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Democratic Socialism in Comparative Perspective

Ignacio Walker

This paper deals with the way that political parties rooted in the Marxist tradition accommodate themselves to the institutions of representative democracy, in both developed and undeveloped countries. It aims at providing some explanation of that process from a comparative perspective.

The paper considers both successful (western Europe) and unsuccessful (Chile) democratic socialist experiences, while exploring the prospects for a new democratic socialism in Chile.

In the first part, I shall deal with western European socialism and the process of accommodation to the institutions of representative democracy. I shall concentrate on the study of three cases: the German Social Democratic Party (SPD), the French Socialist Party (PSF), and the Italian Communist Party (PCI). I shall argue that all three cases, representing different branches of European socialism and having in common the same Marxist, revolutionary origins, have experienced a process of convergence around a democratic socialist understanding, that is, an evolution towards a formal commitment to the institutions of political democracy in its liberal western form which includes political pluralism, alternation in power, majority rule, respect for minority rights, and due respect for basic democratic freedoms.

My central hypothesis concerning this process is that the coming to terms of western European socialism with the institutions of representative democracy may be explained as a result of four basic elements: (1) the contradictions between the premises of Marxism and the reality of western European capitalist development, (2) the impact of authoritarianism leading to a new appreciation of political democracy, (3) the dynamics of party and electoral competition, and (4) the international context, in which the reality of political-military blocs and the crisis of eastern Communism (authoritarian socialism) merit special attention.

In the second part, I shall concentrate on the failure of the Chilean road to socialism through "democracy, pluralism, and freedom," and not on the broader and more complex question of the breakdown of Chilean democracy, which would require a quite different approach. My central hypothesis concerning this second question is that the failure of the Allende experiment is to be explained mainly by the absence within the Chilean Left, and especially within the Socialist Party (PSCH) itself, Allende's own party, of a clearly defined and well-established democratic socialism, consistent with Allende's own understanding.

In the last part, I shall argue that it was only after the military coup of September 1973 that there emerged from within a significant sector of the Chilean Left (the so-called "renovated" Left) what might properly be called a new democratic socialism.

The central hypothesis concerning this process is that the emergence of this new democratic socialism is to be explained, for the most part, by the traumatic impact of authoritarianism, leading to a new appreciation of the institutions of representative

democracy. In this process, European socialism appears as the most significant external influence.

European Socialism and the Coming to Terms with Political Democracy

From Edward Bernstein and the famous "revisionist controversy" at the turn of the century to Enrico Berlinguer and "Eurocommunism" in the 1970s and thereafter, we find a steadily growing trend towards representative democracy, which is characteristic of the whole of European socialism. During that period, the European Left experienced major transformations, from an orthodox, revolutionary socialism at the turn of the century, towards a reformist, democratic socialism, especially in the postwar period.

Perhaps the starting point for the discussion is to be found in the defeat of "revisionism" at the turn of the century within the Second International. Both Edward Bernstein in Germany and Jean Jaurès in France were defeated by the orthodox positions held at that time by Karl Kautsky and Jules Guesde, respectively.

Briefly, Bernstein's position within the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) was that the Marxist premises concerning the deepening of the class struggle and the collapse of the capitalist system were not taking place in the concrete reality of Germany. Within that context, according to Bernstein, a steady advance through reform was more likely than a catastrophic crash of capitalism. Thus, the SPD's relative importance would dramatically increase if it "could find the courage to emancipate itself from a phraseology which is actually outworn and if it would make up its mind to appear what it is in reality: a *democratic, socialist party of reform.*"¹

Moreover, Bernstein saw a close association between socialism and the best of the liberal democratic tradition. According to him, socialism and democracy were inseparable concepts: "democracy is a condition of socialism, to a much greater degree than is usually assumed, i.e., it is not only the means but also the substance."² Socialism was seen by the German Social Democrat as a higher social form that nevertheless drew important elements from the liberal tradition: "with respect to liberalism as a great historical movement, socialism is its legitimate heir, not only in chronological sequence, but also in its spiritual qualities."³

In the end, with the triumph of the orthodox positions held by Kautsky, Bernstein's "revisionism" was condemned both within the SPD (1903) and at the Amsterdam congress of the Second International (1904). The latter defended in the most stubborn way the materialist conception of history, the class struggle, and revolution.

A controversy similar to the one that took place within the SPD occurred in France, also at the turn of the century, around the Dreyfus Affair and the issue of "ministerialism." Following the reversal of the verdict on Captain Dreyfus and thus the defeat of the forces of reaction (the monarchists, army, and church), a republican conservative, René Waldeck-Rousseau, called for the formation, in 1899, of a ministry of republican defense. Realizing that the threat coming from the most reactionary forces was still alive, he asked Alexandre Millerrand (spokesman for the socialist parliamentary group) to enter the cabinet, as minister of commerce and industry. Considering that the republic was in danger and that

it was the duty of any socialist to defend, above any other consideration, the republican institutions, Millerrand accepted that position.

It was the first time ever that a socialist entered a government coalition. As had been the case with the Dreyfus Affair, Jaurès took sides with Millerrand. This was not the case, however, of the more radical sectors of French socialism represented by Jules Guesde, who called for an “intransigent opposition” to Millerrand and the politics of the new cabinet. According to Guesde, “the Socialist Party is not able to share political power with the bourgeoisie, in which hands the State can be nothing but an instrument of conservatism and of social oppression.”⁴ The French state was an enemy state in the hands of an enemy class, and thus there was no possibility whatsoever of collaborating with bourgeois forces, even in defense of the republican institutions. The class struggle prevented socialist participation within the bourgeois state.

On the opposite side, Jean Jaurès fully supported Millerrand’s decision. According to the French theorist, the republic was “the durable law of the nation, the definite shape of French life” (which should nevertheless be perfected and extended to all the realms of social and economic life); it was a popular conquest (“the major tangible fruit of a century-long struggle”) and not a mere “concession” of the bourgeoisie.⁵ Thus it was in the direct interest of the proletariat to defend those institutions.

