Chile’s “Revolución Pingüina”

by

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“If student protest is more than the expression of a fashion of the present generation, then we should not lose sight of this question.”

- Jurgen Habermas, *Toward A Rational Society* (p. 30)

“And your education? Is not that also social, and determined by the social conditions under which you educate, by the intervention, direct or indirect, of society, by means of schools, &c.?”

- Karl Marx, *Communist Manifesto* (p. 487)
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Introduction

On April 26, 2006, three thousand high school students marched towards the Chilean Ministry of Education in downtown Santiago. They carried with them a range of emotions and demands: they wanted free bus passes and free access to the national college entrance exam (PSU), but at the same time they wanted the elimination of the Ley Orgánica Constitucional de Enseñanza [Organic Constitutional Law of Education] (LOCE), the law that has organized the Chilean education system for the past twenty years. Like most Santiago protests, the march began peacefully and ended violently, as students skirmished with the national police and their water cannons. There were 73 detentions, not unusual for Chilean political fare (El Mercurio 4/27/06).

Besides some coverage in the newspaper, the protest appeared to accomplish little. At least on the surface, nothing significant changed that day. No new structures had been created: ‘La Asamblea Organizada de Estudiantes Secundarios,’ [Organized Assembly of Secondary Students], the umbrella organization for Santiago-area public schools, was still considered a loose and relatively unimportant group. No political elites had joined the students; indeed, some of the elite public high schools known as emblematicos had not appeared. The students had few resources and no political party behind them. And there was no extraordinary repression by the police that could warrant larger outcries of abuse.

Yet, a month later, a million high school and college students would take the streets throughout Chile to demand a better education system. Hundreds of high schools would be occupied in a matter of weeks. The Asamblea would become a
center for discussion and decision-making among students, and, just as significant, the agreed-upon negotiator with the government. The press would become obsessed by the movement, as would the Chilean public. It would eventually cost the minister of education and the head of the national police their jobs and would become widely accepted as President Michelle Bachelet’s first and greatest challenge since taking office earlier that year. In brief, for the better part of May and June of 2006, Chile (and parts of the world) would be so entranced by these students in their black-and-white school uniforms, demanding a better education for their fellow Chileans, that it would become popularly known as “La Revolucion Pingüina,” or the Penguin Revolution.

Whether it was a revolution is doubtful, according to standard definitions of revolution in social movement literature. But that is not to say that the Chilean pingüinos are not unworthy of study, or of genuine puzzlement. The social movement theorist, swamped with resource mobilization, political-process, cultural, and materialist explanations, has much to see in Chile, but little to make sense of. There are characteristics of the movement, for example, that confirm other beliefs, but there are several more that buck these trends. How did so many students take the streets without prior organization or significant resources other than themselves? And why at that time, without any overt shift in the structure or tone of the government? And, finally, does it matter that the events occurred in Chile, a country struggling to reconcile twenty years of authoritarian regime and a relatively recent return to democracy?

1 For example, on Sept. 11 there is an annual protest in front of La Moneda (the President’s house) to mark the anniversary of the 1973 coup. There is almost always violence and hundreds of detentions.
This thesis will attempt to not only answer these questions, but also seek meaning and significance behind the *Revolución Pingüina*. What can we learn from the *pingüinos*? What do they tell us about Chile? About an education system based on decentralization and free-market principles? About student activism and youth coalition-building? About the broader structure of social movements? By emphasizing how the *pingüinos* can provide insight into larger questions, we insure against limiting ourselves to conclusions that deal with the Penguin Revolution as an anomaly instead of a lesson for the future.

After all, the *pingüinos* are by no means the first students to find themselves on the streets protesting for social change. The 1960s, for instance, witnessed a flood of student discontent that many considered revolutionary: from the decentralized but persistent anti-war and civil-rights movements among college campuses in the United States, to the explosive anti-establishment protests in Paris, as well as the “sliding May” that took place across universities and schools in Italy (Tarrow 1998) and the violent repression of student demonstrations in Mexico. The list continues through the present day: Tiananmen Square in 1989, Tehran in 1999, and, more recently, student demonstrations in France, Pakistan, Iran, Burma, and Spain, among others.

It will be important to consider the *pingüino* movement within this historical narrative, while also recognizing the significance each student movement has on its own terms, particularly for the individual nation-state. That is, this thesis will not suggest that a new “wave” of student activism is sweeping the world today, as many will argue occurred in the New Left movements of the 1960s. All social movements

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2 “A revolutionary movement is a social movement that seeks, at minimum, to overthrow the government or state” (Goodwin and Jasper 2003). At no point did the *pingüinos* call for the overthrow of the Chilean government. See also Skocpol 1979.
continue to affect each other in such a global and information-driven age, but student movements are nuanced and complex, deserving attention first on their own historical, cultural and political grounds before extrapolating it to the larger arena of social change.

Meanwhile, though, we can take full advantage of the slew of literature and theory that arose during the 1960s and after concerning social movements that offer several different lenses with which to analyze the pingüinos. Social movements are no longer considered aberrations that indicate societal instability (e.g. Kornhauser 1957), but a complex alignment of factors, including types of resources held and utilized by participants (McCarthy & Zald 1977), relations among elites, governmental authorities and dissident groups (Tarrow 1998), cultural values or historical traditions of protest, and so on. This thesis will draw heavily from this literature and others’ works previously done on social movements (e.g. classical theorists like Marx), which has led to important insights into the way we analyze and explain social change.

A glance at the current literature reveals two immediate observations. The first is that social movement theories often disagree, highlighting ongoing tensions between disciplines like sociology, political science, and history, or between specific schools of social movement theory, like resource mobilization, political-process, materialist and cultural theorists. This thesis should consider these tensions and attempt to resolve them in the context of the pingüinos, while recognizing their importance in furthering discussion. Coming up with a catch-all theory for social movements would not only be unfeasible (i.e. too much variance among events to generalize and not see exceptions to the rule), but rather unhelpful. Trying to utilize
various modes of analysis, on the other hand, can only add to the overall understanding of the event, something this thesis will try to accomplish by looking at the pingüinos from a variety of theoretical perspectives, among them historical-cultural, structural, and political-economic.

The second observation is that case studies are the lifeblood of the social movement theorist. Without specific instances of social change, the theories would be useless. Sidney Tarrow, for example, examined Italian social movements before contributing to political-process theory (Tarrow 1967 and Tarrow 1989), while David Meyer looked at the politics of nuclear weapons prior to his political opportunity theory (Meyer 1990). We must therefore accurately capture the complexity of the pingüinos, as well as use case-comparison studies of social movements, to make any arguments that extend beyond Chile.

This thesis will rely on several types of sources to investigate the pingüinos. Some of the most useful research will stem from five months spent in Santiago, Chile from late July through December of 2006. Along with obtaining a general familiarity with Chilean politics, history and culture, I conducted several recorded interviews with Chilean high school students, who had marched in May and who continued to protest through the end of the year. This included a conversation with one of the movement’s main organizers, Julio Isamit, from the elite public school Instituto Nacional, interviews at the entrance to a meeting of the Asamblea, as well as discussions with student and teacher participants in a paro nacional [national strike] that occurred in October. That strike was part of a busy month that included a second (and far less successful) round of school takeovers, which revealed much about the accomplishments and disappointments of the earlier protests in May. The findings
during that time must be placed in the context of those current events, as well as weigh the bias of an American observer/interviewer, but overall should provide some critical supplementary evidence for the narrative of the events.

Most of the research will rely on various sources of print media that covered the events in detail. There are two major daily newspapers in Santiago, the conservative-leaning *El Mercurio* and the more centrist *La Tercera*, and both offered extensive coverage of the *pingüinos*. Other newspapers, including the afternoon paper *La Segunda*, the left-leaning daily *La Nación*, the Communist Party biweekly newspaper *El Siglo*, and the daily news tabloid *Las Últimas Noticias*, also lend unique perspectives on the movement. Finally, the daily newspaper *El Sur* provides an in-depth account of how the movement unfolded in the communities surrounding the third-largest city, Concepción, in the historically tumultuous VIII Region. The newspapers provide invaluable documentation of the busy and intense schedule of events that occurred during the three weeks in May and June, without which it would be impossible to understand the complexity of the movement. The coverage is also critical for doing further quantitative analysis (e.g. tracking the spread of takeovers, marches, and participation numbers) and for sources of social commentary. At the same time, description bias, selection bias, and observer bias must all be recognized, particularly in the context of social movements in which newspapers play dual roles of reporting the events and influencing the public’s opinion; the work of Earl et. al. (2004) is especially useful for understanding this.

Other sources of information include multimedia coverage of the events, including television and the Internet. While television has already been recognized as a critical part of the media, the *pingüinos* are one of the first social movement groups
in Chile to use the Internet as a venue for posting videos, photos and commentary, along with very practical uses like social-networking. For the purposes of research, the Internet has provided a useful source for obtaining alternative perspectives that otherwise would have been difficult or impossible to find.

Finally, there is a wide array of secondary material that is critical for identifying any larger cultural, historical, or political structures that influenced the pingüinos. Much has been done, for example, on the intense fissures between the right and left in the years prior to the 1973 coup (San Francisco and Soto 2005; Meller 2000; Valenzuela 1978). The foreign press has been wrapped up in the notion that the age of the pingüinos equaled that of Chile’s democracy (since its return in 1990),³ signifying some sort of step forward from the language of repression and division under the dictadura, the pejorative word for Augusto Pinochet’s military regime. In order to evaluate such a hypothesis, however, a detailed understanding of Chilean history is necessary, and this thesis will incorporate a historical narrative throughout the work, based not only on works chronicling the 1970s, but also ones that look through to the present day.

Along with historical understanding, there is also a need for clear knowledge of Chile’s education system, to determine how its structure may have influenced the timeline of events. Chile’s education system has already been recognized as unique due to its structuring along relatively orthodox free-market principles (begun under Pinochet), mixed with recent reforms to make the system more equitable and fair. Policy analyses (by the Chilean government and by Chilean educators), as well as

³ From the New York Times: “[President Bachelet] campaigned on the promise of more tolerant and nurturing leadership, and the students – teenagers with no memories of the Pinochet era and its political repression – seem to have taken her at her word.” (June 5, 2006: “Chilean Promised a New Deal; Now Striking Youth Demand It.”)
case-comparison studies, will be the most helpful in gaining a better understanding of Chile’s education system (Carnoy 2007; Cox 2006). The structure of the system and its bearing on students, parents, and the government must be taken into account when we examine the pingüinos.

Using this research, the thesis is structured into five parts. Chapter 1 will briefly summarize how the pingüinos solved the collective action problem, focusing on how the movement began and spread. It will take a special look at the change of tactics at the end of May from marches to tomas [takeovers], as well as the paro nacional of May 30, in which one million students throughout Chile took to the streets, including roughly 80% of all high school students. From there, the chapter will track the governmental response, the fissures within the movement, and the difficult process of reform later that year. To explain both the rise and decline of the movement, the chapter will draw upon social movement theory to come up with various hypotheses, and suggest which ones deserve closer attention.

Chapter 2 will explain the significance of the pingüinos for Chile and try to determine whether these were distinctively “Chilean” events. It will identify historical or cultural structures that must be looked at in order to understand present-day Chile, starting from the social movements of the 1970s to the return to democracy in the 1990s. The chapter will then use a cultural argument to explain how the pingüinos may be a unique product of the country’s history, to be followed by a critique of this argument to demonstrate how the pingüinos may instead be relevant to other Latin American cases or represent something new and different from the Chilean past. The chapter will conclude by evaluating the value of the popular
narrative of the *pingüinos* as youth returning to democracy and politics after a dark period of repression.

In **Chapter 3**, the education system of Chile will be examined as a possible contributing factor to the movement, and whether the *pingüinos* have revealed anything about structures of education in general. The chapter will begin by briefly describing the history of the Chilean education system and its structure as of the May 2006 protest. It will determine whether the system contributed to the rise of the *pingüinos* by offering choices for elites, breeding inequity, and providing opportunities for political action. At the same time, it will attempt to evaluate the significance of these factors in shaping the movement. Critiques of the Chilean education system and comparisons with other structures should provide predictions as to whether other education systems may expect to face similar movements like that of the *pingüinos*.

**Chapter 4** will return to the collective action problem in the context of youth protest and mobilization. The chapter will identify the role of youth in Chilean politics, including their relation with the political party system, with the media, and among themselves. Using social-network theory and theories on student activism, it will determine how the *pingüinos* do and do not reflect other student movements. The students’ age (high school, not university), their organizing tactics, and the politics of student leadership are among those factors that must be considered. The chapter will conclude by predicting the long-range implications of the *pingüinos* for student activism in Chile, and whether their model can or should be adopted by student activists in other places.
Finally, the thesis will conclude by reconciling these broad-based perspectives of the movement to assemble a more complete analysis of the movement. It will return to the initial hypotheses (cultural, materialist, political-process, and resource mobilization) on how the *pingüinos* solved the collective action problem. Given our knowledge of the movement’s significance to Chile, to structures of secondary education, and to mechanisms of youth-coalition building, how does this help explain the *pingüinos* as a social movement? The chapter will identify the distinctive qualities of the movement and evaluate how the *pingüinos* can contribute to our previous understanding of social movements, and/or what ways the *pingüinos* are not represented in the current literature and thus deserve more attention and further research. Along with suggesting specific areas for further inquiry, the chapter will conclude with some thoughts on the future of the *pingüinos* and their overall significance for both Chile and the world.

By studying the *pingüinos* in-depth, this thesis hopes to accomplish several things. First, it attempts to highlight an event that very few scholars outside of Chile have considered or looked at. It remains an open question whether secondary students have ever taken the streets in such high numbers, and therefore holds tremendous significance in the context of both Latin American youth movements and education-advocacy movements in general. Second, those that have shed light on the *pingüinos* have often oversimplified the movement as the triumph of Chilean youth, when the narrative is indeed much more nuanced. This thesis will demonstrate the complexity of the *pingüinos* and the implications beyond Chile.

Indeed, this thesis will strive to use the *pingüino* movement to advance the way we understand the art of making social change. What does the *pingüino*
revolution mean for future student struggles for a better education? Using Chile as a case study and social movement theory as a lens, this thesis suggests a more or less optimistic hope for student-initiated change. Using a variety of perspectives of the Chilean educational and political world, as well as other case studies concerning education and/or youth movements, it can be determined whether the Revolución Pingüina was an isolated incident or whether it holds lessons for the future. With proper investigation, these lessons should be able to guide both the academic and the activist towards a more coherent vision of education and social change in the larger world today.
Chapter 1: How the pingüinos solved the collective action problem

“They began marching, and taking schools over, and each time more schools joined in. We never thought that when Cesar and Karina invited all the schools in Chile to join the paro that they actually would. We never thought that the mobilization was going to occur outside of the Región Metropolitana [Santiago]. It was a huge surprise.”

- student leader María Huerta, INSUCO II

(Gutierrez 2007:24)
As asked whether he could have predicted that something like a ‘Penguin Revolution’ might occur, the former Minister of Education Martin Zilic retorted:

“Did anyone guess that the mapuches [Chilean indigenous people] were going to have a hunger strike? That isn’t foreseen, that just happens.”

(El Mercurio 5/27/06)

The explosion of the pingüino movement in late May of 2006, as well as its equally intriguing puttering out later the same year, presents a vexing problem for social movement theorists. How did so many students take the streets without prior organization or resource mobilization? And why in May, when there was no overt shift in the structure or tone of the government? To answer questions such as these, it is important to cross-examine the details of the events with the various existing theories on social movements. The missing pieces, as well as the connections, which respectfully emerge should help guide which explanations are more fitting, while suggesting areas in which the current research is lacking.

The movement’s beginnings, at first glance, are particularly perplexing. One possible strategy would be to identify what social movement theorist Sidney Tarrow identifies as “early risers” – well-placed actors whose claims give rise to coalitions and reduce the overall cost of collective action – as primary impetuses for the pingüinos (Tarrow 1998). Indeed, several events surrounding issues of education and inequity occurred in late April and early May that hinted of a growing call to action.

The first recorded school takeover, for instance, took place not in the capital city of Santiago (home to 40% of the population), but in Lota, one of the poorest
towns in Chile and located in the southern region of Bío Bío (Eighth Region). A group of parents and students, upset with the local municipality’s inaction on fixing the flood-damaged roof of their school, Liceo A-45, occupied the building on April 24, 2006 in protest, an action known in Chile as a toma. Police were called on the third day to dislodge the protest, prompting Liceo A-45 to move from toma to a state of paro, in which classes are canceled as a sign of protest. Meanwhile, two other public schools in Lota followed suit in support of their peers. The protests ended only after two extensive meetings between student leaders, school officials, and the mayor of Lota, who agreed to fix the infrastructure problems and work with officials to improve the quality of education in general (El Sur 4/27/06-4/29/06). Commenting on the discussions, the provincial head of education Juan Carriel Carriel stated the importance of maintaining “direct contact” with students in order to speed the process of change for the future (El Sur 4/27/06).

