

Pressure Groups in Latin America: A Focus on Chile's Political Scene

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Abstract

Skillful pressure on government by organized groups is one of the distinct phenomena of modern time. Some of these groups are altruistic and are sincerely committed to social reforms; others exist frankly for the promotion of the economic well-being of their members. At least a few organizations with high sounding names represent nothing more than the efforts one or a few persons to influence the conduct of public affairs; others with large staff of public relations experts, legislative counsel, and lobbyists represent the attempt of thousands of persons to bring pressure to bear on government officials at national, state and local levels. The focus of this article is on "pressure Groups in Latin America: A focus on Chile's Political Scene. Qualitative approach was adopted as method of data collection and analysis. The research finding agree with the fact that pressure groups with skillful lobbying capability can influence government to carry out social reforms or programs geared toward the promotion of economic well-being of their members.

Key words: Pressure Groups, Chile, Latin America, Lobbying, economic, well-being"

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Introduction

This study would focus basically on the activities of pressure groups in the development of political history of Chile, in conjunction with the global experience of the Latin America in general. Chile is classified under the sub region, known as Andean Zone, a common geographical feature within the countries in the Andes mountains, which extend along the West Coast of South America from Venezuela through Chile (Duncan, 1976:6).

Like other Latin American Countries, the pattern of pressure in the developments of political arena in Chile took the form of conservative landed interests, the Military, church, Organized Labour, present activities. University students contribution, businessmen and bureaucratic policies. Therefore, we shall discuss the political activities of these *group*.

The Strategy of pressure Groups

LOBBIES. Lobbying is the process of addressing or soliciting members of a legislative body, in the lobby or elsewhere, with intent to influence legislation. Largely, lobbying is carried on in the open, although behind-the-scenes lobbying scandals occur in every country from time to time. Traditionally, lobbyists have represented rather narrow segments of the society with specific interests, often economic in nature. In recent years, however, groups have been organized to lobby for a broader range of citizen interests, and have enjoyed a reasonable degree of success. Common Cause and Ralph Nader's various organizations exemplify public interest lobbies that have effectively communicated to Congress citizen views on everything from consumer protection to congressional reforms.

It is common for interests such as large industries to maintain lobbies at the capital and smaller interests to maintain a lobbyist or "legislative agent." One of the most effective activities of the lobby, lobbyist, or "employed expert" is appearing before legislative committees to argue for or against specific proposals. If lobbyists are unable to influence legislators by analysis and argument, they usually call upon the members of the groups they represent to flood the mails with protests; often this is so successful that bills in question are passed and the executive may even refrain from vetoing them as a result of the demonstration of "public opinion." In addition, if he happens to be a close friend of a lawmaker, the lobbyist may make use of his friendship, and be instrumental in the introduction of measures favorable to his interest group (William, 1955:113).

Regulation on Pressure Groups

In an attempt to monitor more carefully the activities of interest groups (lobbies), the U.S.-Congress in 1946 passed the Federal Regulation of Lobbying Act which requires the registration of all individuals who provide funds for the support or defeat of legislative proposals. This act has not lessened the case of those groups who feel bound to register as lobbyists under the rather narrow definition contained in the law. Many other groups engaged in indirect lobbying, or *in* activities other than lobbying, may legally choose not to register and disclose their activities. Although the U.S. Congress, in the wake of Watergate and some of its own internal scandals, has moved to tighten the ethical codes governing member conduct, relatively little has been done to strengthen the 1946 Lobbying Act. In contrast, many American states have adopted "sunshine acts" placing rather stringent disclosure requirements on both lobbyists and legislators and occasionally setting monetary limits on expenditures by lobbyists intent on influencing legislation. Some critics of Congress's limited regulation of lobbying suggest the adoption of similar measures at the national *level*. They also advocate the public financing of congressional elections (the system now used in American presidential elections) as a means of reducing the dependence of office-seekers on funds from lobbying organizations. Such dependency, critics charge, dilutes the loyalty of legislators to the citizenry they are supposed to represent. Opponents of public financing suggest that it encourages too many non-serious candidates to enter election races, and maintain that there are factors other than money which heavily influence election outcomes. Nevertheless, the rapidly escalating costs of campaigning have caused about 20 percent of the American states to adopt some sort of income tax "checkoff" to support political campaigns, while variations of the same system have been adopted in Sweden, Finland, Norway, and Germany.