Jaurès was well aware of the exploitative nature of capitalism and the reality of class struggle (on this issue he even sided with Kautsky against Bernstein in the revisionist controversy), and both were seen as related concepts. His point was, however, that the transformation of private into social property should be achieved by a gradual process, through democratic institutions: “it is not by an unexpected counterstroke of political agitation that the proletariat will gain supreme power, but by the methodical and legal organization of its own forces under the law of democracy and universal suffrage.”⁶

The case of “ministerialism” was finally taken by the French socialists to the Amsterdam congress (1904) of the Second International. At that congress, both ministerialism and “revisionism” were condemned. The 1905 Declaration of Principles of the SFIO stated that the Socialist Party “is not a reform party but . . . a party of class struggle and revolution” and of “fundamental and irreducible opposition to the whole of the bourgeois class and the State, which is its instrument.”⁷

Despite the triumph of orthodoxy and its contempt for “political forms” (including political democracy and its institutions), in the decades to come both Bernstein and Jaurès would end up prevailing upon Kautsky and Guesde.

Already in the years between the wars it appeared clear both for the SPD and the SFIO (especially in the face of the threat posed by Nazism) that political forms did matter. I shall hold the view that this also became the case with the Italian Communist Party (PCI) after twenty-two years of fascism.

In the case of the SPD, as noted by Peter Gay, despite the triumph of Kautsky’s orthodox views it “continued to behave as a revisionist party and, at the same time, to condemn revisionism; it continued to preach revolution, and to practice reform.”⁸ Following the Bolshevik Revolution and the November 1918 revolution in Germany, the SPD committed itself to creating and, in the years that followed, strengthening the new institutions of the Weimar Republic.

Throughout that period (1919–1933), in spite of the worsening of the political situation,

the deepening of the class struggle (thus challenging Bernstein's overly optimistic views on the subject), and the strong competition emerging from the Left (the German Communist Party, KPD), the SPD sought to advance the interests of the working class through parliamentary activity, in a gradual process towards socialism. Rudolf Hilferding, the leading theorist of the party in the 1920s, stated that "we must make the German working class conscious of the intrinsic value (*Eigenwert*) of the republic and democracy."⁹

In the case of the SFIO, in the years between the wars and under the leadership of Léon Blum (a follower of Jaurès), the party also favored a politics of *défense républicaine*. As had been the case at the turn of the century with the threats coming from the forces of reaction, so the need to defend the republican institutions against the threats coming from Nazism (and its allies in France) was perceived. This was accomplished through the creation of the Popular Front under the direct leadership of Blum.

Although both the SPD and the SFIO were defeated in their attempts at strengthening the republican institutions against the threats coming from different sectors, it became clear to them (and increasingly to the western European Left as a whole) that representative democracy was much more than the political form adopted by the bourgeoisie within the capitalist state. It was a popular conquest that nevertheless needed to be strengthened and enhanced.

This process took definite shape in the postwar period, both in Germany and France as well as with the PCI in Italy.

Despite the efforts of Kurt Schumacher (SPD) and Guy Mollet (SFIO), aimed at reviving the traditional Marxist rhetoric that was characteristic of French and German socialism, and whatever the contradictions with their own practice, both parties soon realized the need to move away from old ideological frameworks and class identities.

In the case of the SPD, this process leading away from ideological rigidities into a more flexible, programmatic stance, was facilitated by the deep transformations that took place in German politics and society in the years following World War II: changes in the political culture, with a more tolerant attitude and a rejection of radical views of social transformations, especially following the traumatic impact of Nazism and Communism; changes in the economy, with an unprecedented prosperity growing up from a social market economy and not from the old style planning, central controls, and nationalizations that were characteristic of the programs of the SPD; and changes in the political system itself, with the SPD still appearing as too identified with the Weimar institutions that were left behind. Under these circumstances, and in light of the successful path followed by the Christian Democratic Party (CDU), the SPD soon realized the need to turn into a *Volkspartei* (a party of the whole people), or in Kirchheimer's words a "catch-all" party.¹⁰ The final step was taken at Bad Godesberg, in 1959, with the drafting of a program that was basically a declaration of general ethical principles devoid of any explicit ideological formulations.

Although it took longer and developed in a much more complex way, a similar change took place within the SFIO (renamed *Parti Socialiste* in 1969) in the postwar period. The attempts in 1945–46 of Daniel Mayer and Léon Blum to "revise" some old definitions of French socialism along the lines of a Jaurèsian understanding clashed with the views defended by Guy Mollet (secretary-general of the party until 1969), along the lines of a traditional Marxist rhetoric. At the 1946 party congress, Mollet condemned "all attempts at revisionism, all forms of imperialist exploitation and attempts to mask that fundamental

reality, the class struggle.”¹¹ Instead, he emphasized the Guesdist Marxist tradition as it appeared in the founding charter of 1905, in other words *socialisme pur et dur*. However, in spite of this rhetoric (that in the case of Mollet was part of his style rather than his convictions), in the years immediately following World War II the party followed a line of *défense républicaine* against the perceived threats coming from Communism and Gaullism. In the end, the SFIO was caught in a severe crisis of credibility due to the contradictions between its Marxist rhetoric and its opportunistic practice. At the same time, the Fourth Republic proved incapable of assuring the legitimacy and effectiveness of the system, leading to the breakdown of its institutions and the accession to power of General de Gaulle. Within the context of the new institutions of the Fifth Republic, and following a period of sustained electoral decline (in the 1969 presidential elections Gaston Defferre, the socialist candidate, received only 5 percent of the vote), the SFIO (now PSF), under the leadership of François Mitterrand, underwent a process of internal renewal.

Curiously enough, Mitterrand’s “road to Social Democracy” was full of radical rhetoric concerning revolution, “rupture” with capitalism, the exploitation of man, and the need to build a *front des classes*. Some of these definitions were included in the Common Program subscribed to by the PSF, the Communist Party (PCF), and the Left Radicals in June 1972. Throughout the 1970s, the PSF sought to distance itself from what Jean-Pierre Chevènement (leader of the CERES, from the more leftist wing of the party) called the “*vieille putain de la social-démocratie*.”¹²

Why this attempt at making a sharp distinction between “socialism” and “social democracy” when it became clear in the years to come and under the Mitterrand governments that French socialism belonged in the mainstream of western European Social Democracy?

On the one hand, and placed in a comparative perspective with the SPD, the PSF had to face two realities that were not present in the case of the German Social Democratic Party: its lack of solid roots in the working class and the existence of a strong competitor to the Left (the French Communist Party) pushed the PSF towards a radical rhetoric in order to keep its credibility as a party of the Left.