This brief but important exchange would become just one of several to eventually occur throughout Chile in the following months. The Lota protest stands as an ‘early riser,’ particularly due to its specific demands for infrastructure change (i.e. a new roof) alongside more general (and largely undefined) calls for an improved education system. It was also noteworthy for the type of action chosen by its participants – namely, the decision to take over the school instead of march or petition the local government. At the same time, the students of Lota should not be regarded as some type of vanguard for the ‘Penguin Revolution,’ as their participation took place completely separate to any of the organizing that some of their peers in

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4 An article in El Sur (5/25/06) showed that unemployment rates in the Eighth Region were disproportionately worse than the rest of the country (e.g. the community of Talcahuano, for example, had an unemployment rate of 17%).

5 Toma stems from the verb tomar, which translates as ‘to take’ or ‘to seize.’
Santiago were engaged in. Lota, in brief, was a precursory event, a reflection of the frustration that many Chilean students were feeling about their education and the degree to which they were willing to vent that frustration.

Meanwhile, initial events in the capital city of Santiago helped push the pingüino agenda to the forefront. Marches like the one described in the introduction on April 26, as well as subsequent marches on May 4 and May 10 attracted significant media attention, although reports focused mostly on the violence surrounding each one (El Sur 4/27/06, 5/11/06; El Mercurio 4/27/06, 5/5/06, 5/11/06). The photos of protesting secundarios [high school students] were not that new to the Chilean public, which had seen its share of student mobilizations. Along with a rich tradition of youth and student activism, the country had already witnessed two major student protests in the 21st century, beginning in 2001 with the ‘mochilazo’ movement for lower transportation passes by high school students and another series of protests in 2005 by university students demanding financial aid (González et. al 2007). Both protests were marked by demonstrations, and, in the 2001 ‘mochilazo’ case, with the suspension of classes (paro) at several schools. The mobilizations also both enjoyed relative success, with student demands being at least partially met by the government. (Gutiérrez 2006: 51)

This time, though, the Asamblea in Santiago tried to structure the protest around three demands that, according to student leaders, the past presidential administration of Ricardo Lagos had failed to address:

1) free transportation passes for students;
2) free national college entrance exams; and
3) reform of the Jornada Escolar Completa

(La Nación 4/27/06, 5/12/06)
While the first demand was a perennial hot topic for students (who almost all commute to school or university using public transportation), the second and third demands were slightly more recent and distinct.

For instance, the national college entrance exam known as the *Prueba de Selección Universitaria (PSU)*, had always remained in the exclusive hands of the *Universidad de Chile*, the oldest and most prestigious public university in the country. The lack of transparency regarding both the design and the cost of the exam (which had just increased 5%) exasperated students who understood the critical relation between exam performance, college admission, and ultimately, one’s future career. Not only students recognized this, but rectors of rival Chilean universities and legislators as well, such as House representative and teacher María Antonieta Saa (PPD - *Partido por la Democracia*):

“The student who attends a *municipalizado* (municipal) school cannot enter into a career in medicine, even if they do have good grades, because they do badly on the *PSU*. Yet the student who attends a *privado* (private) school takes test prep classes, gets a good grade and goes to the career that he/she wants... the admissions process has become transformed into a social privilege.” (*La Nación* 4/28/06)

With feelings like these, and test registration around the corner – as well as an upcoming election in May for the new rector of the *Universidad de Chile* – the issue of the *PSU* was particularly relevant and thus a smart wedge issue for the *pingüinos* to pursue.

As for the third demand, the reform of the *Jornada EscolarCompleta* (Full School Day) program, there was both a practical and symbolic importance behind it. Practically, the Ministry of Education had just announced on April 20 that the program would not complete its goal on time to fix school infrastructure, improve
curriculum and implement other education reform measures. This marked the second time since the program was announced in 2002 that the government had been forced to push back the deadline due to inefficiency and lack of funds (El Sur 4/21/06). Moreover, the schools still due for improvements were notably in some of the hotbeds of student protest: the Región Metropolitana (Santiago) and the southern Eighth and Ninth Regions (La Nación 4/21/06). But there was also symbolic meaning behind the students’ demand for JEC reform. By protesting for something other than immediate rewards like free bus passes and test waivers, the pingüinos were attempting to highlight the more fundamental inequity problems facing the Chilean education system. The JEC was not just a federal government project, but one that depended on the involvement and funding of regional bodies.6 And its failure to be completed on time underscored the organizational and structural flaws inherent in the present education system.

Despite this distinct agenda, the early marches of April and May 2006 in Santiago were not considered extraordinary by most measures of the Chilean media or public. The Asamblea Organizada de Estudiantes Secundarios, still a relatively unknown entity on the national scene, was quick to repudiate the violence witnessed in the marches but made it clear that they wanted a stake in the negotiations. Martin Zilic, the Minister of Education at the time, responded positively to the idea of talking but struck a somewhat condescending tone: “They said they’re going to protest first and talk later” (El Mercurio 5/5/06). Others were more blunt, accusing the students

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6 A letter to the editor of La Nación from Fernando Verdugo Valenzuela of the Chilean Association of Municipalities demonstrates this point. In it he supports the decentralization efforts of the state and identifies both universities and municipalities as critical players. He criticizes the Chilean government for not lending enough support to the municipalities, “who often don’t have sufficient resources to support the implementation and maintenance of new schools…” (La Nación 4/28/06)
of being pawns for the more radical, Santiago branch of the teachers’ union, the Colegio de Profesores (La Nación 5/9/06).

The dismissive attitude of the government was forced to shift when the protests grew in size and intensity on May 10. Events occurred in thirteen cities and most included some degree of public vandalism and damage. In Santiago, a march devolved into attacks on city buses and local shops, as well as an assault on a plainclothes officer; there were 930 arrests and more than $30 million in damage (El Mercurio 5/11/06). A disproportionately high amount of contestation was witnessed in the Eighth Region, home to poor towns like Lota and activist leanings towards issues like indigenous rights.

While impressive for its amount of activity, the target of the May 10 violence was not well-defined, and participants included youth and adult anarchists. It had not yet attracted widespread adherence either, as several schools in Concepción, for example, chose not to march because “the same problems [in Santiago] don’t always affect us.” As for the Asamblea, they distanced themselves from the violence and admitted that the events had gotten “a bit out of hand.” Ironically though, the government announced on the same day that registration fees for the national entrance exam PSU would be waived for an additional 28,000 low-income students, sending a mixed message to the pingüinos.

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7 Seremi Alejandro Traverso (regional director of education for the Región Metropolitana, which includes Santiago): “I have the impression that at the very least this is not a movement that arose from gremial or student interests, but instead born out of politics and from Abedrapo [the head of the Santiago Colegio de Profesores Metropolitano], who I know, and therefore, know that we’re talking facetiously.” (La Nación, 5/9/2006)

8 Claudio Iturra Iturra, the president of Liceo Enrique Molina Garmendia, the third oldest school in Chile (El Sur 5/10/06).

9 Maria Jesús Sanhueza, a spokeswoman for the Asamblea (El Mercurio 5/11/06)
By the following week in May, students began having open discussions about their education system and the possible ways of voicing their dissatisfaction with it: to continue talking without overt action, to go into paro by not attending school, or to go into toma, in which students would physically take over the school building. The Asamblea called for another march on May 18, prompting Minister Zilic to suspend talks until the “youth responsibly assume their roles as student leaders.” (El Sur 5/17/06). But the most important decision was taken by two well-known public schools, the traditionally progressive Liceo de Aplicación and the elite, prestigious all-boys Instituto Nacional, which both went into toma, locking their school gates to everyone but students. Rumor had it that other ‘emblematic’ schools like Liceo No 1 “Javiera Carrera” (President Bachelet’s alma mater) and Liceo A-13 (ex-Confederación Suiza) would be soon to follow (La Nación 5/20/06). This was a dramatic departure from the marches of April and May, and hearkened back to some of the more radical takeovers of the 1960s. Leaders called it a turning point in the moment:

“It was bacan [awesome], an honor. If we hadn’t taken over the school, the rest would never have either. We were the first, together with Instituto [Nacional]…I believe that we prevailed because of this, and we won respect and the admiration of other schools, while at the same time it radicalized us…”

- Gonzalo Cabrera Rubio, student president, Liceo de Aplicación

(Gutiérrez 2006:22-23)

“Now the press couldn’t say that the secondary students were causing damages, and that instead they were going to show off banners like ‘Abajo la LOCE’ [Down with the LOCE]. This without a doubt changed public opinion about

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10 The march attracted 2000 students and ended with 566 arrests, including one female student from Puente Alto who was found to have a gun. This spurred another round of admonishments from administrators such as Minister Zilic: “If someone had died they wouldn’t be telling me that we were too tough, but rather that we had not done enough policing in the streets.” (La Nación 5/19/06)
us, it was like a second cycle that characterized the ‘Revolución Pingüina.’
With the *tomas* we earned the respect of society.”
- Karina Delfino, spokesperson for the *Asamblea (Liceo N°1)*
  (Gutiérrez 2006: 85)

By changing the rules of the game, the *pingüinos* had effectively injected a new and effective “repertoire of contention” (Tarrow 1998) to the marches and *paros* already in use.

As the movement headed into the weekend, all eyes were on President Michelle Bachelet, who on Sunday, May 21, was to deliver her first ‘state of the union’ address in Valparaiso. In her speech, Bachelet laid out four major goals for her presidency, one of which was education reform: she proposed expanding preschool education and providing additional aid for the neediest schools. Most relevant to the *pingüinos*, however, was not Bachelet’s vision for the future, but her forceful declaration against violent protest:

> “I will tolerate neither vandalism nor destruction nor intimidation! I will apply the full extent of the law. We achieved democracy without covering our faces and we ought to continue with uncovered faces.” *(El Mercurio 5/22/06)*

The reference to the *cara discubierta* (uncovered face) was both a direct appeal to the past struggle for democracy under the military regime of Augusto Pinochet, as well as a veiled threat against activists known as *encapuchados* (literally, the hooded or hoodlums) who wear scarves to hide their faces while using violent direct action. The attempt to de-legitimize the movement backfired to a degree, however, as several *pingüinos* seized on the message to demonstrate that their demands were both legitimate, as well as nonviolent (e.g. a photo that week
showed students with a banner reading, “Luchamos a Rostro Descubierto,” or “We fight with uncovered faces”) (El Mercurio 5/24/06)

The day after Bachelet’s speech, four more schools were taken over by students. At one school, Liceo Lastarria in Providencia, a middle-class neighborhood in Santiago, the mayor attempted to negotiate with students, only to encounter insults and a refusal to talk. The relationship between schools and city district mayors, who had the ultimate say over whether police could dislodge the schools, would become a sticking point throughout the movement, reflecting a divided and uncoordinated elite. Mayors were split on the appropriate approach to the pingüinos, who were, after all, only teenagers. Some refused to call the police and looked to the Ministry of Education for support, while other mayors called on their colleagues to “put on some pants” and dislodge the tomas.

Meanwhile, the teachers’ union was similarly unsure of how to respond, with the Communist wing calling for unequivocal support for the pingüinos, while others wanted a more nuanced approach. As for the national government, they remained quiet, hoping perhaps to play down the growing movement.

By May 25, however, there were too many pingüinos to ignore: Over 100 schools had taken some type of action, interrupting education for approximately 100,000 secondary students and costing millions of pesos daily (El Mercurio 5/26/06). In the regions, mayors had to respond to specific demands (e.g. a new roof in Colonel), while Minister Zilic countered by setting the following Monday, May 29, as a day for student leaders to meet and negotiate with the national

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11 According to El Mercurio’s analysis of the address, this declaration, along with a promise to pursue justice for those who ‘disappeared’ under Pinochet, received the most applause.
12 Pablo Zalaquett, mayor of La Florida and president of the Chilean Association of Municipalities (El Mercurio 5/24/06)
government. Students reacted both positively and negatively, with some decrying the proposition as a “strategy to put down the movement.”¹³ By then, however, the movement was receiving support from several influential allies, including the main parent association of Santiago, various university student governments, and the previously divided teachers’ union. Even the Catholic Church was willing to mediate with students, implicitly giving the pingüinos the same status as some of Chile’s most important stakeholders¹⁴ (El Mercurio 5/25/06).

Political parties began to weigh in on the issue. Leaders from the Concertación, the centrist-leftist alliance that has retained the legislative majority and the presidency since the return to democracy in 1990, met with Minister Zilic and vowed to talk about education reform. Others pointed out that the founding order of the education system, the Ley Orgánica Constitucional de Enseñanza (LOCE), was passed in the final years of the Pinochet years:

“I share their critique [of the LOCE]. We have a bad memory. The ley orgánica de la enseñanza was the last ley de amarre [lame-duck law; bitter law] by Pinochet before he left the Palace of La Moneda, 48 hours before he stepped down from power he left us this little gift.”

- Camilo Escalona, senator and president of the Partido Socialista (La Nación 5/24/06)

Politicians from the right, on the other hand, emphasized the inept and uncoordinated government response that allowed education to become an issue in the first place: “The Concertación cannot blame others for this crisis. The

¹³ Asamblea spokesperson Karina Delfino (El Mercurio 5/26/06).
protesters are 16 years old, the same age as those that are in power.”15 As for President Bachelet, the issue was presenting difficulties, given her hard-line stance the week before and her relative silence since. At a visit to a nylon factory, she stated off-handedly that the government was monitoring the conflict and would continue to support Minister Zilic’s attempts to resolve it (El Mercurio 5/25/06).

In the run-up to the Monday negotiations, both sides tried to gain the upper hand. The Asamblea, which had quickly become the mouthpiece of the pingüinos, threatened to organize a paro nacional, a sort of general strike for students, if the talks did not go well: “We are right and we are many, which is why we are not going to bend our position.”16 At the same time, Minister Zilic was not so much trying to improve his bargaining power as he was deflecting criticism that he had gone back on his original position, which was to not talk to students occupying buildings. President Bachelet found herself coming to Zilic’s defense again, forcefully stating that there was “no contradiction or turning of the hand, but a decision to sit down to talk, to listen” (El Mercurio 5/27/06). Yet only a day later, Minister Zilic would make a preemptive offer to the pingüinos, which included waiving the cost of the PSU for public school students, a free transportation pass for the poorest 60%, and more grants for basic things like food in school. The pingüinos refused, citing several other petitions that were ignored (e.g. ceding control of the municipal schools to the Ministry). With support from much of the public (an El Mercurio survey [5/28/06] showed 69% of the public

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14 Despite this statement by the Church, it was not immune to the protests: the following day a march to Rancangua ended with students pelting the house of a senior Church official with rocks (El Mercurio 5/26/06).
15 Seremi Alejandro Traverso (El Mercurio 5/26/06).
supporting the movement), as well as key allies like teachers and parents, the movement excitedly headed into the Monday negotiations.

The meeting was, in brief, a disaster. Two hundred students arrived at the Ministry of Education, but the room designated for the talks could only accommodate forty. With students packed inside and many more screaming to be let in, the negotiations lasted only fifty minutes before being broken up. The pingüinos, visibly upset and complaining of a “lack of respect” for students who had traveled to Santiago from various parts of the country, reconvened at a nearby occupied school. The government promised a dialogue as soon as the students selected a smaller group to negotiate with. But the news did little to appease the pingüinos, who promptly announced a paro nacional for the following day, Tuesday, May 30.

The paro nacional demonstrated the strength of the movement and may be described as the closest to the peak of the ‘revolución.’ The numbers speak for themselves: 939 high schools participated with over 790,000 students, almost 80% of all secondary students in the country (El Mercurio 5/31/06). Alongside them were 100,000 university students whose student governments had decided to join in solidarity with the pingüinos. Marches took place throughout Chile, with at least some type of action in virtually every town, and major protests occurring in places such as Valparaiso (10,000 students) and Antofagasta (12,000 students). In Santiago, there was less marching and more violence, including 619 arrests, while 17 civilians and 11 police officers were wounded (El Mercurio 5/31/06). This was partly due to what was perceived by many as excessive force by the

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Carabineros, the Chilean national police force. Officers employed tear gas and water cannons against the protesters in several locations, including just outside the National Library, where negotiations were taking place with pingüino leaders (who suspended talks for several minutes to attend to their classmates suffering from the effects of tear gas).