Pressure groups in Chile

Many pressure groups operated within Chile Political System. The newer ones are products of increased urbanization, industrialization, commercial relations and new leaders building new bases of power.

Conservative Landed Interests

This group is a master political force to reckon with in Chile. They share power with new middle and lower class groups in Chile. So, consequent upon the fact that it is a dominating group being in control of major natural resource, land and its use as a political weapon, Chile National Society of Agriculture played a powerful role *in* politics. During the first year of Agirre Carda's administration, Marxist Unionization of farm workers threatened to disrupt the tacit agreement between landowners and popular Front (Bethell, 1991:292).

The Military

Understanding Chile politics, requires a close look at division within the military establishment, the reforms and conservatives within Army, Navy, and Air Force. Chile's military for example went through severe internal strains. As Marxist President Allende pressed for radical reforms within Chile's traditional constitutional structure and civil unrest mounted. Indeed until the coup which ousted the government of Salvador Allende in 1973, Anti Chile sustained in this period an electoral democracy including major Marxist parties.

And for almost fifteen years, between 1938 and 1952 radical presidents, held power through the support, erratic but persistently of both the socialist and the communities with lasting consequences for the nation's political growth. The multi-party governments based on multi-class alliances simultaneously pursued industrial growth and social reforms** .Although they failed to attack the roots of Chilean underdevelopment in the latifundia dominated rural sector (*Duncan 1991:267*).

That the military can play the trump card in politics, and therefore be reckoned with in any conflict, is manifested by its dominating presence in Latin America's political systems by 1973. Before 1973, the Chilean military had intervened only intermittently in the political process, and political views of its officers corps were generally made public. The military tended to be ignored by civilian politicians thought there were signs that this neglect could be dangerous, as in the minor uprising that occurred in 1969. Thus, officers' salaries were improved, spending on arms increased, some officers were involved in the administration of public services. (*Duncan, 1991: 357*).

The Church

The role of the church as an autonomous interest group promoting change in political, social and economic development of Chile cannot be over emphasized. Indeed, a wide range of political activism on the part of Latin America clearly emerged in the 1960s, covering a spectrum, from moderate and progressive, to radical. Even in Chile leftist and moderate clergy are found, before Allende's overthrow in September, 1973. The theological value system, as a baseline for political action, became noticeable, during the rise to power of the Christian Democratic Party, as a party of major governmental strength in its role as the president's party. This occurred in Chile in 1964: Chile's Christian democratic party came to power under the leadership of Eduardo Frei (1964 - 70). It served as a key to political mechanism for motivating political leadership to the partial nationalization of Chilean Copper, and to new housing, agricultural reforms, and educational projects. It was also instrumental in recruiting young Chileans into political process. Therefore, this party clearly contributed to widening the participation of people in government in Chile (*Duncan, 1976:16 - 162*).

The Church equally, played an important role in the election that saw strong opposition of the candidacy of Pinochet. With funding from the United States and Europe, the government of Chile allowed the opposition parties to go through the process of re-organization throughout the country and to count the vote with its own computer systems, thus minimizing the possibility of government fraud. (*Bethel, 1991:178*). The church and its Hispano Catholic religion, remains a formidable force in the complex political scene of Chile showing the transitional roles of the clergy.

Organized Labour

Another formidable force in the political transition of Chile was the organized labour groups. However, it is not absolutely certain if the organized labour effectively achieved economic gain in Chile, what is obvious was that they contributed immensely to the political scene of Chile as a pressure association. During the popular front year, the minority of politically active workers lived

mainly in the crises and mining towns, venting their grievances primarily through Trade Unions and the Socialist communist party. Chilean copper miners, the elite labour groups there managed to gain large pay increase each year, a development that contributed to high inflation. This happened during Allender's term in office, notwithstanding his appeared to the copper miners to forego, large wage increases to help in his austerity programme. In early 1973, workers illegally seized factories and engaged in urban violence. These events made the task of governance exceedingly difficult for Allender helping to set up conditions leading to the eventual military intervention in Chile. Chilean Labour Unionism is historically split between socialist, communist, and Christian Democratic Party activities (Duncan, 1976: 165, 166).

