, first of the Fuerza Social and subsequently in the educational sector, the Bloque Social after the 2006 demonstrations.

Indeed, the Fuerza Social (and the Bloque Social), insofar as it represents a previously unarticulated voice within civil society, presents a number of challenges for the Concertacion. First, it threatens the Concertacion’s dominance of the political Centre and Left by opening up political space to its left. It rejects much of the political and economic (and educational) model that the Concertacion has accepted since 1990. Second, it tests the approach taken by the Concertacion to pursue politics
through established institutional channels; being aligned to the extra-parliamentary Left, it lacks any representation in Congress with which the government may engage (Cox, interview, 2007). This was most apparent when the government in its continual search for consensus, signed an agreement on its educational proposals with the Right in November 2007, thereby marginalising what has become a visible alternative to the prevailing blocs in Chilean politics.

Yet one should not exaggerate the role of this non-party and extra-parliamentary Left. The persistence of the binominal electoral system continues to work against those individuals and parties who remain dissatisfied with the Concertacion’s consensual approach. Furthermore, neither the Fuerza Social or its opponents on the Left have the political capacity to challenge the centre-left in terms of numbers while its educational associates in the Bloque Social have become organisationally weak in the year since the publication of the Garcia-Huibodro commission report.

Consequently, despite Bachelet’s rhetoric of greater participation and citizenship and internal personnel changes within the Concertacion – especially in education – it is arguably premature to assume that the Concertacion’s approach to policy making has shifted in any substantial or meaningful way. However, while it continues to approach policy in a particular fashion, it is obliged to tack accordingly as the policy context (e.g. from ‘inputs’ to ‘outputs’ or quantity to quality) and the nature and number of relevant actors changes.

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