Amidst student outcries of abuse, the media and government responded. On the nightly television news broadcast, the well-known host (and head of the journalists’ association) Alejandro Guiller called the carabineros’ actions that day an “embarrassment for Chile.” (El Mercurio 5/31/06). This was accompanied by an apology from a police general who admitted that there had been “unjustifiable excesses” on the part of the authorities, and that there would be an investigation. The next day, eight officers were suspended and two police chiefs were fired. President Bachelet made her first public appearance since the paro next to Guiller to declare her “indignation” over the events, calling them an “excess, an abuse, an act of repugnant and unjustifiable violence.” (El Mercurio 5/31/06). They were strong words from the president, but not unsurprising considering her strong stance on human rights and her own history of protest and exile during the military regime.

The overwhelming student participation, along with the public sympathy due to the excessive police force, gave the pingüinos what Minister Zilic described as a ‘pecho hinchado’ [a ‘puffed-up chest’] (El Mercurio 5/31/06). They continued to insist on getting what many knew to be impossible demands, particularly the idea of free transportation for all students. Demonstrations, often tinged with violence, continued throughout the week and throughout the country.
Another *paro nacional* was threatened for the following Monday, June 5, if the government did not respond to the demands of the *pingüinos*.

President Bachelet, now heavily involved with the government response, went on television on June 1 to announce what she thought were feasible and reasonable concessions. Calling the protests a “great opportunity” to change the education system and for the country to come together, she stated her support for improved school infrastructure, for more grants towards basic student needs, and for the creation of a presidential advisory council to help come up with long-term solutions, which included, she said, the possibility of reforming the LOCE (*El Mercurio* 6/2/06). At the same time, Bachelet was forthcoming about the feasibility of offering a free transportation pass to all students. She would extend the hours of discounted service for students to all-day, every-day, but she could not make it free. And she would not centralize the municipal schools that many *pingüinos* saw as the most dire in need of government intervention. In brief, if there was going to be change, it would come in parts, not in one wave of radical restructuring.

The *pingüinos* were left to decide whether they should agree to President Bachelet’s terms. In a contentious meeting of the Asamblea on June 2, students debated between declaring victory through compromise and calling off the next round of mobilization, or remaining resilient and continuing to demand more substantial reforms. After a last-ditch attempt to negotiate with Minister Zilic, the *pingüinos* made it clear that they considered the government’s proposal “unsatisfactory” and that the next *paro nacional* would take place as scheduled (*El Mercurio* 6/3/06).
However, it was clear that fissures were beginning to appear within the student movement, underscored by the resignation of student leader Cesar Valenzuela as one of the four voceros [spokespeople] of the Asamblea. Conservative students from Instituto Nacional, as well as some parents, felt that the movement was becoming radicalized by the left. A new political strategy to broaden the paro nacional to supportive gremial organizations and syndicates also caused stirrings, punctuated by a controversial meeting between pingüinos, organizers from the Central Unitaria de Trabajadores (CUT), and leftist ex-presidential candidate Tomas Hirsch. The strategy seemed to backfire when neither the CUT nor the Communist Party pledged to take the streets (they would support the movement in name only), but the radical anarchist organization, Frente Patriótica Manuel Rodriguez did, spurring a quick denunciation by the government.

The second paro nacional on June 5 continued to attract large numbers of participants, but found less sympathy from a tiring public. Demonstrations, some of which had continued nonstop since the previous paro nacional, occurred throughout the country, and were mostly peaceful. Those in Santiago, however, were substantially more violent, including 23 police officers hurt and around $27 million in damages to buses, banks and stores (El Mercurio 6/6/06). This was due in part to the increased presence of encapuchados and anarchists: Of the 266 arrests, the majority were adults, something previously not seen during the movement. The government condemned the violence and stated that “we frankly do not understand why the demonstrations are continuing” (El Mercurio 6/7/06). A last-minute attempt by a legislator to mediate on behalf of the pingüinos was
similarly dismissed by the government. Instead, Bachelet held an open meeting with the entire executive branch where she demanded, among other things, “a government that anticipates problems and doesn’t just react to them.” (El Mercurio 6/7/06). It was a not-so-veiled critique of her own government’s handling of the pingüinos, as well as a clear statement that the conflict, for all intensive purposes, was over.

Indeed, the movement appeared to be losing steam. By the end of the week, more than 250 schools had decided to stop their mobilizations. It was a difficult final meeting of the pingüinos that took place on June 9 in the emblematic Instituto Nacional, where students had just decided to return to school as well. Several pingüinos accused their leaders of radicalizing the movement, while others maintained that they had not gone far enough. Karina Delfino, one of the more moderate student voices, became the second spokesperson to resign. At the final press conference, the Asamblea announced two important things: First, that they would participate in the Consejo Asesor Presidencial to reform the education system, despite objections to the amount of representation given to students. Second, and more importantly, the pingüinos resolved to return to school, while insisting that the movement would continue.

A couple weeks passed before things returned to some degree of normalcy in Chile. Several schools did not accept the Asamblea’s resolution and continued in toma for up to a week longer. At most schools, however, the pingüinos cleaned up the schools they had occupied and ceremoniously removed the chains off the school gates that had kept teachers and parents from coming in. School would continue into winter vacation (early-mid July) to make up for the lost time. The
government, meanwhile, underwent a minor but not insignificant cabinet shake-up in late June that included the resignations of Minister Zilic and the Minister of the Interior, Andrés Zaldivar, both of whom had been heavily involved in the protests. The other major news was the formation of the Consejo Asesor Presidencial, which began to meet and issued a preliminary draft four months later.

This ignited another, albeit brief, round of protests in October that reflected some of the disillusionment being felt by pingüinos. The preliminary draft, 107 pages long and full of footnotes noting various dissenting members, showed the tremendous ideological differences between the various stakeholders over the future of the Chilean education. The nuanced approach of the Consejo went unappreciated by the pingüinos, who began to mobilize again. When some schools voted to go into paro or toma, however, the authorities quickly repressed the movement. Mayors were more quick to allow police to come in and dislodge the schools, while President Bachelet stated bluntly that the “hour of paros are over” (El Mercurio 10/14/06). Meanwhile, the influential allies from May were either silent or pledged nominal support: university federations wanted to continue working with the Consejo, while the teachers union had reached an “historic agreement” with the government over teacher pay. Despite tomas by some of the elite schools, the majority of the public was unsympathetic, and the movement fizzled out once again in late October.

As of this writing, the pingüinos have somewhat fallen from public prominence since around the end of 2006, displaced by various other scandals and issues; e.g. the new and near-disaster public transportation initiative in Santiago,
and most recently, allegations of corruption by the new minister of education, Yasne Provoste. The student protests of 2006 remain fresh in the public memory, however, and the threat of further mobilization is not out of the question. For instance, the eve of this year’s ‘Día del Joven Combatiente’ (Day of the Youth Combatant)\(^{17}\) witnessed various violent confrontations between students and police (300 participants, 185 arrests), while some schools like Liceo Lastarria in Santiago turned the day into a *jornada de reflexión* (period of reflection) to evaluate the “status of the student movement” ([La Tercera](http://www.la-tercera.cl/3/29/08); [Lastarria website](http://www.lastarria.cl), 3/29/08). The pingüinos may be quieter today, but they have not disappeared, and there is nothing to indicate that they cannot return in full strength at a time of their choosing.

Indeed, the pingüino organizational might may be their most lasting legacy. After the May mobilization, the *Asamblea* continued to play a prominent role in the negotiations and protests of September and October. Student leaders also worked with teachers to organize marches and meetings under an umbrella coalition called the “*Bloque Social por la Educación*” (Social Block for Education). While this group appears to have fallen into disuse,\(^{18}\) another has apparently arisen to replace it under the heading, *Asamblea Nacional por la Educación*.

This new *Asamblea*, however, should not be considered extraordinary, as it is reminiscent of the old extraparliamentary left coalition that has always believed that the *Concertación* reforms have been inadequate and that what is

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\(^{17}\) The day, March 29, commemorates the suspicious deaths of two brothers in 1985 who belonged to the *Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria* (MIR), and is typically recognized by protests and sometimes violence ([La Tercera](http://www.la-tercera.cl/3/29/08)).

\(^{18}\) The group last posted an event on their website, bloquesocial.cl, in May of 2007.
truly necessary is a radical restructuring of the education system that eliminates the market-based approach.19 Along with student leaders from universities and high schools, the group is made up of predictable stakeholders: the Colegio de Profesores, Central Unitaria de Trabajadores (CUT), and the Agrupación Nacional de Empleados Fiscales. In its first public action (and a reflection of its legitimacy), the Asamblea Nacional por la Educación met with government officials in March 2008 to demand a new “General Law of Education” that will ‘corregir el rumbo’ (change direction) (La Nación 3/19/08). In addition, the group threatens further mobilization and a conference in June to discuss changes; it remains to be seen how effective their lobbying will be.

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There are a number of ways to analyze the revolución pingüina described above. This thesis will examine four possible explanations, to be introduced below and revisited later:

1) The first, a materialist argument, focuses on the market-based model of the Chilean education system and views the pingüino movement principally as a contest between classes for access to a quality education that was seen as critical for gaining material wealth.

2) The second explanation, based on resource mobilization theory, posits that a social movement industry already existed surrounding the issue of education, which allowed certain individuals and organizations to effectively mobilize participants.

3) The third lens for examining the movement relies on political-process theory, highlighting the structural changes – in the government, among influential allies and opponents, and within the movement itself - that propelled the pingüinos to successful mobilization.

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19 In a letter delivered to the government on March 18, 2008, the group writes that “the root of all these anomalies resides in a philosophy of education that coverts it into a market and that our school system is a market based on wealth.” (La Nación 3/19/08).
Lastly, a **cultural** explanation points to historical precedent and Chilean-specific customs and practices as the critical drivers for producing the *pingüino* movement.

To delve into each explanation more specifically, the materialist argument deserves considerable attention. Chile, while possessing one of the more stable and prosperous economies in Latin America, is also a country with glaring inequalities. An education system designed to act as a market for parents – vis-à-vis government support for private schools, a vigorous school voucher program (*subvención*), and decentralized public school funding – only sharpens the differences between classes. Critics point to statistics like test score disparities between expensive private schools and public *municipalizado* schools, or the fact that half of the CEOs from the country’s 100 largest businesses come from just five of the most elite private schools in Chile, to demonstrate the overwhelming influence of elites in Chile. The *pingüino* movement, they contend, was twofold: first, the successful adoption of the lower-class struggle in education as the ‘notorious crime’ of the whole society, and second, the ultimate victory of the elite that appropriated the true material conflicts of the lower class (e.g. school infrastructure, food waivers, etc.) for either petty or lofty demands (e.g. free

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20 See the United Nations’ Human Development Report 2007-2008, which delivers an overall positive assessment of the country, ranking it 40th among 177 countries with data. Only one other Latin American county (Argentina) ranks higher overall, while Chile leads the continent in life expectancy (78.3 years old) and has an impressive literacy rate of 95.7%. However, the Gini index (a common measure of income distribution) for Chile is 54.9, the third highest among the 70 countries with ‘high human development’ (only Panama and Brazil have higher gini indexes), p. 281-282.

21 *La Tercera* commissioned a study that looked at gerentes (CEOs) from 100 Chilean businesses whose revenues top US $80 million a year. Even though five out of every ten Chilean students study in public schools, only 14% of the CEOs had attended public school, while 84% had attended private school. And half had come from the five most prestigious private schools: *Verbo Divino*, *Sagrados Corazones de Manquehue*, *Saint George*, *San Ignacio*, and *Tabancura* (*La Tercera* 3/30/08).

22 From “Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right: Introduction” (1843): “A particular social sphere must be regarded as the *notorious crime* of the whole society, so that emancipation from this sphere appears as a general emancipation…” (Marx, p. 63)
transportation pass, number of representatives at the negotiating table). In short, a
materialist explanation emphasizes the very real class undertones of the conflict,
while playing skeptic to the narrative of a universal youth movement for change.

To defend a materialist perspective, the linkages between wealth and
participation need further exploration. While provocations like the toma in Lota
highlight the tremendous diversity of needs in the arena of education, the
pingüino movement grew only when elites in Santiago participated, garnering
attention from other the media and influential allies. Their demands for waivers
and passes were also grounded in the belief that the poorest could not afford the
costs of getting access to college – a clearly lower-class interest being waged by
middle- and upper-class students. Similarly, it is also significant that there was
widespread support from private schools, despite the lack of incentive on their
part to protest an educational system that favors them. A strict class explanation
has its merits, but deserves a more nuanced analysis to iron out these
discrepancies.

Resource mobilization theory, on the other hand, highlights those individuals
and organizations with the means to launch a social movement (McCarthy & Zald
1977). For the pingüinos, there were a number of social movement organizations
(SMOs) that were able to mobilize students, parents, and/or teachers. Some
structures can be traced to the pingüinos, such as the system of centro de alumnos,
which imbued schools with a political and activist atmosphere, while clearly
designating student leaders to represent and lead. Other institutions, such as the
teachers’ union and parent groups, already had significant resources and political
sway, allowing them to easily integrate themselves into the movement, while
sometimes changing the dynamics of the movement (e.g. opening up larger debates that sometimes strayed from the initial objectives of the pingüinos). Meanwhile, other narratives emphasized several leftist and university SMOs that supported the student movement, arguing a kind of ‘outsider’ conspiracy to radicalize the students. While the validity of these outside-mobilization ‘conspiracy’ theories are worth exploring, they add further evidence that an education-related social movement industry (SMI) was present, viable, and with the potential to explode.

Critics of the resource mobilization theory would point to a couple of aspects of the movement that do not agree. Foremost of these is the difficulty in ascertaining what resources changed that suddenly propelled participation rates from virtually none to everyone (and rather quickly too). Unless the conspiracy of the left is granted considerable weight, the resources were spread out and without direction. La Asamblea, the supposed student coordinator of the movement, was at the start of protests nowhere close to being an SMO that could mobilize students from all over the country. And many of the “early risers” (Tarrow 1998) of the movement from the countryside, had very little access to the money or the time that resource mobilization theory requires to initiate change. If resources are to be the primary indicator of change, the complexities of the pingüino movement do not seem to hold answers.

Whereas resource mobilization theorists examine the internal workings of the participating groups, political process theorists emphasize the changes that occurred around those groups, particularly any shifts in the structure of the government (Tarrow 1994). One narrative that resonates with the political process theory is that of the presidential election of Michelle Bachelet, the first female president of Chile who was sworn in just two months before the protests began. This story has some
merits, but it fails to find much initial evidence among Chileans, at least on the terms of whether Bachelet represented a wave of change. That does not mean, however, that it is not worth considering her election, even if it was simply a changing of the guard, as a shift in the exterior and a possible opportunity for contestation. In the same vein, more compelling arguments may be made for minor shifts in the government and certain alliances that allowed the pingüinos to launch their social movement in late May. Reports after the events revealed significant fissures, for example, in the Ministry of Education, which made it difficult later on for the government to suppress the early actions of the movement. That being said, while divisions among elites and an overall feeling of new leadership may have helped usher in Bachelet’s first real challenge as president, they do not completely explain why that challenge centered on education and not something else.

A cultural outlook highlights Chilean models of protest as the main drivers of change that compelled the pingüinos to take the streets in a unique, ‘Chilean’ way. For example, many pingüinos found common ground in their opposition to the Organic Constitutional Law on Teaching (la LOCE), one of the last laws passed during Pinochet’s regime (The system has undergone a few reforms since Chile’s return to democracy, but the LOCE remains on paper the guiding organizational principle). By tying the educational system to the dictadura, the pingüinos found an emotional outlet for change. In a similar vein, the disproportionately high levels of protest in the southern provinces might also be explained by the history of demonstrations and unrest that has occurred in that region for decades. If the parents understood the ‘art of moral protest’ (Jasper 1997), cultural theorists would contend, why shouldn’t their children too?
It is in the same light that one might look at the culture of protest in Chile as a sign of why a ‘revolution’ of the pingüinos might have seemed necessary. Since the 1970s, the threshold of political theater has been set very high. The takeover of schools has precedent (political process theorists would call it the ‘repertoire of contestation’) in the tomas of La Catolica (Catholic University of Chile) and other universities. Teacher unions and other unions routinely take the streets to demand better wages or conditions. Finally, demonstrations that took place right before and after the pingüinos (e.g. the mapuche hunger strike before, and burning tires in a squatting campaign after) confirm the extreme nature of Chilean protest relative to what is typically seen in the United States, for example. As some students have claimed, social movements require violence in order to be noticed in Chile.

In conclusion, the pingüinos evoked greater participation and attracted more attention than almost any other movement in recent Chilean memory. There was a vibrant culture of the pingüino, from the painted faces of protesters to nicknames for certain student leaders (e.g. Commandante Conejo, or Commander Rabbit). The events continued to evoke strong reactions from teachers, parents, and former pingüinos, evidenced by the re-vuelta [return] of school takeovers that took place in October 2006. Indeed, the pingüinos solved the collective action problem with relatively few resources and in very little time. The above hypotheses offer some possible explanations, but suggest that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to explaining the pingüinos. As we explore the relevance of the pingüinos in a number of different contexts – for Chile, for a market-driven education system, and for youth activism – it may be possible to expand on these theories and suggest new modes of analyzing social movements.
Chapter 2 – The pingüino movement and Chile

“Yo lo expreso de manera provocativa, al decir que la autoría intelectual del movimiento estudiantil le pertenece a Bachelet, porque las expectativas que ella abre y las razones por las que la gente votó por ella, se corresponden con esta movilización.”