On the other hand, the “bipolar tendency” of the presidential and majority systems established under the Fifth Republic compelled the PSF to build an alliance with the PCF. Perhaps nobody within the PSF understood the need of this alliance as well as Mitterrand. In addition, the Socialist leader sought to redress the balance of power within the French Left, by transforming the PSF into the majority force.

Thus it was for tactical reasons, related to the dynamics of party and electoral competition, that Mitterrand and the PSF sought to distance themselves from the *vieille putain de la social-démocratie*. But in its practice, as demonstrated by the Mitterrand governments, the PSF has proven to belong in the mainstream of European Social Democracy. This is especially the case following the reelection of Mitterrand and his appointment of Michel Rocard as prime minister.

In the end, the Jaurèsian socialist views have prevailed upon the Guesdist tradition. The French Socialist Party under the Mitterrand governments has nothing to do with its 1905 Declaration of Principles according to which the PSF is a party “of class struggle and revolution” and of “irreducible opposition to the whole of the bourgeois class and the State, which is its instrument.” Throughout this process, the politics of *défense républicaine*

(going from Jaurès to Blum and Mitterrand) has proven stronger than the rhetoric concerning the “rupture” with capitalism.

As I have already suggested, the appeal of political democracy in western European socialism reaches well beyond the cases I have referred to. A third case to be considered is that of the Italian Communist Party, especially beginning with “Eurocommunism” in the 1970s and thereafter.

What is interesting about this case is that the evolution of the PCI towards a formal commitment to political democracy, backed by a consistent practice in the same direction, takes place from within the Communist tradition. The PCI does not belong to the “revisionist” socialism linked to Bernstein, Jaurès, and the Second International, but rather to the “revolutionary” socialism associated with Lenin and the Third International. Its intellectual heritage comes from Antonio Gramsci, a theorist of revolution and not of reform.

Despite this powerful tradition and its international loyalties, and whatever the contradictions may appear to be, the fact remains that the PCI has managed to transcend its tactical and even strategic views on political democracy, while adopting a genuine western European type of democratic socialism. This was the case under Enrico Berlinguer, “Eurocommunism,” and thereafter, and it is still an ongoing process with yet unforeseeable results and implications.

In regards to the question of political democracy we may distinguish four specific stages in the historical evolution of the PCI. During the first period (1920s), under the influence of Lenin and the Bolshevik Revolution, the PCI developed a frontal attack on so-called “bourgeois” democracy, with a position in favor of proletarian insurrection. In that period, socialism was seen as the antithesis of the bourgeois democratic state, which had to be smashed and left behind. Moreover, democracy was seen as alternating with fascism within the context of bourgeois rule; they were seen as “two aspects of a single reality.” The dilemma was not “fascism/democracy,” but “fascism/proletarian insurrection,” according to Gramsci.¹³

The second stage, under the leadership of Palmiro Togliatti, goes from the seventh congress of the Comintern (1935) through World War II when the PCI considered political democracy in a more positive way, although in purely tactical terms. This stage corresponds to the tactics of the Popular Front, aimed at containing fascism in Europe and elsewhere through a gathering of antifascist (not necessarily anticapitalist) and democratic forces (even “bourgeois” ones). The real dilemma, in this case, appeared to be that of “fascism/democracy” and not “fascism/proletarian insurrection.”

In the third stage the PCI developed an even more positive appreciation of political democracy, leaving behind the purely tactical considerations of the Popular Front and turning to Togliatti’s strategic design around what came to be known as the “Italian way to socialism” (1944–1965). After twenty-two years of fascism, it was thought within the party that the real dilemma was again that of “fascism/democracy,” but with political democracy now being considered for “a whole period of history.”¹⁴ It may be said that, throughout this period, popular frontism (understood in terms of an alliance of national, antifascist, and democratic forces) evolved from a tactical to a strategic design.

The fourth and final stage may be said to have begun in the 1970s in the midst of “Eurocommunism,” with the call on the part of Enrico Berlinguer for a new “historic

compromise” among democratic, progressive forces.¹⁵ Within this most recent evolution, the PCI has come closer than any other Communist party to a western European type of democratic socialism. The party has managed to transcend its tactical and even strategic views on political democracy, undergoing deep ideological transformations along the lines of a formal and permanent commitment to the institutions of representative democracy.

Berlinguer died in 1984, but the ideas associated with “Eurocommunism” survived. Throughout this process, it may perhaps be true that a “silent Bad Godesberg” has already taken place within the PCI. Though it is still an ongoing process with as yet unforeseeable results and implications, it is clear that the PCI appears, in its concrete practice, as a “democratic, socialist party of reform,” following Bernstein’s terminology.

In 1923, Antonio Gramsci wrote to Togliatti: “Three years experience has taught us, not just in Italy, how deeply rooted social democratic traditions are.”¹⁷ More than six decades later we may confirm his views. What the Italian theorist never imagined, however, was that these traditions were to reach the party he contributed to create.

Perhaps the most recent demonstration of this “social democratization” process taking place within the PCI was its eighteenth congress in Rome in March 1989, at which a “change of course” was agreed upon. In the inauguration speech, Achille Occhetto, secretary-general of the party since June 1988, dismissed “democratic centralism” and even the possibility of a *terza via* between Communism and Social Democracy, while calling for the formation of one single socialist movement in Europe and a closer relationship with Socialist and Social Democratic parties. Occhetto’s line was approved by an overwhelming majority of the 1,048 delegates attending the party congress. Finally, in November 1989 a vast majority of the members of the central committee of the PCI decided to change the name of the party, thus completing the “social democratization” process the party has undergone in the postwar period.

All three cases I have considered in this section (SPD, PSF, and PCI) hold in common an experience of convergence around a democratic socialist understanding, that is, an evolution towards a formal commitment to the institutions of representative democracy.

What elements have led to this “social democratization” process?

Let me simply summarize some of the elements I have already mentioned. First, the manifest contradiction between the premises of Marxism and the reality of western European capitalist development should be underlined. The first one to have developed a systematic argument on this contradiction was Edward Bernstein. Although his views might be considered overly optimistic concerning the evolution of European capitalist development and the “softness” of the class struggle, and although he was defeated at the time by the more orthodox positions held by Kautsky and the more radicalized sectors of the SPD, Bernstein’s views concerning the need to develop a “democratic, socialist party of reform” proved to be correct not only for the SPD but for most of the socialist parties of western Europe.