One reason for their unusually vigorous record of mobilization and militancy was that a relatively slow rate of population growth created a smaller labour surplus. Moreover, the strongest proletarian concentrations emerged *within* the under-populated and isolated mining zone, where Labour struggles against foreign companies controlling a crucial enclave acquired exceptional strategic and national importance. The political dedication and skill of the Marxist parties channeled these protests into the most dynamic radical electoral movement in Chile. (Bethel, 1991: 274). Thus the typical Union member in Chile tends to be conservative, wanting simply large share of the economic cake, rather than a wild revolutionary action on violent overthrow or reforms of the system.

The Peasants

A number of events in the 1960s and 1970s illustrate peasants willingness to engage in militant action to gain access to the land and express discontent when so inspired by effective leadership promising some new form of land distribution. Accordingly, peasants invade land in Southern Chile under the leadership of the radical movement of the Revolution of left (MIR), and migrant workers (inquilinos) and other rural peasants allowed themselves to be used as instrument for demonstration, painting walls, and discussing political tactics in support of President Allende between 1970 and 1973. As could be observed in Chile and other parts of Latin America, the peasant revolutionary is usually narrowed down once they achieve their yearning for land. (Duncan, 1997: 167- 168.). However, the socio-economic power of the Chilean peasants were enhanced under the presidency of Eduardo Frei (1964-1970) and Allende (1970-1973) and their Christian Democratic and United Popular Movement in return for peasant political support.

University Students

Moreover, University students constitute another interest group, usually regarded in some circles as having major effect on social and economic reforms of Chile. Many students activists later became prominent leaders thus effecting change in Latin America. In Chile Salvador Allende became notable leader after transition from student activism. For example, in July 1971 middle class University students both Catholic and Marxist professionals and public employees took their protest to the street. Such opposition, which could be silenced only with massive armed forces suppression convinced Ibanez to resign. Davis 1991: 276). Although students activities in this political scene were divided in Chile in 1970-73. with Christian Democrats and conservatives opposing left-wing groups, supporting Allende. Aside, from this shortcoming, Christian Democratic University Students, also worked hard for some of Eduardo Freis reform programs in Chile between 1964 and 1970. The success of the University students' activism in Chile hinged basically on the cultural dimension and personality.

The Businessmen

Chile's interlocking upper class which owned the great estates (fundas). Factories, mines, and banks at a time account for less than 10 percent of the population. Likewise middle class merchants form the businessmen. Their activities in the shaping of the economy and political arena of Chile remained consistent. They (businessmen) arranged to be represented on committees drafting legislation, key legislation including the 1962 tax reform that affected all Chilean. The business sector also prepared new statutes or administrative rules affecting businesses testified before legislative committees, and had access to government representatives through their own upper middle and upper class social ties, Chile's central business organization, the Sociedadde Formento Fabril.

The Bureaucrats

The effort of bureaucrats in the political development of Chile became manifest. Bureaucrats occupying responsible position in the public sector agencies, agrarian reforms, state industries natural resource control, and a number of other civil service concerns, exert strong political pressure within the governmental system when other parties and interest groups are too weak to do so. For instance, Chile's dictator Carlos Ibanez Del. Campo, who observed to power in 1927, had thrived on the success of his efficient management of the economy, at first clung to orthodox laissez-faire policies, maintaining the gold standard: pursuing a balanced budget, increasing tax and pricing expenditure, which alienated bureaucrats. (Bethell, 1991: 276). Development agencies set long-range goals in Chile, like Institute of Agrarian Development (INDAP) or the Agrarian, reform Corporation (CORAO). The realities of bureaucratic recruitment, staffing, and internal politics can hold back any momentum for change, as occurred in the later years of Eduardo Frei administration.

Conclusion

The Latin American Politics history was impacted upon greatly through the revolutionary activities of such pressure groups as conservative landed interest, the military the church, organized labor, the peasants, university students, businessmen, and the bureaucrats as manifested in the discussion above. Skillful pressure was being mounted on government functionaries at local, state and national levels with a view to influencing government to carry out social reforms or programs aimed at promoting the economic well-being or interest of the numbers. A careful analysis of this article indicate that pressure groups are agents of change in any political scene including that of Chile.

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