“It would be provocative for me to say so, but the intellectual branch of the student movement belongs to Bachelet, because she raised expectations and the reasons the people voted for her correspond to this movement.”

- Pepe Auth, secretary general of the Partido por la Democracia (PPD) (El Sur 6/11/06)
The revolution of the pingüinos, for all of its divisions and setbacks, was hailed by many Chileans as a proud moment in their country’s difficult recent history. Civil society, long a source of national pride for what was once considered Latin America’s most vibrant and sturdy democracies, had played a cautious and altogether lackluster role in the new civilian governments of the 1990s. Older generations were particularly worried about youth participation, seeing as many of their children had grown up under the Pinochet dictatorship, which had spurned political organization among political parties and grassroots groups alike (Oppenheim 1999). The mood was perhaps best reflected in a popular saying about Chilean youth, “no están ni ahí” – that they basically “didn’t give a damn.”

Suddenly, though, Chilean youth were in the streets, demanding change. Leaders were trying to move beyond the debate over cheaper transportation, which had typified the student movement in the past and only fatigued the public and press. Instead, teachers’ unions, university federations, parent associations, and high school grassroots organizations were marching together, spanning class and regional divisions. While such a movement a decade ago might have evoked fears of a fledgling democracy at risk again, by 2006 it was confidently heralded as a reflection of how far the country had come. Both domestic and foreign press made much of the fact that the youth were the same age as the re-emergent democracy, allegedly enabling them to take the streets without the mental and emotional baggage

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23 See, for example, two letters to the editor published in La Nación on consecutive days, 5/23/06 and 5/24/06. The first, “Violencia juvenil y responsabilidad” is written by Jorge Parragué López, a political scientist, who describes the “youthful face” of street violence that afflicts Chilean society. He blames disillusioned student leaders for the violence. Meanwhile, “La marcha de los pinguinos,” by education academic Ilich Silva-Peña, also recognizes the ability of high school students to consistently take the streets (in 1957, during the 1980s, etc), but paints them in a much more positive light.
of repression under Pinochet. Even President Bachelet, who by all accounts was dealing with the most serious crisis in her barely two-month old presidential term, was quick to acknowledge that “in a democracy, everyone has the right to mobilize” (New York Times 6/4/06). If the pingüino movement was a ‘revolution,’ it was as much symbolic as productive, and as much reassurance for the parents as it was energizing for their children.

Understanding this historical and cultural background is critical to analyzing the pingüinos. Student protests occur all around the world, all deserving of narration and explanation. What happened in Chile, though, was seen by many as something unique: a sign of new times, a rebirth of civil society, a reality check on the new democracy, an emerging new Left coalition, etc. Exploring these ideas are crucial for distilling the pingüinos and to debunk some of the mythmaking that has incorrectly arisen in the movement’s wake. Through cultural and historical lens, this chapter will attempt to sort out what makes the pingüino movement a distinctively ‘Chilean’ event (i.e. maybe more worthy of national attention), and what makes it relevant to a larger audience. There is ample evidence for both claims.

First though, it is necessary to briefly outline a trajectory of Chilean politics that places the pingüino movement at the end of a long and often painful history. It begins in a country that has boasted of having the longest and most stable democracy in Latin America. The Constitution of 1925 created a strong presidency and a two-house legislature that depended on coalition politics to function. Elections, therefore, were important, influential, and drew heavy participation across class and gender

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24 As mentioned earlier, see the New York Times article (6/5/06).
25 This was a slight exaggeration, considering the civil war of 1891 and a military intervention during the 1920s. But relative to the other Latin American countries, many of which witnessed several coups, it was a more accurate statement than not.
(women were enfranchised in 1949). They were also highly contested, as the Left, Center, and Right each put forth their own candidate, forcing run-offs or coalition bargaining in several cases. Indeed, the three presidencies preceding the 1973 coup – Jorge Allesandri, Eduardo Frei, and Salvador Allende – each hailed from a different political strand. This also led, however, to increasing levels of polarization within Chilean society, sharpened by Cold War geopolitics that turned the country into a kind of proxy war between the Soviet Union and the United States.

Would Chile be able to navigate an elusive ‘third way,’ a via chilena? The presidency of Eduardo Frei, a Christian Democrat whose Center-Right alliance narrowly beat Salvador Allende in 1964, suggested that such a task would be difficult at best. Serious challenges faced the Chilean government and its people, many of whom were openly calling for revolutionary change. While the Frei administration proposed moderate reforms, including agrarian restructuring, the nationalization of copper, and a sincere attempt to mobilize those of lesser means vis-à-vis Juntas de Vecinos (neighborhood councils), they were not considered sufficient. Indeed, they “awakened great expectations on the part of the poor – who expected the state to enact programs that would change their life circumstances. In this, they were disappointed…” (Oppenheim 1999:26). By 1970, a slightly larger coalition of the Left gave the Socialist candidate Salvador Allende a relative majority, and, after intense negotiations with the Christian Democrats, the presidency.26

26 The Christian Democrats (DC) were caught in a tough bind after their candidate, Radomiro Tomic, got third place, while neither the Right (Jorge Allesandri) nor Left (Salvador Allende) received a majority. This gave the DC the decisive vote, however, when the run-off election went to a floor vote in Congress. With extreme reluctance and after frantic negotiations, the DC continued the tradition of awarding the presidency to the candidate with the relative majority, which was Allende. In exchange, they extracted a promise from the Allende government to uphold the Constitution and a list of ‘democratic guarantees.’ See “La elección presidencial de 1970: Sesenta días que conmovieron a Chile (y al mundo)” in San Francisco and Soto 2005.
The events surrounding the 1970 election reflected the forms of popular mobilization that had emerged in what was a vibrant, albeit intense, political culture. At the political party level, past campaigns had invented songs, staged marches, and tried to manipulate the media. In 1970, this reached the point of especially polarizing rhetoric (e.g. photos of Soviet tanks on the front page of *El Mercurio*, suggesting that Chile would be the next Cuba), and even violence. Two groups, *Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionario* (MIR) and *Patria y Libertad* both advocated violent resistance, the former in the name of a Marxist revolution, and the latter to rid the country of any threat of one. These both played a role in further pushing Chilean society away from the legalistic and technical wrangling that had previously resolved class and political disagreements; “this cultural disposition for converting conflicts into legal-formal disputes was beginning to break down” (Oppenheim 1999:68).

On the streets, this translated into a variety of mobilization activities from all sides, including the Right. For example, the practice of takeovers, or *tomas*, was employed. This had begun in August 1967 when students at the conservative *Universidad Católica* took over their main building to demand a greater stake in university decision-making and the resignation of its rector. Almost five years later, a copper miners’ strike would also culminate in the occupation of the *Católica* campus. The Right marched too, as during the famous ‘March of the Empty Pots and Pans’ in December 1971, when well-to-do women and their maids protested the

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27 See, for instance, the Balmaceda campaign in the late 19th century or Arturo Allesandri’s in the 1920s - both also turning points in Chilean history. During Balmaceda’s campaign, the media was particularly nasty in its treatment of Balmaceda’s personal life. And Arturo “the Lion of Tarapaca” Allesandri marked the first populist campaign, which relied heavily on middle-class support and employed songs and popular marches (San Francisco and Soto 2005).

28 Equally significant, it led *Católica* student Jaime Guzman to organize entrepreneurs and other middle-class businessmen into the *gremialista* movement, which would grow quite powerful and become a strong advocate for military intervention in 1973.
unavailability of food and blamed it on the socialist government; the march marked the first significant presence of women onto the popular protest scene in Chile. Finally, the Right used the *paro*, or general strike, in October 1972 during the truckers’ strike, which paralyzed the country and ratcheted up the opposition to the Allende government. Both the *toma* and *paro* had been commonly used by the Left, but now the Right also viewed them as effective modes of protest.

At the same time, the Left utilized grassroots organizations and popular protest to support the Allende government. Their *tomas* took place on both rural farms and in urban factories. Poor farmers (often Mapuche) occupied land in the name of agrarian reform, even when the land was not large enough to expropriate. In factories, Allende had called upon workers to defend their workplaces from being locked out by owners who feared government takeover. This led to the formation of *cordones*, or industrial belts, that were grassroots worker mobilization groups and mutual-assistance organizations. Often influenced by more radical groups like MIR, these *cordones* sometimes took over factories violently rather than defend them from being shut down. All these mechanisms of organizing would be echoed three decades later throughout the *pingüino* movement. It was as if the children were picking up from where their parents had left off, albeit in a very different time, and in a very different context.

Of course, this ‘time warp’ theory of protest practices deserves considerable attention, as well as scrutiny. While the 1970s were formative to the mindset and political culture of the older generation, the context has changed dramatically today. Most significantly, the Pinochet regime left a gaping, 15-year wound to the former
vibrant political culture. Society was deliberately and violently depoliticized: political parties were officially dissolved, labor unions were persecuted and strikes outlawed, and the mass media and academia was effectively censored. It was risky for even small social groups to get together; Chileans today often recall the *toque de queda*, essentially an evening curfew for which violators would be arrested and taken to jail. A new constitution, ratified by a not-so-very fair or free plebiscite in 1980, declared it illegal to support Marxist doctrines. More so than the rules, though, it was breaking them that left indelible harm to Chile: Dissenters were kidnapped, jailed, and exiled, while still others died or were simply regarded as *desaparecidos*, ‘the disappeared’ (Oppenheim 2007; Stern 2006; Collins and Lear 1996).

It was not until the early 1980s that some Chileans felt comfortable showing public opposition. The plebiscite of 1980 sparked some criticism, but it was the economic crash in 1981-1982 that allowed civil society to begin its return. The failing markets showed vulnerability within the regime, and grassroots organizations led the way in mobilizing opposition. Interestingly, much of this took place “autonomously from political parties,” symbolized best in the first ‘Day of Protest’ that took place on May 11, 1983, which was organized by the copper miners’ union and subsequently supported by various political parties (Oppenheim 1999:131). More Days of Protest occurred, although these would be countered with repression from the Pinochet regime. An *Asamblea de Civilidad* – a coalition of grassroots organizations, unions, women’s organizations, and others – was also formed in April 1986. And while it would take political and legalistic tactics to finally oust Pinochet vis-à-vis the ballot box in 1988, the “grassroots mobilization, and its level of

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29 See the *El Mercurio* feature blurb, “*Nostalgia puro*” [pure nostalgia] on 5/28/06, in which the
coordination, also demonstrated the extent to which Chilean society had maintained its custom of collective action, despite Pinochet’s efforts to individualize – virtually atomize – society” (Oppenheim 1999:132). Chilean culture was still, at its core, political.

The new democracy, however, had serious challenges to overcome, and many wondered if popular protest would be sacrificed in return. From the start of the election campaign of 1989, it was clear that the Concertación – the Center-Left coalition that had organized the “No” vote – was running on reconciliation, not revenge. The new government recognized the residual fears among Chileans of both left-wing violence and the threat of another intervention by the military, which Pinochet had ensured through lame-duck legislation would remain an integral and strong independent force in the country. President Aylwin, therefore, had to accomplish the difficult task of pushing for social change while playing nice with the various political stakeholders, including those on the Right. This meant a return to the more legalistic and formal coalition politics that had marked the first half of the 20th century.

This tone continued through the next presidential term, which remained in Concertación hands and was held by Eduardo Frei (1994-2000). Even by this second term, the transition to democracy was slow-going. President Frei worked on further decentralizing the role of the executive branch to distribute power among municipalities and regions. The government also tried to tackle the social inequalities that had been left from Pinochet’s neoliberal policies. By 1997, the poverty level had been almost halved from what it was in the mid-80s, but 24% was still an alarming newspaper makes the casual connection between the protests and the cordones strategy of the 1970s.
and serious figure. Income inequalities and the lack of social services – including, among others, education – were still society-wide problems. But, unlike the 1970s, when civil society seemed ready and willing to intervene, the Chilean public seemed more content this time to watch the formal negotiating take its course. Writing at the end of Frei’s term, one political observer was concerned:

“Questions remain, however, about whether the current system encourages grassroots participation and whether the younger generation, which grew up under the Pinochet dictatorship, has the same kind of proclivities toward political activism and partisan affiliation as their parents. The question is especially pertinent among very poor youth, among whom there seems to be a high level of political alienation. In general, young Chileans, who grew up watching political parties that were fragmented, competitive, and ineffectual during years of military rule, tend to be skeptical about loyalty to a party.”

(Oppenheim 1999:221)

In another telling sign, a 1995 survey found that a third of the Chilean population older than 18 did not understand what a democracy was, while 70% considered a democratic system weak. (Riveros 2001:20). As historian Alfredo Jocelyn-Holt noted, “Chile has returned to a paraíso amnésico [amnesia-like paradise]” (Riveros 2001:16). Such observations suggested that the Chilean people were willing – even wanting – to forget their democratic traditions in order to not have to relive their difficult past.30

Following Frei was another term of slow-going reform with Ricardo Lagos (2000-2006), whose campaign slogan, “crecimiento con equidad” [“growth with equity”], nicely captured the difficult balance the Concertación government had been attempting to strike over the previous decade: promising positive reform under a veil

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30 For an in-depth and insightful look at the relationship between memory and history in Chile, see the work of Steve Stern (2004, 2006).
of stability and security. Lagos won praise for his tough attitude, however and left office with relatively high public approval, even as some criticized his administration for not doing enough to reverse the neoliberal policies left by the Pinochet legacy and continued by his Concertación predecessors.31

Enter President Michelle Bachelet in March 2006, whose presidency Chilean historian Arturo Valenzuela has termed the first ‘post-transition.’ (New York Times Magazine 11/18/07). Besides breaking a number of symbolic barriers as president – the first woman, not to mention a single mother and an atheist – Bachelet represented someone who had been personally affected by the violence of Pinochet: her father was tortured and killed, and she had also been briefly imprisoned before spending several years in exile. (As for Pinochet, he was sick, and too bogged down in both human rights and financial scandals to have much political significance; he would die in December 2006, the end of Bachelet’s first year in office) Chilean society, some politicians hoped, could finally start talking about a new generation and a new beginning, and not so much reliving the difficult past.

Within this historical trajectory, the pingüinos straddle the present and past in unique ways. They debunked the modern myth of the apathetic Chilean youth, while they invoked the similarly mythical social protest of the past. The pingüinos relied on both rhetoric and ‘repertoire’ from their predecessors. The constant call to get rid of the LOCE, for example, was supported in part by tying it to the legacy of Pinochet

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31 These critics include those like outspoken legislator Sergio Aguiló Melo, who penned an article called “Chile entre Dos Derechas,” (Chile Among Two Rights), which blamed both the Concertación government and the opposition for embracing neoliberal economic policies. The “inequalities in Chile continue today equal to what they were when the Lagos government began,” he said in an interview with El Sur (4/18/06).
and the fact that he had promulgated the initial law. In structure, the *toma* and *cordon* employed by many *pingüinos* resembled some of the “best practices” of the past. Some students, including many of the leaders, were also tied to political parties and groups – namely the Communist Party and the militant wing, the *Frente Manuel Rodriguez* – that had been pushing for change throughout the return to democracy, and whose historical identity remained strongly linked with the past. And yet, at the same time, the *pingüinos* repeatedly insisted that their movement represented something new, something that crossed political and class boundaries, and something that was about Chile’s future more so than any past struggle.

What was distinctively ‘Chilean’ about the *pingüinos*, it could then be argued, was a unique history that injected emotional and political terms and practices into what otherwise might have been seen as an ‘ordinary’ protest. The last two Chilean presidencies, for instance, have all dealt with some sort of *paro* or strike in their first year: Frei with teachers and carbon workers, Lagos with longshoremen and truck drivers (*El Mercurio* 6/11/2006). The *pingüinos*, however, attracted greater numbers and a far more diverse swath of participants, which allowed both comparisons to the past and a societal acceptance for this type of protest. Whereas a school takeover in a country like the United States might elicit a rapid and severe police response, the *toma* in Chile has precedent and was accepted as a legitimate way to make demands (what Sidney Tarrow would define as Chile’s ‘repertoire of action’).