Second, the impact of authoritarianism led most of western European socialism to a new appreciation of representative democracy and its institutions. All three cases I have considered, some in more profound ways than others and through different historical periods, have gone through the experience of authoritarianism. This was especially the case under Nazism and Fascism. Moreover, with only a few exceptions, most of European

socialism is postauthoritarian. This is also true of the most recent experiences in southern Europe, as demonstrated by socialism in Spain, Portugal, and Greece.

Third, the dynamics of electoral politics and the laws of the “political market” ought also to be considered in explaining this process. The increasing appreciation of political democracy and its institutions leads to an adherence to certain “rules of the game”—and to the game itself—which in turn imposes certain limits on the political actors. These limits on the possibilities of social transformations do not stem only from the “rules of the game” of procedural democracy but also from the economic system (capitalist). In this way, for example, the need to respond to international competition and the importance of keeping basic macro-economic equilibriums have led to the adoption of measures that may appear as contradictory to the ideological or programmatic postulates of the party. The clearest and most recent example is that of the Mitterrand governments, especially with the measures adopted after an intense first year of “structural” reform. This is also the case of the Socialist Party in Spain. A central feature that seems to be common to European socialism as a whole is the acknowledgment of the limits coming from both the political regime (democratic) and the economic system (capitalist) and the need to expand these limits from within both systems. This is characteristic of the “social democratic” paradigm in western societies.

The fourth and final factor refers to the international context, in at least two ways. On the one hand, the existence of political-military blocs, within a bipolar international system, adds a third limitation to those coming from the economy (capitalist) and the political regime (democracy). Berlinguer’s well-known statement—“I want Italy to remain in NATO”—did not come out of enthusiasm for the Atlantic Alliance but from the realization that Italy belonged to a certain political-military bloc. If the PCI wanted to become a *partito di governo* it had to acknowledge this external element and adapt to it (without precluding the possibility of introducing change from within). Something similar may be said of Felipe González and the PSOE in Spain. On the other hand, the crisis within the socialist bloc of eastern Communism (well symbolized in Poland and the repression of Solidarity in the late 1970s and early 1980s) has confirmed the criticisms emerging from western European socialism at large towards the “authoritarian” tendencies within that system. A clear distinction has been made between democratic and authoritarian socialism.

All four factors have led western European socialism towards a new appreciation of representative democracy and its institutions, away from the orthodox, revolutionary understanding of the turn of the century and even after.

It may be said that democratic socialism is well established in western Europe. This system may lack the heroic features of the “storming” of history, but at least it offers guarantees that the people, in the form of an “electorate,” will have the last word. This appears as both the strength and the weakness of “democratic” socialism in western (capitalist and democratic, within a bipolar international system) societies.

Chilean Socialism and the Withering Away of Political Democracy

Whereas the “social democratization” of the European Left led increasingly towards political democracy and its institutions, the “leninization” of the Chilean Left led

increasingly away from those institutions. In sharp contrast to European socialism and with strong contempt for its “social democratic” features (regarded clearly in pejorative terms), Chilean socialism followed quite a different path: in its origins by developing a merely instrumental, ambiguous view of political democracy, and later on by becoming directly opposed to the institutions of so-called “bourgeois” or “formal” democracy. It was within this context and in manifest contradiction with the recent evolution of the PSCH that Allende’s proposal of a path to socialism through “democracy, pluralism, and freedom” emerged.

With respect to the views concerning political democracy we may distinguish three different stages in the historical evolution of the PSCH: the populist phase (1933–1946), the intermediate phase (1946–1955), and the phase of increasing leninization (1955–1973). I shall concentrate especially on the latter.

Throughout the first period, the PSCH developed a permanent contradiction between its adherence to Marxism (with a clear reference to the class struggle and revolution) and its reformist practice; whereas its rhetoric was rather suspicious of political democracy, its practice was immersed in the dynamics of electoral politics. These contradictions were never satisfactorily resolved.

The emergence and development of the PSCH in this first period should be understood within the context of the oligarchic crisis in Chile and elsewhere in Latin America. In response to that crisis a socialism of an antioligarchic and antiimperialist type, with a strong populist component, emerged in Chile. Although the PSCH adopted a Marxist ideological definition, it was the national and popular character of the party—and not its class definition—that attracted the masses. The opposition between the “people and the oligarchy” rather than between the “proletariat and the bourgeoisie” was characteristic of Chilean socialism in this first period, along with a nationalist, Latin Americanist orientation. This process coincided with the emergence and development of Latin American populism, in which Peruvian *Aprismo* appeared as the most significant external influence on the PSCH.

Precisely this populist element helps us to explain the permanent ambiguity of the party towards political democracy. Although the PSCH participated in the institutions of representative democracy, its rhetoric was rather suspicious of them. In this way, for example in its “Declaration of Principles” (1933), while adhering to Marxism as a “method of analysis,” the party declared that “gradual transformation through the democratic system is not possible.”¹⁸ Three years later, when joining the Popular Front, the PSCH stated that “bourgeois democracy is only a temporary useful instrument which could not lead to ultimate power for the proletariat.”¹⁹

However, in clear contradiction to that rhetoric, the party fully participated in the institutions of representative democracy, with significant electoral and political success. Throughout the 1930s the PSCH devoted its energies almost completely to electoral politics, first by electing three senators and seventeen representatives (including Salvador Allende) in the 1937 parliamentary elections, and next by electing Pedro Aguirre Cerda, a candidate from the Radical Party supported by the Popular Front coalition (which included both the Communists and the Socialists), in the 1938 presidential elections. Finally, in the 1941 parliamentary elections the PSCH received 18 percent of the votes, comparing favorably with the 11 percent it won in 1937.

However, so as to confirm the permanent contradiction between a revolutionary rhetoric

and a reformist practice, a discussion followed within the PSCH around the issue of the costs and ideological sacrifices demanded by its participation within the institutions of “bourgeois” democracy. This was the case with the *anticolaboracionistas* within the party, who argued that participation in the multiclass coalition of the Popular Front obscured the class and revolutionary definitions of the party. The group won definitive control of the PSCH in 1946.