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32 Even if the *pinguinos* did not push the Pinochet-LOCE legacy as the primary rationale for reforming or rejecting it, some participants in the movement’s wake have emphasized this narrative more. A recent statement by the new *Asamblea por la Defensa del Derecho a la Educación* (Ande), for example, heralded the 2006 protests for “opening up grand expectations in the country, instilling valuable modes of participation in public politics in a democracy and putting in the center their critiques of one of the last laws promulgated by the military dictatorship” (*La Tercera* 4/8/08; emphasis is mine).
Moreover, the presidential style of Bachelet may have lent additional legitimacy to such actions. In the movement’s wake, critics of the government accused Bachelet of encouraging popular protest. Compared to President Ricardo Lagos (2000-2006), whose government was “authoritarian, masculine and enlightened,” Bachelet was putting forth a “government of the people, equal and postmodern.” While that might have “sounded good,” critics said it allowed the pingüinos to essentially co-opt the government’s platform and make the issue of education a crisis rather than one of the areas in which work was needed. Interestingly, it would be the government, not the critics, that defended the historical importance of the pingüinos. Said Education Minister Martin Zilic: “This is the first government to come without fearing the past. This type of conflict has to exist in democracies” (El Mercurio 6/11/2006). Bachelet’s strong condemnation of her own national police after the May 31 paro also confirms this notion that allowing the pingüinos and popular protest to occur without repression was in some way a testament to the progress Chile had made over the past decade.

Finally, the political culture of today should be emphasized as a key factor in why the pingüinos chose to pursue such a high degree of popular protest. As mentioned above, protests in the street are common occurrences in Chile. Before the pingüinos, several members of the mapuches (Chilean indigenous group) began a hunger strike that got the attention of the press and also led to some university occupations in Temuco. Right after the pingüinos, squatters in a poor neighborhood in Santiago burned tires and threw sticks at riot police to protest a forced move. A nurse’s strike in the fall brought workers out into the streets, demanding fair pay.

33 Carlos Peña González, in El Mercucrio, 6/11/06.
None of these elicited the kind of response that the pingüinos did, but all made the news and demonstrate the relative ‘normalcy’ of popular protest in Chile. This is an important point when judging the distinctiveness of the pingüinos: While their organization and participation was impressive (even in Chilean terms), their tactics were expected. In brief, the threshold of political protest is very high in Chile, and the pingüinos succeeded in meeting it.

At the same time, the myth of the pingüinos deserves attention and critique. First, the domestic and foreign press heralded the ‘penguin generation’ as symbolic of the Chilean rebirth of democracy. While the movement deserves recognition as the first major mass movement since the return to democracy, most pingüinos shied away from political historicizing. Their criticism focused on the present government and its failure to provide quality education. Indeed, some schools (e.g. Liceo Lastarria in Providencia, Santiago) were adamant about their apolitical position, as well as those within the Asamblea:

“In the Asamblea we arrived at a point of total cohesion, because there we figured out what we were about and that we weren’t there because of our politics.”

- Marianna von Bernhardi Pérez, spokesperson, Colegio Altamira
(Gutiérrez 2006:104)

In addition, schools made decisions mostly by themselves, oftentimes by a school-wide vote, as to how they would respond to the movement. It was only by the end of the movement that some leaders began to reach out to politically charged groups like the CUT, the main workers’ federation and a traditional leftist

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34 Carlos Peña González, El Mercurio, 6/11/06.
organization. For the greater duration of the movement, though, the *pingüino* rhetoric was tied to education reform, not a general call for democracy or mass mobilization.

Secondly, the distinctively ‘Chilean’ theory must be compared to the larger stage of Latin America. Those who argue for a Chilean exceptionalism (Oppenheim 2007) must contend with those who view the Pinochet dictatorship as just another in a series of military takeovers in Latin America (e.g. Cuba in 1952, Guatemala in 1954, Brazil in 1964, Argentina in 1966, and so on), or as some Pinochet supporters would argue, that the intervention was not “the classic Latin American coup…but an institutional action” to avoid communism (Piñera 1997:10) that did not fundamentally change the political conscience of the country. Certainly, there is a case to be made that there has been a Latin American “common experience” in which countries – including Chile – are afflicted by problems of economic inequality and stratification (Hoffman 2003). The *pingüino* movement, then, may simply have had the most favorable circumstances for a successful movement. There have been other student movements in other countries, such as efforts for university reform in Argentina and, most recently, a march against university privatization in Barcelona (*La Tercera* 3/31/08), and others could be expected for the future.

The fizzling out of the movement by the end of the year also rebukes, in part, the idea that the youth have somehow re-created civil society through one movement. By the middle of June, students returned to classes, many quite relieved that the protest had ended. The issues remained relevant through October, when a ‘*revuelta*’ of sorts occurred due to the release of the preliminary report from the *Consejo Asesor*. Students frustrated with the conclusions and impatient to see results once again took over buildings and marched in the streets. Their organization remained strong, but
they failed to elicit more than cursory offers to negotiate from the government. The national police were also called in faster, although they were careful not to repeat the tactics that had received criticism back in May. The results, therefore, were mixed. The students had once again shown their ability to mobilize, but their ability to make change seemed limited. Granted access to the media and, in the case of several of the leaders, a relative amount of ‘star power,’ the *pingüinos* were unable to convert the movement into something more. By the following year, they were still heroes, but not necessarily new political leaders.

These opposing views of the *pingüinos* – as a new generation of Chilean activists versus a young coalition of political opportunists – make it difficult to project whether there is indeed a future for the *pingüinos*. The last few days of protest in June revealed some serious fissures within the movement, including accusations from some that the movement’s leaders had let the narrative get away from them. For example, the decision by the *Asamblea* to abandon the *tomas*, even as the central government was openly rejecting calls for more student representation on the *Consejo Asesor*, left palpable feelings of frustration. “Because what happens in Santiago doesn’t represent us,” claimed leaders like Eduardo Contreras Contreras, spokesperson from *Liceo INSUCO* in Concepción (*El Sur* 6/11/06). Or, put more bluntly by Eris Sáez Stuardo, the student president of Colegio Brasil: “It is not possible to have done something so big and to have it result in us receiving nothing.” (*El Sur* 6/11/06). Indeed, six schools in Concepción voted to stay in *toma* even as their peers in Santiago went back to classes. The universities were similarly divided after holding a *Confech* summit that was described as a “circus” by Luis Tapia, student president at the *Universidad de Bío Bío* (*El Sur* 6/11/06).
At the same time, it is clear that the pingüinos have left a lasting legacy in the memories of both younger and older generations alike. There are concrete accomplishments, both big and small, for which participants and supporters can attribute to the movement. The naming of a prestigious, high-level Consejo Asesor, for example, was a genuine concession and marked an interruption to Bachelet’s gradual, early-education based, approach to fixing the education system. The public also correctly credited the pingüinos for the June 2006 firing of Martin Zilíc, the Minister of Education, to the movement, as well as the appointment of the much more student-friendly Yasna Provoste, a former physical education teacher.\(^{35}\) Even small-scale signs, like the establishment of a television show, Pinguions en Acción, starring several of the pingüino leaders, or the appearance of a pingüino costume in one of the October rallies, validates the cultural significance and the symbolic power of the movement.

In brief, the revolución pingüina has been romanticized, but not necessarily without just cause. Any movement that can be described as “the largest street mobilization since the days of Salvador Allende” deserves recognition (Oppenheimer 2007:201). Any movement whose base is primarily youth-based in a country for which youth movements over the past three decades have been consistently repressed is rightly considered remarkable. And any movement that can successfully span economic boundaries and incorporate different generations (children, parents, teachers, etc) is also bound to create a fine narrative. These observations, in addition

\(^{35}\) Ministra Provoste, currently fighting charges of corruption (in what has become a very political battle), was generally perceived well by the students. Said student leader Juan Pablo Mejías del Pino from Liceo Leonardo Murialdo of Recoleta: “La Yasna is good, is very good, she knows the situation and she knows what’s going on, and since she is a physical education teacher, she knows the problems with the system. We have to take advantage of the fact that a person like her is in charge…” (Gutiérrez 2006:64)
to the fact the inequalities within the Chilean education system stand as a neat symbol for the inequalities of Chilean society at-large, make the romanticizing not only understandable, but even justifiable.

The pingüinos may not have changed the ground rules of the education system – at least not yet – but they did show that the new generation of Chilean youth were ready and able to demand change. They did not mobilize in order to demonstrate this, since their success came largely as a surprise. But they accomplished this task nonetheless: The pingüinos have demonstrated what post-Pinochet mobilization can look like, and the Chilean public was left enamored and proud of their accomplishments.
Chapter 3: The *pingüino* movement and education

“Hay un largo proceso en que los jóvenes han sido marginados de la sociedad, discriminados. Hay una relación brutal entre los puntajes del Simce con el nivel socioeconómico y educacional de las familias. Aquí no ha existido movilidad social y eso es muy grave.”

- Education Minister Martin Zilic
  *El Mercurio* (6/11/06)
Buried at the heart of the pingüino movement is a complex and flawed education system. While past student movements have incorporated educational demands into their protest, few have been so powerfully and specifically aimed at transforming the structure of education. In the Chilean case, it was a structure that students began to see as harmful to their own opportunities for success, their peers’ opportunities for success, and ultimately to the progress of their country. The pingüino movement, while noteworthy for its narrative of a reemerging youth voice, was primarily a harsh critique of the reconciliatory track that has defined the Chilean government’s approach to education reform over the past decade.

This chapter aims to address that fractured history of education in Chile, as well as examine the current structure that has produced such a backlash from the pingüinos. The issue of private-public education has garnered much debate in the world today, from discussions of vouchers and charter schools in the United States to wonderment at the compulsory (and high-performing) state education system in Cuba. The Chilean system offers a unique mix of completely private (particular pagado), voucher-subsidized private (subvencionado), and decentralized public schools (municipalizado).

This structure has led to some interesting, and at times disturbing, observations. Primarily, the Chilean education system has continued to produce inequitable results that the government has only slowly improved upon and for which the pingüinos found widespread resentment towards. At the same time, the choice-driven education system may also have encouraged (unintentionally or intentionally) an environment in which stakeholders, including students, could take a proactive role in demanding a quality education. Dissecting the historical, structural and cultural
aspects of the education system is thus central to identifying the significance of the pingüinos.

The history of the Chilean education system is deeply connected to the struggle of the pingüino movement. Two fundamentally different reforms during the last thirty years have produced the system as it stands today. The first occurred under Pinochet and involved a rigorous process of decentralization and privatization, culminating in the now infamous Ley Organica Constitucional de Enseñanza (LOCE). The second occurred under the current Concertación alliance and involved a series of projects aimed at both improving overall quality within the system while addressing the challenges (and flaws) of the former mostly-privatized system. Both reform eras have been equally influential and at odds with each other, with the latter in many ways trying to turn back the former. The result has been a compromised system that retains elements of both privatization and government intervention.

Education has been long recognized in Chile as both a critical part of its national development and as a source of political power. This goes back to a colonial legacy that placed an aristocratic minority on a fast-track to financial and political success, a trend that would continue for decades. It was also a system that very early on emphasized the liberty of teaching and the existence of private schools, principles that remain in existence today and are summed up through the phrase, libertad de enseñanza (liberty of education). The expansion and organization of education, however, remained a key responsibility of the government, and planning began as early as 1912 with the first Congreso Nacional de Educación Secundaria. Primary education was made mandatory shortly thereafter (1920), while teachers formed a union to advance their own vision of an education system that would be more
transparent and accessible to more than just the privileged. For a long period of time, then, education became a sort of battleground between the wealthy and the middle classes, both seeking to control it and use it to gain political control. (Piie v.1 1984)

By the mid-20th century, the middle class had solidified its monopoly over the teaching profession, while a streak of Radical Party presidencies began to push for more extensive educational reforms. Between 1940 and 1957, for instance, enrollment in secondary education more than doubled, while enrollment in universities more than quadrupled (Piie 1984). The government created a Superintendent of Public Education, albeit with limited power, while establishing a subsidy system for private schools that abided by certain state regulations (later to become known as subvencionados). Still, the increased demand for education was not matched with enough resources, leaving a segmented education system that left many dissatisfied, and others worried about the progress of Chile. Urbanization, worker migration, and the rising influence of the middle classes had created a complex challenge for the Chilean education system. Entering the 1960s, “a profound and comprehensive transformation of education was seen as necessary, linked with a model of development” (Piie v.1 1984:20).

This transformation was attempted through a series of initiatives between 1965 and 1970 that included a rapid expansion in educational opportunities and the first projects aimed specifically at the lower classes. Structurally, the Chilean education system switched to the ‘8/4’ model (eight years of primary school and four years of secondary school) that remains in place today. In general, though, the initiatives ran into similar ‘bottlenecks’ that had plagued administrations prior:
notably a lack of financial resources for the growing demands of Chilean society (Piie v.1 1984).

The groundbreaking election of Salvador Allende in 1970, however, opened up the possibility of even more radical restructuring. Rather than tear down the system in place, though, Allende’s socialist government started by building upon earlier projects to expand educational opportunities and realign the system along the interests of the working class, and, to a lesser extent, the middle classes. Along with largely symbolic gestures like the creation of community councils and teacher workshops, the Unidad Popular government was able to achieve an unprecedented expansion in education.36 (Piie v.1 1984)

The initiatives were financially unsustainable. Yet the Allende government pressed on, proposing in 1972 the Escuela Nacional Unificada (ENU) project, which called for a much more hands-on administration of education by the state. Not surprising, the proposal was vigorously challenged by critics who saw the ENU as an attack on the libertad de enseñanza (liberty to teach) and as a gateway for socialist propaganda. Private schools and those against the Allende government took to the streets, in what was already an increasingly polarized and tense situation (Piie v.1 1984).

What progress had been made in the field of education was violently interrupted by the military intervention in 1973 and the regime’s subsequent ‘big-bang’ style of educational restructuring that would come to characterize the next two decades (Cox 2006:3). Among the more dramatic changes, the military regime

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36 Elementary school enrollment (6-14 years old) increased 4.3% annually, while secondary school enrollment (15-19 years old) and university enrollment increased 9.4% and 22% annually, respectively (Piie 25).
eliminated teachers’ status as public employees, decentralized the administration of schools, and reintroduced vigorous financial incentives to stimulate the creation and expansion of private schools (Cox 2006).

Critics of the military regime considered the privatization program to be orthodox, overarching, and mostly destructive. They point first to the repressive legacy of the reforms, such as the purging of hundreds of teachers and professors from schools that were believed to be bastions of Marxism (Collins and Lear 1995). But they also critique the very premise of privatization, in which public universities lost major funding in order to create competition with new private institutions, while the central government gradually handed over control over primary and secondary schools to the municipalities. While vouchers based on student attendance spurred the growth of independent subvencionado schools, education entrepreneurs were inevitably drawn to locate the schools in urban (and usually better off) neighborhoods where there was enough demand. The quality of municipal schools, on the other hand, became directly correlated with the wealth of their respective districts: those with resources could afford better teachers and offer a better education to their students, while those without struggled to provide. Not surprisingly, gaps in achievement appeared between those attending private schools and those not, as well as between well-off and poorer municipalities (Collins and Lear 135). And these gaps only exacerbated the already severe problems of inequality that afflicted Chilean society.

Supporters of privatization, on the other hand, saw the reform as essential for expanding and improving secondary education in Chile. The old model that depended on the State was “anachronistic, inefficient, politicized, and increasingly
corrupt” (Piñera 1997: 42). Privatization, on the other hand, harnessed the power of the market to allow all families access to the private schools of their choosing: The “essence of the revolución liberal chilena was not the use of force, but the power of an idea – comprehensive liberty…” (Piñera 1997: 10). Proponents of the free-market education policies point to the creation of subvencionado schools as critical for the twofold increase in secondary school matriculation from 1970 to 1985.

The transition to democracy in 1990 forced a national conversation on the issue of education and how to proceed into the making of a new, different Chile. At stake was the degree to which the new Concertación government would or should reverse the military regime’s educational policies. The new administration struck a reconciliatory path at first, deciding not to reverse the decentralization from the municipalización or the financing mechanisms that had been set up at the end of the military regime. At the same time, the government made efforts to expand its role in the system, both as a guarantor of quality education to all, as well as a leader in defining and leading policies for improving education for all schools in the country.

This initial negotiating position thus demonstrated a willingness on the part of the Concertación government to play by the “institutional rules of the game” (i.e. keep the three-category system of municipal schools, subvencionados, and private schools), but still determined to fight along some of the key ideological battle lines of the day, including the regulation of the teaching profession, the amount of autonomy granted to schools, and the role of financing mechanisms in improving education (Cox 2006). A new statute for teachers (returning their rights as government employees) and new state programs targeted at lower-income students were among these achievements claimed by the Concertación. But, for all intensive purposes, the
initiatives were considered non-political, passed with either broad consensus from Congress (including from the opposition) or through national, bipartisan commissions (Cox 2006). Democracy, after all, was a fragile and still uncertain status for the country, and the Concertación government was trying hard to strike the reconciliatory tone that they had campaigned on, and that the Chilean people seemed most comfortable with at the moment.

One of the main challenges facing the government was a secondary education system that was “as a whole, lagging behind society with institutional structures and curricula adequate for a system that had served only 15 percent of the relevant age group three decades earlier” (Cox 2006:25). A 1992 survey of high school students, for example, showed a “precarious grasp of the materials” (Cox 2006:26). Equally startling was the huge gap in achievement between those with means and those without: 20 percentage points between the first and fifth income quintiles. And it was not merely diagnostic tests, but other measures like dropout rates, in which 88% of those students entering private school were able to graduate, compared to 59% of students entering municipal schools (Cox 2006:26). The situation seemed dire, but it was unclear who was to blame: two decades of privatization, other factors like family background or socio-economic status, or simply the growing pains of an expanding secondary education system.

The Concertación government responded with three reform projects that began in the 1990s and continued into the 21st century. The first, the MECE program (1995-2000), was a package of “quality and equity improvement programs” that invested millions of dollars into providing preschool education and supplying students with learning resources like textbooks, libraries, and computers (Cox 2006;
The program was critical to establish a more even playing field, after several years of neglect from the former government; the Ministry of Education doubled its budget from 1990 to 1997 (Toloza and Lahera 2000: 375).

The second reform, the Montegrande37 Project (1997-2004), was designed to target needy schools and transform them into liceos de anticipación (schools of anticipation/hope), a sort of testing ground for innovation. The government turned to the spirit of competition that has come to be appreciated to a large degree in Chile by offering significant subsidies for the best proposals. From entrepreneurship programs to citizenship education, Montegrande projects contributed to creating a “particularly rich laboratory in practical decentralization” (Cox 2006:37).

The third and final project of the Concertación government’s reform, the Programa Liceo para Todos (High School for All Program) (2000-2006), also targeted poorer secondary schools, but in a more direct and substantial manner than Montegrande by providing subsidies for every student in conditions of extreme poverty that completed high school. It was designed specifically to reduce dropout rates, and enjoyed moderate success (Cox 2006).

The Chilean education system, therefore, is something of a strange beast: the product of two starkly different (indeed, opposing) reforms over the last thirty years. By agreeing to play by the ‘rules of the game’ set during the military regime, the Concertación government must deal with both the advantages and disadvantages of administering a semi-private, semi-public school system. The market-based approach, for examples, offers parents a feeling of “considerable educational choice.”

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37 Named after the home town of the Chilean author and Nobel Prize winter Gabriela Mistral.
particularly to those who live in larger, urban settings (Carnoy 2007:36). Of the nearly one million Chilean students in secondary school, more than half are in either fully private (8%) or semi-private *subvencionado* schools (45%) (*El Mercurio*, 5/26/06). The government has also earned praise for its proactive role in improving education through its reform efforts and substantial funding. A recent report, published weeks before the *pingüino* protests, stated that “in terms of policy generation and implementation, the school system and its Ministry [of Education], in a fundamental way, ‘work’” (Cox 2006:5). Through four *Concertación* presidencies, education has received top billing as an issue that deserves money and reform.

At the same time, however, the initial reconciliatory attitude pursued by the government garnered substantial criticism, particularly from teachers and unions who felt that the *Concertación* government had not gone far enough in reversing the military regime policies. They see the education system, even with its promises of reform, as still inextricably linked to the legacy of the Pinochet government, which passed through many of the decentralization and privatization policies in the *Ley Organica Constitucional de Enseñanza (LOCE)*.39

In addition, even those within the government admit that the system leaves much to be desired. Specifically, the gap between municipal, *subvencionado*, and private schools continues to leave many poorer students behind. Scores on the *PSU*, the national college entrance exam, for example, show municipal school students registering an average of 476.46 and 480.97 points on the Language and Math

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38 This is significant, considering that 40% of secondary students live in the main capital of Santiago. (*El Mercurio*, 5/26/06)
39 In the early days of the protest, the leader of the *Partido Socialista* (President Bachelet’s party) Camilo Escolana made this connection very clear. In signaling his support for its derogation, Escolona cynically stated: “We have bad memories. The LOCE was the last *ley de amarre* (bitter law) signed by
sections, respectively – scores that seriously diminish the chances of entering most Chilean universities. *Subvencionado* students scored an average twenty points higher (508.78 points, language; 507.47 points, math), while private school students overwhelmed both groups with averages of 592.09 (language) and 605.30 (math), more than a hundred more than their municipal peers (*El Mercurio* 5/14/06). Similar trends can be seen on other evaluative tests and measures like dropout rates, which continue to be a challenge. While former President of Chile Eduardo Frei (Ruiz-Tagle) may have correctly noted that “our children receive an education which their parents did not possess and their grandparents could not even have imagined,” (Toloza and Lahera 2000:21) the system has struggled to make the education a quality one for all.

Did this history of educational inequity “create” the *pingüinos*? In certain ways, although it largely depended on who the participant was, and, more importantly, what type of school he or she attended. For students from municipalizado schools, a lack of resources became a main motivation to take the streets. The protest in Lota, for example, had nothing to do with larger questions of educational choice, but the urgent need for a fixed roof. In Rafael, another town in the Eighth Region, students had been asking since 2002 for more money from the municipality; the movement allowed them to demand a specific timeline from the municipality (*El Sur* 5/6/06, 5/23/06). Many of the municipalizado demands centered around the failure of the JEC to deliver essential services and infrastructure. “There are 1,600 students here and only 300 of us have free lunch. We want it so that everyone who needs free lunch, gets it,” stated one student (*El Mercurio* 5/27/06).
For these pingüinos, taking the street or taking over their school not only allowed them to express discontent at their situation, but in many cases led to meetings between municipality officials, education officials and students to set goals and make promises.\textsuperscript{40} These behind-the-scenes negotiations did not make for great newspaper headlines, yet they represented some of the movement’s greatest accomplishments.

Students from subvencionado schools had only slightly different demands. As one student leader put it, the subvencionados “are always left on the wayside. They always talk about the municipales or the particulares, but they don’t know what happens with us because we’re in the middle.”\textsuperscript{41} This was partly due to the diversity of subvencionado schools, some of which were dealing with resource problems just as severe as their public school peers. At the same time, remarks from subvencionado students like the ones below reflect less concern with infrastructure problems than with the general hectic nature of the Chilean school day structure (which often requires teachers to teach a ‘full-day’ morning shift and a ‘full-day’ afternoon shift):

“We arrive at home late at night to do work and study for tests. Plus, we have to do preuniversitarios [college prep work]. We are tired.”

- Eduardo Castillo Costanzo, student president, Colegio Salesiano

\textit{(El Sur 6/1/06)}

\textsuperscript{40} In Lota, students, teachers and school officials signed a four point pledge for improving education and infrastructure problems, as well as an end to a principal rotation shift that had been one of the sources of conflict (\textit{El Sur} 4/28/06, 4/29/06). In Rafael, an education official agreed to fix a patio and provide adequate bathrooms for students (\textit{El Sur} 5/6/06). These two cases were reported in the regional paper because they were two of the first to demonstrate, but newspaper reports suggest that similar meetings occurred throughout the movement, particularly in the regions where local officials controlled most if not all of the resources.

\textsuperscript{41} Student leader Juan Pablo Mejías del Pino, from Liceo Leonardo Murialdo of Recoleta (Gutierrez 2006:60).
“At 4 p.m. we are totally exhausted, the teachers haven’t eaten anything and all students, beginning with the youngest, show enormous stress.”

- Danitza Figueroa Gutiérrez, spokesperson, Colegio Sagrado Corazón

(El Sur 6/1/06)

For some of these subvecionado students, then, they had more in common with the particular pagado students, who generally had adequate resources and protested largely in support of their less fortunate peers.

But perhaps more significant than any single group were the students from liceos emblematicos, the oldest and most prestigious public schools in Chile. These schools, which exist in major cities like Santiago, Valparaíso, and Concepción, attract some of the brightest students and are well-known throughout the country. In Santiago, schools such as Instituto Nacional, Liceo 1 and Liceo de Aplicación are considered municipalizado schools, but they do not face nearly the same problems of inequality as their peers, since they attract the best teachers and students. Students from these ‘liceos top’ have always recognized their unique situation and were more than willing to set the tone and demeanor of the pingüino movement. As both elites and public school students, they saw themselves as communicators for the movement as well as advocates (even apologists) for their less well-off peers:

“The poverty, the hunger, the bad education that they receive is much worse than the one hundred broken signs and 500 broken windows. It makes sense that the students are violent, because it responds to the consequences of living in poverty, in slums, of being marginalized…it’s not for nothing that they do this.”

- Gonzalo Cabrera Rubio, Liceo de Aplicación (Gutiérrez 2006:26)

“All of this got worse when they introduced education to the free market, to the neoliberal system. That’s when we killed the educación chilena. When the education in Las Condes [a wealthy district] is better because they live in a more
wealthy community than the schools in Estación Central or outside of the Región Metropolitana, it’s ugly and embarrassing.”

- Joaquín Ignacio Valderrama Salinas, Instituto Nacional (Gutiérrez 2006:32)

The diversity of feelings and accusations of inequity – what Sidney Tarrow calls the “mark of injustice” – served to bolster the narrative of a youth that cut across economic boundaries. For those that felt the education system was not allowing them to succeed, their demands for infrastructure combined with a general call for the derogation of the LOCE. For elites, it was recognizing that few of their peers were getting the challenging intellectual environment they had come to appreciate. And although many of the leaders of the pingüino movement came from schools that were relatively well off, they were not alone in marching due to a deeper anger towards the system as a whole. After all, most participants understood that they would be out of school by the time any real, systemic change could be accomplished.

A culture of choice may also have contributed to the widespread support for the pingüino movement. Several authors emphasize Chilean feelings towards education as both a strength and a challenge. Unlike some other lower income countries that face slow or inept hiring processes or a lack of evaluative tools (Reimers and McGinn 1997, cited in Cox 2006), Chilean educational institutions are “reliable and predictable, with little corruption” in a culture that “condemns clientelism and overt partisanship” (Cox 2006:6). Parents are “expected to participate” as “informed consumers of education,” and to “put pressure on providers to deliver a quality product” (Carnoy 2007:37). No doubt, then, parent organizations like the Asociación de Centros de Padres y Apoderados de Santiago had an influential role during the conflict, as both activists (at one point threatening a hunger
strike), as well as invested stakeholders (speaking out against the student Asamblea when they reached out to the extra-parliamentary left).

At the same time, Chilean education experts have also identified being challenged by a feeling of righteousness on the part of parents and teachers, which inevitably interferes with innovation and openness in the classroom. The relationship between parent and child, and between school and child can be “authoritarian, highly controlling, and often quite aggressive” (Ruiz 354). The Montegrande project also seems to be a reflection of this – a desire to break out of the traditional model of education, which, despite the influx of resources since 1990, have not led to stellar performance in comparison with some of its Latin American peers (e.g. Cuba) (Carnoy 2007, Long 2006). The decentralized nature of the system adds to this difficulty, as schools are allowed an enormous amount of flexibility in how they administer their schools. Nowhere was this more apparent than in the various reactions to the pingüinos: While some rectors supported their students (even leaving the door unlocked, as in the case of Instituto Nacional), others were quick to call the police in. Another driving factor, then, was a system that seemed stagnant and unresponsive from the very highest levels (i.e. a Ministry that could not bring about change quick enough) to the lowest (i.e. an administrator or teacher that refused to be innovative).

The seemingly unique history and education system in Chile would suggest that the pingüinos could be an isolated incident. While it is true that few countries have created public-private systems so in line with neoliberal ideology as Chile (only Sweden and New Zealand, and Colombia have large-scale voucher programs), the inequalities present in the Chilean system are anything but rare. Latin American
countries have the highest levels of income inequality in the world, and this is reflected in their respective education systems that continue to be segmented and insufficient. Moreover, studies of education systems in Latin America and the world demonstrate that school autonomy is just one component in terms of a school’s effectiveness: factors like unequal education, income and habits are also important, as well as the amount of resources invested in the individual school (Long 2006: 33, 168). While the private-public education system in Chile may lend itself to a certain ‘culture,’ it would not seem too farfetched to suggest similar outcries for reform in other Latin American or developing countries.

Indeed, Chile stands as both a model and a warning for the future. As a model, it shows the ability of students, parents, and teachers to force a government – even one in support of reform – to take more drastic steps to improve their education system. The Concertación has taken the movement seriously, and in the days following the protest created a commission to make recommendations. The last couple years have seen intense negotiations about the way forward, including a proposal passed last year to bolster government funding for public and subvencionado schools.

None of this would have been possible, of course, without a system that encouraged parental involvement, and that respected the rights of students to protest their own conditions. Along with the more student-centered pleas for free transportation passes and test waivers, the country had a real debate on the state of education and served as a check on the extent to which the reforms taken by the Concertación government were successful. This conversation was seen as a positive from all sides – and is quite possibly the most lasting legacy of the pingüinos.
As a warning, the pingüinos may demonstrate the growing impatience that students in developing countries may begin to feel around issues of education. While other student movements may react to oppressive policies or events, the pingüinos rose in opposition to a government committed to reform, but slow in making change. In a world that grows increasingly interconnected, it is becoming painfully aware to students in developing countries that their education is critical for upward social mobility. Students, parents, teachers and other stakeholders who want a better education for the next generation may begin to demand it of their governments, which may no longer react with silence. While it remains to be seen, the Chilean pingüinos may inspire other, pingüino-like movements in the future, and other governments should take note.
“Conciencia total no había. La realidad es que había personas que llegaban ahí y sabían porqué, sabían los puntos y tenían base. Pero también nos encontramos con aquellos que no sabían nada, pero querían luchar, querían aprender.”

- Didier Octavio Luchero Robledo, spokesperson for the Asamblea de Estudiantes Secundarios de Quilicura (Gutiérrez 2006: 97)
Youth have often held a special place in political and social movements. They are labeled as both idealists and extremists, as naïve pawns and future leaders. They can just as easily rebel against structures of oppression as they can propagate oppressive messages, while their movements are often marked by spontaneity and unpredictability, which can make them incredibly powerful. Or equally short-lived and unsuccessful (Burg xiii). The pingüinos of Chile both do and do not fit into these categories, making them particularly relevant in terms of evaluating youth coalition-building in the 21st century.

This chapter will examine the role of youth in Chile to determine how the pingüinos reflect current literature on youth movements, or how they may represent something unique. Their ephemeral rise, for example, follows similar models of youth and student movements. Tactics like taking over buildings and marching in the streets are also common practice in Latin America and the rest of the world. At the same time, certain characteristics of the pingüinos, such as their diverse backgrounds and their extremely high rate of adherence, make the movement particularly intriguing. Their highly effective organizational tactics, both at the individual school level and on a national scale vis-à-vis the Asamblea, are also worthy of attention. Indeed, the pingüinos are arguably the first high school, ‘grassroots’ movement of the 21st century.

While university students have been a known entity in politics – representing the intellectuals and elite – only relatively recently have younger youth been recognized for their unique place in society. As industrialization led to the new category of development known as the adolescence, sociologists began to pay attention. Some, like James Coleman, were motivated by both curiosity and a concern that adolescents
were “in a kind of limbo” in which they responded to the pressures of their own peer group as much as their parents (Coleman 1961: vii):

“Now the levers are other children themselves, acting as a small society, and adults must come to know either how to shape the directions this society takes, or else how to break down the adolescent society, thus re-establishing control by the old levers.” (Coleman 1961:11-12)

Not surprisingly, Coleman saw little chance that parents could reclaim control of their children’s lives. Instead, he advocated for sociologists to better understand the ‘adolescent society’ as a way to impede their self-propelling influence.

Ten years later, Coleman’s alarmist stance was vindicated to a degree by the intense social movements of the 1960s, which were fueled by youth and student participation. From the Port Huron statement to the French ‘May revolt,’ there was a verifiable flood of student discontent. In the United States, for instance, 2/3 of the colleges and universities witnessed student demonstrations totaling 9,000 between 1969 and 1970 alone (Burg 1998). Students were now seen not only as a political constituency, but also as one that could generate profound and sometimes radical change. For sociology, the decade led to a slew of literature and interest in youth as a political force. This was, however, a temporary obsession: While the 1960s were recognized as a critical and influential period for youth activism, “with the passing of that era the interest again subsided” (Burg 1998: xi). A brief uptick in student activism took place during the identity politics of the 1990s, but, in general, the youth have been relegated to the background.
A similar but more complicated trajectory has taken place in Chile. While the 1960s were a transformative experience for Chilean youth – many of whom are now leading the country – the military regime essentially tried to stifle youth dissent throughout the 1970s and 1980s. But, counter to the youth-as-activist narrative in the United States, the Chilean youth never really left the political arena. From both a structural and historical perspective, students and youth play important roles in the shaping of their country’s future.