As I have suggested, at the core of the contradictions between the revolutionary rhetoric and the reformist practice of a party increasingly immersed in the institutions of political democracy were the populist leanings of the PSCH. By definition, Latin American populism views the question of representative democracy ambiguously. As Faletto notes, “populism emerged as a response to the crisis of oligarchic rule but at the same time, it constituted a divorce with the liberal understanding of democracy.”²⁰ The populist appeal is directed to the “people” rather than to the “electorate;” what matters is the incorporation of the popular masses (generally under a multiclass and multiparty coalition of an antioligarchic type), whether under an authoritarian or a democratic form. Although Chilean socialism came closer to a democratic understanding (at least a democratic practice), it considered political democracy at best in purely instrumental terms. In any event, it maintained a permanent ambiguity towards it.

It was precisely this “ambiguity” that Eugenio González sought to eliminate in what I have referred to as the second stage in the historical evolution of the PSCH concerning the question of political democracy (1946–1955). A socialist of anarchist background, close to a Jaurèsian understanding of a “humanist socialism” (as he himself referred to it), González’ central thesis was that socialism and democracy (in its liberal western meaning) were inseparable and that neither could be understood without reference to the other. In a debate in the senate (his natural arena) in 1953, González declared that there was “no opposition between political liberalism and democratic socialism. On the contrary, democratic socialism wants to extend to all human beings, without any type of distinctions, the achievements of the liberal bourgeoisie in the political order.”²¹ Socialism, according to the socialist theorist, aims at continuing and going beyond, and not denying, the western cultural tradition. In another debate, in 1957, while acknowledging what he considered to be the “merely formal” character of the “existing pseudo-democracy” (which he considered to be inherent in the limited character of liberal democracy), González stated the following: “it doesn’t seem possible for us to separate socialism and democracy. Moreover, only by resorting to democratic means may socialism reach its ends without distorting them.”²² These were some of the basic contents of Eugenio González’ understanding of democratic socialism. Consciously or not, they expressed an attempt at abandoning the purely instrumental, ambiguous idea of representative democracy as developed by the PSCH in its first phase.

However, although some of these ideas were formally adopted in the 1947 program of the PSCH, they did not take root in the further development of the party. In the years to come—commencing what I have labeled the third phase of development of the PSCH concerning the question of political democracy—it was felt within the party that the “class and revolutionary” definitions that were adopted by the 1933 Declaration of Principles and confirmed at the eleventh party congress (1946), which elected a new leadership identified with the *anticolaboracionista* group, had to be followed more strictly. This meant a rejection

of multiclass alliances of the Popular Front type and the adoption of a position that would increasingly lead away from electoral politics and the institutions of representative democracy.

The first step in this direction was taken by the party in 1955, with the adoption of the “workers’ front” thesis. In clear contrast with the multiclass character of the Popular Front, this new definition (to be followed in the next two decades) emphasized the class character of the PSCH. Its political implications were as important as the definition itself: no more alliances with “bourgeois” forces within a multiparty coalition. Only the “true” representatives of the working class (Socialists and Communists) would lead the process towards the “workers’ democratic revolution” (which was thought of as an “intermediate stage” between the bourgeois democratic revolution and the socialist revolution).

If the “workers’ front” thesis emphasized the “class” character of the party, the impact of the Cuban revolution (1959) was an even more determining element in stressing the “revolutionary” character of the party (in accordance with the 1946 party definitions). The Cuban revolution was the single most decisive influence on the radicalization process of the PSCH throughout the 1960s.

With the example of the Cuban revolution, the “workers’ front” thesis assumed a more Cubanized tone leading increasingly away from electoral politics. Not only did it demonstrate that it was possible to conceive of a socialist revolution without a previous “bourgeois democratic” revolution, but above all it demonstrated that there was an effective alternative to the “electoral way.” In a report to the central committee of the PSCH in August 1961, Salomón Corbalán, the new secretary-general of the party (1957–1961), declared that the Cuban revolution, “which was born breaking with the scheme of national unity and class collaboration and that swept away the idea of strengthening the bourgeois democratic revolution, is the practical expression of the policy we support.” Along with questioning the “peaceful way” (which was considered to be a “conciliatory path”) and the “electoral way” (which corresponded to “the rules of the game dictated by bourgeois democracy”), Salomón Corbalán concluded in drastic terms: “class confrontation must come and we are going after it.”²³ The final resolutions of the PSCH congress emphasized “the profound coincidence between the politics of the Cuban revolutionary government and our line around the Workers’ Front.”²⁴

In spite of these definitions, in the following years the party once again immersed itself in the dynamics of electoral politics. Under the leadership of Raúl Ampuero (1961–1965), the tensions between a revolutionary rhetoric aimed at emphasizing the class and revolutionary character of the party and the much more complex reality of electoral politics, within a well established and long-standing democratic regime, emerged once again.

The election in 1964 of Eduardo Frei, the Christian Democratic candidate, as president changed the situation dramatically for the PSCH. Along with disillusionment with the reformist, electoralist leanings of the popular front and the impact of the Cuban revolution, the coming to power of the Christian Democrats contributed to the further radicalization of the PSCH.

According to the Socialist Party, the Christian Democratic government was the “other face” of imperialism and the “new face” of the Right. But beyond this rhetoric the PSCH was well aware that the PDC had come to power with many of the banners of the Left and with an important dose of popular support. Very eloquently, a few months after the election

the PSCH declared that “for the first time we have to face a government that, with objectives that are different from ours, has mobilized the people with a program that in many respects is our own program.”²⁵

Thus, the PSCH moved further to the Left in order to show that its own “revolutionary” ideological outlook was different from that of the “reformist” Christian Democrats. On the Left, reformism became the enemy of revolution. Meanwhile, the Right, following a period of tactical retreat, prepared the way for getting rid of both.

The first step in this radicalization process was taken at the Linares party congress (1965), which emphasized the class and revolutionary character of the party, while adding a new reference to “Marxism-Leninism.” The draft program for that congress was written by Adonis Sepúlveda (from the Trotskyist wing of the PSCH), and it declared that “we were taken by a false door, to a respect for bourgeois institutions and a position in favor of ‘peaceful ways.’” While stating that those who believed in “the verdict of the ballot boxes” should “now take the part of responsibility they have in the defeat” (a clear reference to Allende and the *Allendistas*), Sepúlveda declared in very drastic terms: “our strategy excludes the electoral way as a means of access to power.”²⁶ The final resolutions of the party congress concluded that “only a revolutionary notion, a consistent Marxist-Leninist position, will allow for an effective congruence between the strategy and the day-to-day practice of the party.”²⁷ It was the first time that “Marxism-Leninism” was officially adopted by the party.