Universities, for instance, have long been proving grounds for voicing discontent, as well as a kind of tryout period for aspiring politicians. Many current political leaders began their political careers during the tumultuous 1960s, when universities like Universidad de Chile and Pontificia Catolica de Chile were battlegrounds for the polarized ideologies of the Chilean left and right. The unprecedented takeover of La Catolica in August 1967, for example, was led by law student Jaime Guzman, the leader of the gremialista movement and a future Pinochet advisor and UDI party founder. Other leaders of their respective university federations – the nexus of political organization on the Chilean campus – would also go on to become important figures in Chilean politics, including:

- José Piñera (FEUC, 1939) – famous economist, architect of pension plan
- José Tohá (FECH, 1950) – minister of interior and defense during Allende
- Jaime Ravinet (FECH, 1968) – former minister of defense during Lagos
- Hernán Larraín (FEUC, 1970) – senator; president of UDI party
- Yerko Ljubetic (FECH, 1984) – minister of labor during Lagos
- Marco Antonio Núñez (FECH, 1989) – delegate from Aconcagua

But even these names do not demonstrate the political importance of the university federation as does the decision of the Pinochet military regime to personally appoint federación leaders from 1973 to 1980. They recognized the opportunities to mobilize on campus and aggressively sought to tamper them, both through the university
federation, as well as by more systematic purging of left-leaning faculty and administrators (university rectors were often appointed from the military).

Despite these efforts, however, the university has continued to be an important arena for Chilean politics and leadership development. Student federations like **FECH (Universidad de Chile)** and **FEUC (Pontificia Católica Universidad de Chile)** have contested elections that are not only followed by students, but also by political parties that invest money and resources into party-affiliated organizations. At the most recent election at **FECH**, for example, six different ‘lists’ competed, including two extraparliamentary leftist slates (one more extreme than the other), a Communist-Socialist coalition, a gremial movement and a Radical-Independent coalition (see table below). The past three presidencies have been from the extraparliamentary left, but this does not mean they are far from the political stage. Nicolas Grau, the president of FECh during the pingüino movement, was the son of then-Secretary General Paulina Veloso, a senior member of Bachelet’s cabinet. He would later be appointed as a member of the **Consejo Asesor**.

**Federación de Estudiantes, Universidad de Chile (FECH) Elections, Nov. 7 2007**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lista</th>
<th>Party affiliation</th>
<th>% of vote</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A – “Por una mejor Universidad, por un mejor País”</td>
<td>Radical Party, Independents</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B – “Nueva Mayoria, Nueva Federación”</td>
<td>Communist, Socialist Party</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C – “Por la refundación de la Fech y la educación gratuita”</td>
<td>Extraparliamentary left: JRME, MIR, PH</td>
<td>6%</td>
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<tr>
<td>D – “La Chile Para Todos”</td>
<td>Gremialist party (right)</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E – “Por la II Reforma Universitaria”</td>
<td>[not specified]</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F – “Izquierda en Movimiento”</td>
<td>Extraparliamentary left: La Surda</td>
<td>43%</td>
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The focus on the university federation allows it to become a superior organizing tool (especially in comparison to its peers in the United States). The federation coordinates social events with the centro de alumnos (student union) of every major, which has its own organizational leadership. It sponsors concerts, art exhibitions, and larger forums to discuss issues like education and national development. The student-driven nature of the federación and the centro de alumnos is impressive, and gives them a large influence on what happens at their university. Their infrastructure is both deep and wide, including an up-to-date blog, an activities board, an intramural sports committee, as well as relations with the administration and other student organizations. From facultad-sponsored social weeks to conferences concerning world issues, Chilean university students demonstrate skill and comfort with mobilizing each another – this, despite an academic and social environment that does not necessarily foster a close-knit university community (e.g. students do not live on campus, the library closes at 10 p.m., etc.)

Moreover, the overtly political nature of the federación allows each one to pursue a specific agenda, while offering opportunities to collaborate with other universities who share similar goals. A recent statement regarding the limited use of the student transportation card from FECH, for example, was co-signed by ten other Chilean university federations and addressed to none other than President Bachelet.42 Meanwhile, an organization called Confech stands as a national coalition of university federations, which weigh in on matters of higher education, as they did during the pingüino crisis.

Much of this political culture and organization has been replicated at the high school level. Like the university federación, each high school elects a slate of students to control its respective centro de alumnos. The influence of political parties do not figure in as greatly as they do at the university federation, with a few exceptions. As noted in Chapter 3, there are certain ‘emblematic’ schools that attract the most talented and bright students. These schools, like Instituto Nacional and Liceo 1 in Santiago, are prestigious and influential, and thus similarly followed by the political elites, and even given financial support.\textsuperscript{43} For the majority of high schools, though, the high school centro resembles the university federación not because of political funding, but due to its role as the de facto student organizing body. The student leadership is responsible for social event planning and for general student advocacy. It was through the centro that most high schools voted on whether to take over their school in May. At Instituto Nacional, for example, the centro organized a plebiscite, in which students were presented a proposal for paro and were then asked to vote ‘yes’ or ‘no.’\textsuperscript{44} By having an organizational nucleus like the centro, high school students are accustomed to student-driven decision-making.

In a similar fashion, Chilean youth today are accustomed to political organizations, which have always actively recruited high school youth. The conventional parties all have wings geared towards youth: Juventud Socialista de Chile, Juventudes Comunistas de Chile (JJ.CC), la Juventud UDI, and so on. For many pingüinos, their first encounters with politics took place at conferences or

\textsuperscript{43} Interview with Julio Isamit, student leader at Instituto Nacional. He reported that the incumbent government considers it a bragging right if they are represented at Instituto Nacional (at the time, this was not the case).

\textsuperscript{44} The use of the plebiscite has a historical legacy as a political mechanism, most notably for the ousting of Augusto Pinochet. The 1988 plebiscite was not a vote for a particular candidate, but rather posed as a question.
rallies sponsored by these parties. For example, Julio Isamit the Instituto Nacional leader, recalls leafleting for the conservative candidate during the last presidential campaign. Gonzalo Cabrera Rubio, of Liceo Aplicación, worked three months for the JJ.CC. before he left for “political differences” (Gutiérrez 2006:21). And María Carolina Huerta Vera of INSUCO II said she too flirted with joining the JJ.CC., then decided it was too intense, “like assuming a religion” (Gutiérrez 2006:72). Other pingüino leaders like Cesar Valenzuela and María Sanhueza openly identified during the movement with their political party as a militante, a term that implies not only political affiliation but involvement as well.

The extraparliamentary left is also well-represented among youth and considered the backbone of various colectivos (collectives) that were established around 2000 to mobilize students (Gutiérrez 2006). These political groups ranged from independent leftist political groups like ‘ni Conecta ni Podemos,’ whose members included Juan Carlos Herrera, to more militant groups like Frente Patriótico Manuel Rodriguez de Chile, whose backing of the pingüinos in their second national paro prompted condemnations from the government and from some of the students. There are also anarchist organizations, both small and big. An analysis from El Mercurio identified a majority of student leaders as members of the extraparliamentary left, while most of the rest were associated with a Concertación political party. A few students, including those from some of the liceos emblematicos, identified with conservative politics, but they were vastly outnumbered.

Given this already entrenched politics among youth, the rapid and relatively sophisticated mobilization of the pingüinos should not be too startling. A school-
wide decision to take over the school was considered a legitimate right of self-expression and consensus:

“At eight o’clock we entered and we passed room to room telling the class presidents that there wouldn’t be classes because the school was being taken over, and we threw out the teachers, as well as the cabros [bad or brash kids]. Then we had an assembly with the [class] presidents in order to know if they would support the takeover and they said yes. So the toma was legalized.”

- Gonzalo Cabrera Rubio, *Liceo de Aplicación* (Gutierrez 2006:23)

Students committed to the cause then began to lay down ground rules, especially surrounding issues like drugs, alcohol, and sex (Gutierrez 2006:24). They formed committees: public relations to deal with the media, safety committees to patrol the hallways, etc. In addition, rumors of neonazi gangs, a rare but oft-talked about phenomenon in Chile, instilled an odd defensive mentality among urban-based pingüinos, who collected stones and sticks, arranged communication warming systems with other schools, and even did practice drills (Gutierrez 2006:43). The carabineros [Chilean national police], too, patrolled the exteriors of the school – mostly for the protection of the students, but also to make arrests when protests outside got out of control. So when police came aggressively to *Liceo de Aplicación* on May 30, students had prepared themselves with “boxes of lemons” in order to diminish the impact of tear gas (Gutierrez 2006:25).46

Along with the mobilization tactics, the conscience-building aspect of the movement was also noteworthy, with students teaching themselves and teaching

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45 These neonazi groups were mostly fantasy, although there were a few isolated incidents in Santiago. The drill, on the other hand, was very real. According to Joaquín Ignacio Valderrama Salinas (*Instituto Nacional*), it involved everything but “ringing the bell, which was the alert for the other school to come and support us if we were actually attacked by the nazis. The other school was better armed, they had sticks, poles and everything…” (Gutierrez 2006:43-44)
others about the problems facing the Chilean education system. At Liceo de Aplicación, students began a colectivo to discuss the LOCE, and soon three more appeared, independent of the school’s student government (Gutiérrez 2006:21). Julio Isamit of Instituto Nacional got interested in the issues when his school’s well-known debate team was assigned an education topic. Other students made it their mission during the movement to go out and educate their peers, including those at other schools:

“I ended up going to three schools where I had friends, and I helped them with security shifts, but really my help was more than that. I mean, they took over their school but they had no idea what the LOCE was, and so I had to explain it to them.”

- Joaquín Ignacio Valderrama Salinas, Instituto Nacional, coordinator for zona oreinte [eastern zone] in Santiago (Gutierrez 2006: 30)

“Most of them didn’t understand the issues that they were discussing, and others were afraid to speak up, but I asked them to tell me to please tell me their opinion, because my job was to communicate those thoughts to the Asamblea.”

- Jordan Venegas, spokesperson, Colegio York in Peñalolen (Gutierrez 2006: 39)

These acts of instruction fit into a larger narrative of the movement in which certain students and schools understood their various roles in the movement. Students from liceos emblematicos led the movement in both action and word. They were those from traditionally radical emblematicos, like those at Liceo de Aplicación or the students at Valentin Letilier, described by prominent pingüino leader Juan Carlos Herrera as the “caudillo of the northern zone” that had begun protesting a year ago for changes to the PSU:

46 Using a lemon as a defensive mechanism has become something of a niche market on the Chilean protest scene. At an October 2006 paro, I observed a street vendor selling lemons to those who were
“It’s the school that has always been organizing, since the ‘80s it has been mobilizing, and that history makes it into a driver for other schools from this sector, because if they occupy Valentín, a ton of schools will follow.”

(Herrera in Gutierrez 2006:53)

These more radical leaders pushed the movement to demand more from the government, insisting, for example, in the last meeting that the Asamblea require 50% student representation on the government’s Consejo Asesor or threaten to take the streets again.

There were also conservative emblematicos, such as the prestigious Instituto Nacional and Liceo 1 in Santiago, whose leaders ably communicated to the press the more lofty ideals of education equality behind the movement. Their actions were often taken more seriously by the government – and more importantly, the media – due to this perception of sophistication. When Liceo Enrique Molina Garmendia (EMG) and Liceo de Niñas (the conservative emblematico equivalents in Concepción) decided to not to adhere to the first march in the middle of May, they earned newspaper coverage. At the same time, their decision two weeks later to do an artistic ‘acto cultural’ instead of protest, earned them the scorn of other students, who pelted EMG with stones (El Sur 5/20/06). This does not mean that the conservative emblematicos were any less enthusiastic about the movement (in general, they were some of the most vocal and demonstrative), but they did perform their role as the more ‘mature’ participants.

As for the other municipalizado, subvencionado, and particular students, they all played certain roles as well. The municipalizado students generally followed the emblematicos, sometimes in a more violent and radical fashion, while the

planning to stick around for the tear gas.
subvencionado students participated more as a coalition. The particular schools, interestingly, played important roles as supporters of the emblematicos:

“It was a joke to occupy Altamira knowing that we could do more things outside…There were people who said, ‘You know what, we want to occupy the school on such and such date.’ But I told them that we should have a commission that lends people out, and so if [the other schools] need guards or need help, they could just call us or send us an e-mail.”

- Marianne von Bernhardi Pérez, spokesperson, Colegio Altamira (Gutierrez 2006: 102)

These private schools would supply food for their peers, and often marched to the outside of the emblematicos to demonstrate support. This tactic was also employed in cities by university federations, who lent support in manpower at marches, rhetoric in media releases, and even medical support to check on their younger equivalents.

At the same time, the relationship between university federations and the pingüino movement stands as one of the most intriguing counter-narratives to the effective mobilization tactics described above. Skeptics of the pingüino movement’s seemingly organic (and nonpartisan) beginnings point to several ‘conspiracy’ theories that the movement was already in the making. The university federations figure heavily in these theories, due especially to a retrospective article in El Mercurio that describes meetings between pingüino leaders and La Surda, an extraparliamentary left association with representation at many Chilean universities.48 The story is not without merit, as it quotes La Surda leaders who claim some credit for bringing the pingüino movement to fruition,49 but it is also only part of a larger narrative.

47 Karol Leal Sobarzo from Liceo de Niñas “One cannot mobilize for nothing” (El Sur, 5/10/06)
48 See the recent election at Universidad de Chile described in the early part of this chapter.
49 After the article was published, La Surda vehemently denied the newspaper’s interpretation. Along with a letter to the editor to El Mercurio, the group mounted a P.R. campaign to define their
As a social movement, the pingüino movement has always been subject to the influences of interested outside parties, from political stakeholders to university organizations like La Surda. The beginnings of the current student movement effectively took place in 2001, when secondary students took the streets for a cheaper transportation pass. This movement, known as the ‘Mochilazo,’ shared some similarities to the pingüino movement of 2006, particularly the apex of a paro nacional that involved thousands of students and ultimately led to some government concessions. Since then, various stakeholders – particularly those involved with the social movement industry surrounding the Chilean education system – have shown interest in high schools, according to prominent pingüino leader Juan Carlos Herrera:

“We had a grand effervescence with the ‘Mochilazo.’ We fought for the pase escolar [student transportation pass] and we got it. That time the ‘establishment’ didn’t do much because those that directed the movement were colectivos. This year was different: there were partisan interests involved, from the time we negotiated at the house of a senator to the mysterious resignations of certain leaders when the conflict got more intense, and unfortunately it’s always going to be like that, the sectors of power are always going to get involved.”

(Herrera in Gutierrez 2006:51)

Herrera’s interpretation deserves some context, particularly his not-too-veiled assertions that “certain leaders” (read: Cesar Valenzuela and Karina Delfino, both militante Partido Socialista) stepped down because of party influence. Herrera was rightly bitter about how divided the movement was towards the end, but his remarks remain important. It was not just the Partido Socialista that was accused of meddling. The regional secretary of Santiago called out Jorge Abedrapo of the relationship. “We are not a black hand that has been behind the secondary student movement,” member Franco Quidel Mora told El Sur (6/13/06).
Colegio de Profesores for instigating the movement, while the Partido Comunista came under fire from then-Vice President and Interior Secretary Andres Zaldivar. Other than Senator Mariano Ruiz-Esquide (DC), who clumsily tried to make himself into a kind of mediator, none of these ‘outsiders’ acknowledged having any hand in the movement: Not only did they want to avoid been seen as puppeteers, many of them also saw benefits of preserving the apolitical youth narrative if it achieved the same ends, anyway.

The other major problem with the image of an effective, united pingüino front is that things were, in fact, much messier than they appeared. The Chilean press covered this towards the end of the movement in June, as principals complained of vandalism, broken windows, and schools in utter disarray. After seeing two Talcahuano schools (Eighth Region) too damaged to resume classes, one education official proclaimed:

“Look at this school, it was new, two years ago we handed it over and we invested 800 million pesos [more than $US 1.5 million]. Then they complain about a better education and give us this spectacle, it is not possible.”

(El Sur 6/14/06)

It was not just the fractured end of the movement, however, that reflected the more disorganized side of the pingüino mobilization. The rules about alcohol, drugs, and sex were not always followed either. According to Jordan Venegas (Colegio York de Peñalolen), the Asambea may have advised others to have “ley seca” (dry laws), but in reality “everyone knew that in the schools there was copete [alcohol], and plenty of it, it was like an ‘open secret’” (Gutiérrez 2006:42). As the movement wore on,

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50 The Chilean government was none to pleased: “The Government has not asked anything from Senator Mariano Ruiz-Esquide,” spokesperson Ricardo Lagos Weber stated (El Mercurio 6/11/06).
student leaders also said, it was harder to keep order and kick out students who were there simply for fun.