These definitions were confirmed and developed even further at the Chillán party congress (1967), which declared that “revolutionary violence is both inevitable and legitimate” and the “only way” of obtaining access to power.²⁸

Finally, at the La Serena party congress (1971), the new secretary-general of the party, Carlos Altamirano (a representative of the more radicalized sectors of the party), declared that what was characteristic of the “revolutionary” Left (as distinct from the “traditional” one) was its rejection of the “electoral way.”²⁹ The final resolutions of this congress confirmed the rejection of the “peaceful way,” declaring that the victory of the Popular Unity in the 1970 presidential elections gave birth to a new “favorable correlation of forces” which created the conditions for “an irreversible march towards socialism.”³⁰

In addition, and in demonstration that this was not only empty rhetoric, the new central committee elected at La Serena included a new militaristic component represented by the *Ejército de Liberación Nacional (Elenos)*, a socialist group closely linked to the guerrilla movement led by Ché Guevara, with military training in Cuba. Although there were sixteen *Elenos* in the new central committee, they came to control twenty-eight members (out of forty-five), thus forming a majority.³¹

Allende came to power in 1970 in this context. Clearly enough, Allende’s “road to socialism” through “democracy, pluralism, and freedom” had very little to do with the more recent evolution of the PSCH.

It was not that Allende rejected these orientations emerging from the more recent evolution of the PSCH or that he came to power in spite of his own party. Far from that. In fact, he was a close friend of Carlos Altamirano, and one of his daughters was a member of the *Elenos*. Moreover, he was a close friend of Fidel Castro and had always expressed great admiration for the Cuban revolution.

His point was, however, that the armed struggle that was characteristic of revolution in

Latin America in the 1960s was not applicable to Chile. Perhaps as no other socialist, Allende understood the “specificity” of what he called “the concrete reality of Chilean structures.” It was precisely the “uniqueness” of Chilean political institutions, related to a long-standing democratic tradition, that created the possibility for a “second model of transition to a socialist society,” which excluded the “dictatorship of the proletariat” and was different from the one that had its origins in the Bolshevik Revolution. In short, a socialism built through “democracy, pluralism, and freedom.”³²

It was precisely this kind of “electoralist” inclination on the part of Allende which caused so much trouble within the PSCH throughout the 1960s and early 1970s, the same electoralist behavior backed by thirty-three years in parliament and four candidacies for the presidency of the republic, that may help us to explain Allende’s minority position within his own party at this stage of its evolution. Starting in the 1950s, Allende failed to become a member of the central committee of the PSCH. He even asked to be admitted to it at the Chillán party congress (1967) but was denied.³³ Even more significant, Allende was elected as a socialist candidate to the presidency of the republic with only a minority of the votes of the central committee (the majority abstained).³⁴

It must be said, however, that Allende shared part of the responsibility in this increasingly marginalized position within his own party. In fact, Allende never paid enough attention to the internal life of the PSCH. He trusted in his direct appeal to the masses. His only real support (well he knew it) came from the *Allendista* socialists and the *Allendista* popular masses, and, although his direct appeal to the electorate worked pretty well until 1970 (when he was elected to the presidency of the republic), this appeal lost efficacy in the following years. Under the Popular Unity government (1970–73), Allende’s appeal to the electorate became useless in the face of a party (like the PSCH) that saw electoral politics as an expression of “bourgeois” or “formal” democracy and that evaluated its possibilities of coming to power in terms of class strength rather than “electoral competition.”

Throughout that period (1970–73), the Leninist conception defended by the PSCH, based on the ideas of “smashing” the bourgeois democratic state and substituting formal democracy with an alternative “popular power,” clashed with Allende’s own attempt aimed at creating the conditions for a socialist society through a gradual transformation of the bourgeois state, within the limits of constitutional democracy. The conflict between Allende and the PSCH, his own party, expressed two different, irreconcilable views on what the transition towards socialism ought to be, while contributing to the failure of the Allende experiment.

New Democratic Socialism in Chile

In 1946, Víctor Raúl Haya de la Torre, leader of the Peruvian *Aprismo*, wrote of the Chilean socialists: “they despise democracy because it hasn’t cost them anything to have one. If they only knew the true face of tyranny.”³⁵ It has been precisely the installation of a military dictatorship, starting in 1973, which has led a significant sector of the Chilean Left towards a renewed appreciation of political democracy, formerly dismissed as “formal” or “bourgeois.” This movement, known as the “renovated” Left, consists of separate tendencies (both recent and historic) of the Chilean Left which converged around one of the

two sectors that resulted from the division of the Socialist Party in 1979. Within this process, European socialism appears as the most significant external influence.

In the early 1970s under the Popular Unity government in Chile (and elsewhere in Latin America), the socialist Left coined the slogan "fascism or socialism." However, the advent of authoritarianism soon led these sectors to conclude that the real dilemma was between "dictatorship and democracy." The installation in power of the military dictatorship led by General Augusto Pinochet did not lead immediately to a discussion of the question of political democracy. The issue of human rights emerged first. This in turn led a significant sector of the Chilean Left to the realization that those rights could be preserved only within a democratic regime. The close association between authoritarianism and human rights abuses led to an increasingly sharp criticism against any type of authoritarianism, whether from the Right or the Left. According to Angel Flisflisch (member of the Socialist Party's central committee), the repression imposed by the dictatorship forced the Left to adopt a more consistent attitude: "the Left had to recognize the need to demand a permanent and universal respect for human rights in any type of political regime."³⁶

Above all, the human rights issue led to a new awareness of the relationship among socialism, democracy, and authoritarianism. Two of the most outstanding intellectuals belonging to the renovated Left refer to this process in the following terms. Jorge Arrate, secretary-general of the PSCH starting in June 1989, notes that "the authoritarian regime inflicted upon Chile helped to solidify and universalize the antiauthoritarian sentiment of the Left. That is to say, this induced a rethinking regarding the type of socialism proposed and its relationship to the concept of liberty."³⁷ Manuel Antonio Garretón (a member of the central committee of the party) asserts that "the nature of the military coup and the resulting dictatorship demonstrated that, in those countries with modern armies and a diversified middle class, the actual point of debate is not so much between 'socialism and fascism' as between military dictatorships and political democracy."³⁸

Within this process, old prejudices concerning the merely "formal" or "bourgeois" character of democracy were left behind. In this way, the procedural aspects of democracy came to be seen as having an "intrinsic value."³⁹ Far from referring to it as a "concession" of the bourgeoisie, political democracy is regarded as a "popular conquest" which has to be preserved and extended for all to enjoy.⁴⁰

Perhaps the most dramatic example of this transformation taking place within a significant sector of the Chilean Left is that of Carlos Altamirano himself. The former secretary-general of the PSCH (1971–1979) admits that the major historical error of the socialist Left consisted in not having understood the "uniqueness" of Chile, given its particular "social and political development." Moreover, according to the socialist leader, "Chilean socialists did not bother to analyze the question of democracy," at least until the 1950s. Beginning in the 1960s, the situation became even more critical due to the "Leninization" and "Cubanization" processes taking place within the PSCH. "We should have given democracy greater consideration," concludes the socialist leader.⁴¹

These thoughts, coming from intellectuals and politicians who later on came to be identified with the "renovated" Left, clashed with the views expressed by the more radical and orthodox sectors of the party. The latter considered that the reasons leading to the 1973 political defeat were to be found in the inadequacies of the revolutionary *vanguardia* (leading force) and that only a true "Marxist-Leninist" party would be capable of leading the

process towards the final revolution.⁴² This group, known as *Dirección Interior*, soon took control of the party and expelled Altamirano in April 1979.⁴³

Two parties resulted from the split of 1979: the first, led by Clodomiro Almeyda (former under-secretary-general of the party), with a Marxist-Leninist orientation, and the second, led by Altamirano, which reaffirmed democratic values and gradually distanced itself from Leninist theory. The “renovated” Left emerged around this second group in the following years.

Along with the impact of the military dictatorship, the decisive influence of European socialism ought to be mentioned in explaining this process leading towards a renewed appreciation of political democracy and its institutions. As discussed in the previous section, external elements have always actively influenced the Socialist Party. This was the case, in the earlier stage, with Latin American populism and, in the second, with the Cuban revolution. But whereas the former developed an ambiguous and purely instrumental view of democracy, the latter led increasingly towards a rejection of the institutions of representative democracy. Within the more recent process, the influence of European socialism has sparked a process of reaffirming democratic values.

The influence of European socialism has been twofold. On the one hand, the Chilean socialists in exile have come to appreciate the strong democratic roots and traditions of western European socialism (without necessarily adopting the social democratic model), and on the other, the crisis of so-called *socialismos reales*, the socialist bloc of eastern Communism, which reached its height during the incidents in Poland, led to a new awareness of the authoritarian tendencies of those regimes.

The exile of socialist leaders coincided with the emergence in the mid 1970s of “Eurocommunism” (particularly in Italy). A group of Chilean intellectuals and politicians, from inside and outside the PSCH, developed close ties with the PCI and Enrico Berlinguer and drew heavily on the works of Antonio Gramsci.

But beyond the Italian case, the Chilean Left in exile gradually uncovered the democratic character of western European socialism as a whole. Different groups settled in Holland, France, Sweden, and Spain, among other countries, and soon came to realize how mistaken their former prejudices toward European social democracy were. Already in 1978 Altamirano referred to the existence of “a provincial and schematic approach to international affairs, which prevented us—among other things—from appreciating the value of relationships with other socialist and social democratic parties of Europe.”⁴⁴ Along similar lines, Erich Schnake (from the Socialist Party’s central committee) admits that “in the past, we saw European socialism as simply the great administrator of capitalism.” Schnake adds that this perception has since changed, although this does not mean that Chilean socialism has adopted the western European model of social democracy. In any case, what has occurred is “a broad influence of European society at large, that points in the direction of political democracy.”⁴⁵

Commenting on the views of this renovated Left with respect to European socialism, Ricardo Núñez, secretary-general of the PSCH between 1985 and 1989, declares: “we must be able to create a socialism [drawing] from the best of the European socialist achievements and the best that is possible to obtain of the socialism we want for Chile, in accordance with our own reality.”⁴⁶

In sharp contrast to the reality of western European socialism, the crisis of the *socialismos*

reales led to a critical stance towards the authoritarian tendencies of eastern Communism. That crisis reached its height with the events in Poland, leading to the repression of Walesa and the Solidarity movement, while almost coinciding with the internal crisis of the PSCH in 1979. Following the imposition of martial law, a group of Chilean exiles in Europe expressed "our absolute and unconditional solidarity with the workers and the *pueblo* of Poland, considering the 'state of internal war' and the massive, systematic abuse of human rights taking place in that country."⁴⁷

As a result of this sharp contrast between western European socialism and eastern Communism, and following disillusionment with the latter, this renovated Left sought to detach itself from the model of *socialismos reales*. The final minutes of the Chantilly conference (a gathering of a variety of representatives of this "renovated" left, both from inside and outside the PSCH) spoke directly to the "rejection of the socialist model of eastern Europe" and added that "the socialist experiences of eastern Europe have not created the democratic mechanisms needed to resolve the conflicts of modern society. Consequently, these experiences do not provide Chilean socialism with an inspiring model to follow."⁴⁸

Both these elements, the impact of dictatorship and the influence of European socialism, both from the West (in a positive sense) and the East (in a negative sense), appear as decisive in the emergence of this renovated Left.

Concretely, this process has meant the following. First, the adoption of a self-critical analysis of the Popular Unity experience, which failed "to create a hegemony and a political majority within Chilean society to carry out the transformation process."⁴⁹ Second, a reevaluation of the concept of political democracy as the central feature within this process. Whereas in the 1960s and early 1970s political democracy came to be seen as an "insurmountable obstacle" in the process leading to the socialist revolution, within this more recent process it comes to be defined as the "space and limit" of political action.⁵⁰ It is thought that socialism can develop fully only within the boundaries of political democracy and its institutions. Thus, the discussion does not involve (as in the 1960s) the question of the "type of revolution" (bourgeois democratic or socialist), but rather the "type of political regime" (democratic or dictatorial). Third, socialism is regarded more in terms of a political process than a revolutionary "pathos," a final goal, or a revealed truth. The classic revolutionary concept of the "assault" on the Winter Palace is replaced by a new one in which socialism is not the result of the storming of history but rather of a methodical, gradual, and limited process, taking place within the institutions of political democracy. This, in turn, is related to the disappointment with decades of authoritarianism within *socialismos reales*. As Carlos Ominami (from the Socialist Party's central committee) notes, "more than half a century of authoritarian socialism has robbed socialism of its credibility in calling for paradise on earth. Having lost its virginity, socialism is no longer a given. We are left with nothing more than to live with socialism as a problem. This is the true meaning of the socialist renovation process."⁵¹

Within this understanding, Leninism is definitely left behind ("we have distanced ourselves, and I believe once and for all, from the concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat," according to Ricardo Núñez, former secretary-general of the PSCH), without necessarily adopting the social democratic model (which, although it loses any pejorative meaning, is considered to be essentially European).⁵² Rather, what is proposed is a "new synthesis" between socialism and democracy, aimed at overcoming the traditional ambiguity

towards political democracy and its institutions. Socialism, in this new perspective, comes to be seen in terms of *profundización* (deepening) of political democracy, and not, as in the 1960s and early 1970s, in terms of the “smashing” of the bourgeois democratic state.

Conclusion

I have considered both successful (western Europe) and unsuccessful (Chile) democratic socialist experiences, the degrees of success and failure being considered in terms of both the stability of democratic institutions and the adherence to those institutions of the socialist Left. In the final section, I have concentrated on the emergence in Chile of what might be called a new democratic socialism. Within this process, European socialism appears as the main external influence.

Following a history of divorce and starting in the 1970s, western European and Chilean socialism have developed close ties and a common understanding around the positive value of political democracy. In fact, as I have suggested, it may even be said that their influence has been reciprocal, as demonstrated by the emergence of “Eurocommunism” (which drew heavily from the lessons coming from the failure of the Allende experiment) and the strong influence that European socialism as a whole has exerted upon Chilean socialism.

In some reasonable ways, it may be argued that the intellectual debate taking place within the Chilean Left throughout the last decade resembles some crucial debates in the evolution of contemporary socialism in western societies, such as the revisionist controversy at the turn of the century and “Eurocommunism” in the 1970s.

This is not to say that Chilean socialism (or a major part of it) has adopted the social democratic model, which is considered to be specific to western European socialism. In the end, it is likely that this renovated Left will adopt some formula that corresponds to an “original creation of the Chilean *pueblo*,” as Allende used to refer to the “Chilean road to socialism.”

However, in the eyes of Chilean socialism the social democratic model seems to have lost any pejorative meaning. On the contrary, its democratic traditions and its firm roots in the working class of western Europe are valued. A further demonstration of this new reality is the decision adopted by the PSCH at its twenty-fifty congress in June 1989. Along with the strengthening of its adherence and commitment to political democracy and the rejection of Leninism, the Socialist Party decided, following a controversial internal debate and by a significant majority of its members, to join the Socialist International, an unprecedented decision considering the historical international nonalignment of the party.⁵³

In the case of Chile, however, democratic socialism is not as well established as it is in western Europe (which has gone a long way since the revisionist controversy at the turn of the century). It is still an ongoing process, much more developed at the theoretical level, related to the intellectual debate of the last decade, than at the organizational level.

More recent developments, however, such as the initiation of a transition to democracy in Chile, bring the PSCH (led by Arrate) closer than ever to a hegemonic position within the Chilean Left, and a predominant position within Chilean politics at large.

The PSCH has managed to build a successful umbrella party in order to influence and participate in the transition process. This is the case of the Party for Democracy (PPD),

which appears in the opinion polls as the second largest party, behind the Christian Democratic Party. In addition, the PSCH now includes one of the most prominent leaders in Chilean politics (Ricardo Lagos, leader of the PPD), a prominent group of young technocrats and intellectuals, and a significant number of representatives elected in the 1989 parliamentary elections. Moreover, a reunification process is currently under way with the PSCH led by Clodomiro Almeyda, one of the two socialist groups (in this case, a Marxist-Leninist one) that resulted from the 1979 split. In light of the diminishing appeal of Marxism-Leninism, especially following the crisis of eastern Communism, and the dynamics of the transition to democracy in Chile, it is likely that the PSCH led by Jorge Arrate will become hegemonic within this reunification process.

Taken in a comparative perspective, we may identify elements both of continuity and discontinuity between European and Chilean socialism.

The elements of continuity refer to two of the four variables I have considered in explaining the consolidation of democratic socialism in western Europe: the impact of authoritarianism and the crisis of *socialismos reales*, leading towards a new appreciation of representative democracy and its institutions.

With respect to the third variable, related to the dynamics of party and electoral competition, it is still premature to draw definite conclusions: a transition to democracy has only recently begun in Chile, with the victory of the democratic forces at the plebiscite that defeated General Pinochet in October 1988. Only upon completion of the transition process will it be known how the dynamics of party and electoral competition affect (whether positively or negatively) the consolidation of this new democratic socialism. However, it appears clear that this renovated Left, which may become hegemonic within the Left and predominant in Chilean politics at large, has opted for an adherence and a genuine commitment (which is to be tested in its concrete practice) to the rules of procedural democracy. The open question is about the definite organizational form that this new democratic socialism will adopt.

Finally, the major element of discontinuity seems to be related to the diverse structures of the economy and society in western Europe and Chile. However, it has been an implicit hypothesis throughout this argument that political processes are not determined by economic factors and that they present their own specificities and dynamics, with some important degree of autonomy. Chile may not wait to become a developed capitalist society in order to have a genuine democratic socialism. Above all, the profound structural changes that have taken place under the Pinochet dictatorship, along the lines of a free market, open economy, with a substantial decrease of the industrial proletariat, the expansion of the service sector, and the relative success of the economy in recent years, may well contribute to create the conditions for a new, renovated, democratic socialism, away from a traditional rhetoric concerning nationalizations, central controls, and a state-run economy. In the end, the Chilean renovated Left, notwithstanding its own specificities and the open space for creativity and innovation, may well come to resemble its western European counterparts in transforming itself into a "democratic, socialist party of reform," within the limits provided by political democracy, a capitalist economy, and a bipolar international structure.

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