Finally, the Asamblea did not always receive high marks for its organization or democratic make-up. The organization, which was originally limited to Santiago-area schools, did make significant strides in reaching out to students from schools around the country. Newspapers reported on students from faraway regions who would get on buses over the weekend to come to Santiago and meet. But the horizontal decision-making structure of the Asamblea did not always translate into consensus. As opposed to the federación make-up (used for student governments at universities and high schools) that relies on an elected slate of leaders to lead and represent the student body, the Asamblea relied on consensus-based discussions and trust in voceros (spokespeople) to communicate decisions. Significant disagreements – between radical and conservative factions, between those from Santiago and those from the regions – resulted in tricky tasks for the voceros, who were accused of infusing their own interests into the movement.

This criticism was two-pronged and highlighted the personality-driven nature of the Chilean media. The first critique was directed at the voceros accused of letting their political leanings interfere with the objectives of the movement. Along with the “mysterious resignations” cited by Herrera, the other leader who faced serious scrutiny was Maria Sanhueza, an open militante to the Partido Comunista. After the first paro nacional, Sanhueza was reportedly behind efforts to invite the major workers’ federation, the CUT, to join the threat for a second paro nacional. The press also jumped on her when they were told by her principal that Sanhueza was barely
recognized as a student at her school because she had missed so many classes.  

When she and Herrera remained as the last two *voceros* at the end of the movement in June, some of the Chilean public regarded it as a sign that the movement had essentially been politicized and radicalized.

The second critique was directed at the cozy relationship between the press and the *pingüino* leadership. Chileans, which use the slang term ‘*farándula*’ to describe the ‘fraternizing’ and gossiping that goes on between the media and high society, began to recognize the *voceros* and student leaders as not only spokespeople of a movement but as popular figures too. Newspapers and gossip shows came up with nicknames for the leaders, like *Comandante Conejo* [Commander Rabbit] for Juan Carlos Herrera, and *guatón farándula* [fat fraternizer] for Julio Isamit.  

They also delighted in determining whether Valenzuela and Delfino were dating or, as they first told the press, “just friends” (they later admitted they were dating). The enchantment with these *pingüino* celebrities were short-lived, and some of their followers were frankly embittered. “They were used by the media as part of a political strategy to diminish the importance of the movement,” said Gonzalo Cabrera Rubio of *Liceo de Aplicación* (Gutiérrez 2006: 20). Such an observation was not without merit: When Valenzuela and Delfino stepped down from the *Asamblea*, their exits (and their accumulated prestige) served as symbols for both the public and the media that the movement was effectively ending.

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51 After questions from the press, Sanhueza’s school confirmed that her attendance record was about 50% (*El Mercurio* 6/6/06).

52 As evidence of how popular these names were, a personal anecdote: After interviewing Julio Isamit, I returned home to my host family and told them about my encounter. They did not know who Isamit was until I mentioned his nickname, at which point they smiled, laughed, and acknowledged who I had been talking about.
These counter-narratives provide some evidence that the pingüino mobilization was not as effective or coordinated as they seemed. Herrera’s ‘effervescence’ theory may be more accurate, especially if framed with a proper understanding of the stratified roles of secondary students in Chile. The movement, in brief, went exactly as it should have: the liceos emblematicos began it, the rest followed, and the country became obsessed. The media performed its role by covering the elite youth, who appropriated some of the real concerns among their peers with a more expansive and eloquent proposal for change. The elites challenged the government, just as their predecessors of the 1960s and 1980s had, and learned the ins and outs of politicking, mobilization and popular protest. And they made some mistakes along the way, both in the Asamblea and with their interactions with their peers. This made the pingüino movement much sloppier than their resource-laden counterparts in the education social movement industry, who were able to influence and divide the movement.

In this light, the pingüino movement appears no more unusual than any prior student movement in Chile or other student movements in the world. But this is also a bit disingenuous, as the pingüino movement was diverse in participation and tactics. The media reports and interviews offer just a glimpse into the tactics and models of mobilization employed by the pingüinos. There were hundreds of schools that took action, and few of them were covered by the press. The bitter feelings of some towards the Asamblea must also contend with the fact that for most schools, their accomplishments took place not in Asamblea negotiations with the government, but in smaller meetings with principals, education officials, and mayors. The decentralized (and messy) nature of the movement also diminish the importance of
conspiracy theories of outsider influence, except perhaps in urban centers like Santiago where these groups were both viable and effective. At the individual school level, the pingüino movement was a grass-roots campaign for a better education system.
Conclusion

What is perplexing or difficult to understand about social movements often hits close to its most important features. For the revolución pingüina, we have identified several of these puzzles and attempted to solve them, or at least dig deeper in trying to understand them. These include the explosive rise of the movement and its high rate of adherence, the diversity of participants both young and old, and the effective organizational tactics of high school students with little or no previous mobilization experience. Equally intriguing, the Chilean government’s seeming inability to either foresee or prevent the movement has also been addressed.

In addition, this thesis has tried to look at the movement from various perspectives in order to parse out what made the pingüinos distinct from or similar to other social movements. Examining how the pingüinos fit into Chile’s complicated and difficult past provided ample evidence, for example, that the resurgent youth narrative told by the press was rather romanticized. At the same time, the historical analysis identified a clear trajectory of popular protest in Chile, which can explain the widespread sympathy for the movement, as well as some of the emotional meaning attributed (correctly or not) to the pingüinos.

Looking at the Chilean education system was also important in evaluating the validity of the pingüino demands, and to understand why the pingüinos felt it was necessary to protest for these demands. By identifying the dual, opposing educational reforms that have produced the present system in Chile, the pent-up anger and frustration from participants and sympathizers is more understandable. Moreover, the diverse desires and complaints of the pingüinos – a broken roof in rural Lota, missing lunches in Concepción, the cost of commuting to school in Santiago – deconstructs
the image of some amorphous mass of students wanting change. The stratified aspect of the Chilean education system is seen not only in the demands, but also in the course of the movement.

Not unrelated, an unpeeling of the pingüino youth coalition revealed interesting observations about the movement. It confirmed, for example, two conclusions from earlier chapters: 1) that a historical trajectory of popular protest has always existed in Chile and has been especially true for youth protest and 2) that the stratified nature of the Chilean educational system became extremely relevant in deciding who would be the leaders and communicators of the movement (i.e. the emblematico elites). The image of an independent, effectively mobilized youth was also deconstructed, demonstrating that while there were some impressive protest tactics by the pingüinos, the movement as a whole may have been a lot messier than otherwise perceived.

These revelations are important in answering our initial set of questions, namely: What sorts of explanations – materialist, political-process, resource mobilization, and cultural – best describe the pingüino movement? In other words, by looking at the movement, now given its proper amount of complexity and context, what would a social movement theorist have to say? Evaluating the claim of each explanation may enable us to further define what the pingüino movement was really about, what it might say about the future of Chile, and whether it holds any other lessons for researchers and activists alike.

The history of Chile lends itself to both political-process and materialist explanations. A political-process theorist, for example, sees striking similarities between the pingüino movement and the popular protest styles of the 1960s and
1980s. The ‘repertoire of contention’ (Tarrow 1998) was clearly at play here: the 
toma was previously utilized by both the Right and the Left to protest, and the 
pingüinos tried it out again just less than four decades later. Their decision to take 
over schools at the end of May, rather than continue the violent marches that had 
taken place the two weeks beforehand, radicalized the movement and made it 
something both new (for the pingüinos) and historic (for Chile). The paro nacional 
on May 30 was also an effective tactic, demonstrating the depth and width of the 
movement. Finally, the political-process theory fits in nicely with the idea that such a 
movement could only really occur with a government unable to handle the crisis. 
President Bachelet’s administration not only mishandled the situation, but also 
campaigned on the very premise that such protests were legitimate and appropriate if 
done without violence, with ‘cara descubierta’ (which, while not always true, became 
the accepted narrative). With changes like these in the existing structure, the chance 
that a movement could bubble up and succeed was greatly increased.

A materialist explanation is also supported by the Chilean case. Economic 
inequality has been a flashpoint for political protest in Chile since the 1960s. Chile 
remains a stratified society, while the legacy of the military regime and its neoliberal 
policies has only sharpened the anger felt by some of the poor. The pingüino 
movement played off these feelings, albeit not in a direct way. The student demands, 
while in rhetoric suggestive perhaps of a lower-class struggle, was communicated by 
the elites. The elites convinced the Chilean public to see the pingüino movement as a 
resurgent youth demanding equal opportunity (potentially even a class-less 
movement…). But the materialist, given the history of economic struggle and 
inequality in Chile, views the movement more as another struggle between classes.
The lower classes won some concessions from the government, but not enough, as the movement fizzled to the typical extraparliamentary left coalition that opposes the reconciliatory attitude of the *Concertación* government.

Meanwhile, the historical framework offered in the second chapter tends to refute both cultural or resource mobilization explanations of the movement. A cultural argument highlights the very narrative that has been romanticized; that is, the idea that the Chilean youth of today was finally old enough take the streets without fear. The media sustained this narrative, even as other movements during the last decade (as well as during the 1980s) demonstrate that Chileans have always been willing to protest. The *pingüinos* were simply not as distinctive as they appeared. Resource mobilization theory also fails to address the popular protest tactics that had already been in place throughout Chilean history.

The structure and history of the Chilean education system only further supports a materialist argument. The effect of two opposing reforms by the state – the privatization efforts of the military regime and the ‘*crecimiento con equidad*’ (growth with equity) strategy of the *Concertación* coalition – created the stratified system of today. The upper class continues to control the material resources by getting the most access to college. The disparities between PSU scores make it clear that the regional municipalities are simply not adequately equipped to send students to universities. And the *pingüino* movement reflected these varied demands – while the lower classes wanted immediate benefits like better infrastructure and free lunches, the *emblematico* leaders tried to push the movement towards greater goals like the derogation of the LOCE. That quest was, in a word, ironic, as it pitted the elites against an education system that ultimately favored them. Not only that, it was
against the decentralized nature of privatization, designed to give families like the poor more choices. Still, the materialist argument continues the thread of inequality sown during the last several decades in Chile, where the education system is but a powerful symbol of the ongoing class struggle.

Resource mobilization explanations are stronger when examining Chile’s education system. The ability of parents to choose their children’s schools (when choices are available or affordable) empowered parents to demand changes and organize themselves as well. The structure of parental associations and strong teacher unions demonstrates the existence of a significant social movement industry (SMI) surrounding education, an observation that became even clearer from the perspective of Chilean youth coalition-building. A political-process theory also gains some traction in the idea that the elites used the “mark of injustice” to convince the Chilean public that something was inherently unfair about the system. A cultural argument seems to fail again, however: While the Chilean education system has an arguably unique history, it is neither the only or to have equity issues concerning education nor the only country to have a privatized system. Plus, protests against education privatization have occurred in other countries as well.

Finally, the deconstruction of the youth movement suggests further reliance on materialist and political-process explanations. The materialist points to the tradition of elites “trying out” for politics vis-à-vis secondary student movement participation and leadership. The pingüinos themselves confirm this in their scorn for the fárandula [fraternization], which they perceived as ultimately hindering the success of the movement (This scorn must be punctuated by the acknowledgment of media bias and hindsight bias of more bitter leaders like Juan Carlos Herrera). What
is not disputable, however, is the media’s infatuation with the *emblematico* elites, who they accurately portrayed as the next generation of political leaders. The *pingüino* movement, while awash in ideals for a more equitable system, did not effectively change the way material resources are awarded in Chile. In this light, the movement might be considered a failure.

Political-process theorists would disagree, but only with the normative nature of calling the *pingüino* movement a ‘failure.’ All movements rise and fall, depending on the coalition of willing allies, early risers like those in Lota or among certain radical *emblematicos*, and/or the government’s ability to either repress or respond to the protest. The analysis of the Chilean youth coalition shows a weak, but not unsubstantial group of students that were aided (or influenced, hindered, etc.) by several influential allies, including legislators, political parties, and the powerful *Colegio de Profesores*. Meanwhile, a resource mobilization interpretation is partly refuted by the messy nature of the protest tactics, suggesting that the youth coalition was not as resource-laden or well-mobilized as it appeared. A cultural argument also falls into trouble without evidence that the *pingüinos* were somehow more mature than non-Chilean peers or lived in a culture that allowed them to more ably coalesce around a movement.

In conclusion, the analysis of the *revolución pingüina* suggests putting greater weight in materialist and political-process explanations. For the former, the unequal and stratified society that exists in Chile overwhelms the narrative of student unity told by the media (and a cultural explanation). With the latter, the rise and fall of the movement is attributed to the complex balance of allies and enemies that the *pingüinos* interacted with. Indeed, the two theories complement each other nicely.
when it comes to identifying the *emblematico* elites as the ironic heart of the movement: playing nice with the Chilean press while ultimately allowing the movement to crumble due to both fissures within (political-process), as well as their own elite interests in gaining political prominence (materialist). The role of the elites as maybe a kind of vanguard of the *pingüino* movement also supports both explanations.

This might leave a somewhat cynical taste to what was hailed as the “first great mobilization of the 21st century” by one of the first writers to chronicle the ups and downs of the *pingüino* movement (Gutiérrez 2006: 1). Or by *The Washington Post* as a movement that was “quickly labeled a milestone for the nation’s young democracy” (11/25/06). Must Chilean society and social movement theorists dismiss these claims as overly rosy in what was really an oft-followed model of social protest and change that, in the words of Juan Carlos Herrera, turned into a more dramatic “effervescence” of participation?

Not nearly. The narrative of the *pingüino* movement told by the press deserves retelling because in the weeks of May and June, Chilean society did regard the movement as something significant (and many still do today). There was a temporal feeling of pride and support for a coalition of youth that effectively and persuasively pushed an agenda of education reform onto the *Concertación* table. The fissures, the sometimes messy quality to the protest, and even the stratified nature revealed much about the status of Chilean society, which in general deeply sympathized with the *pingüinos* and their demand for education reform. And equally important was the response from the ‘post-transition’ government of President
Bachelet, whose administration clumsily but willingly acknowledged a problem with the current system.

For all these reasons, the Chilean pingüinos hold lessons for both the social movement theorist and the activist. The social movement theorist can learn the importance of approaching a movement like the revolución pingüina with an understanding of its inherent complexity, and the importance of looking at a movement with proper historical and structural contexts. It also suggests that materialist and political-process theories may share some common ground for movements that involve economically stratified societies or the existence of an elite demanding equity for its peers.

The activist, on the other hand, should take away a better understanding of the extraordinarily complex factors that lead to a movement’s rise or downfall. Mobilization is a messy business and it is not easy, especially in education systems that favor the wealthy over the poor. At the same time, the refutation of the cultural model offers hope for other aspiring pingüinos that they too can successfully push for education reform. The pingüinos are therefore neither an anomaly nor just another movement in a long series of student discontent. Indeed, they hold a special place in the memories of Chileans, and they remain a model and a lesson for the future.
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**Newspapers**

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*El Sur* (Concepción, Chile)
*La Nación* (Santiago, Chile)
*La Tercera* (Santiago, Chile)
*Las Ultimas Noticias* (Santiago, Chile)
*The New York Times* (New York City, United States)
*The Washington Post* (Washington, DC, United States)
Appendix: A Timeline of Events, April-June 2006

KEY: ● = Toma (school takeover); ◆ = Paro (skip school and/or protest outside); ★ = March


Toma: Lota (1) ◆ Paro: Lota (3) ★

March: Santiago (4000)
March: Concepción (100)

4/30 5/1

Protest: May Day
March: Santiago (3000); Concepción (1000); Lota (500)

5/7 5/10 5/11 5/12

★ March: Concepción (2000)
★ March: Santiago, Concepción

5/14 5/18 5/19 5/20

Toma: (5) (2) (3) (24) (42+) MANY
Paro: (1) (4) (10) (13) (24+) MANY


First Paro Nacional: Marches in 13 cities, 300,000 affected

5/28 5/30

Tomas and paros continue

6/4 6/5 6/6 6/10

Second Paro Nacional: Marches in Santiago, Valparaiso, Concepción

6/11 6/12 6/13

Toma: (6) (1) all return
Appendix : Photos I

A paro nacional in Santiago (September 26, 2006)

Teachers marched according to municipality, like those from Cerro Navia (photo A), while others marched with signs (photo C).

Students made up the majority of the protest, as much as 80% according to a newspaper report (photo B).

The appearance of the ‘pingüino’ costume (photo D) shows how powerful (and friendly) the image had become.

The carabineros (photo E) supposedly used a new strategy for the paro. Here they are blocking Alameda, the main street in Santiago.
Appendix : Photos II

A toma at Instituto Nacional (October 2006)

▲ A statue of former principal Juan N. Espejo Varas, fully scarved as an encapuchado in front of the school. Other statues received a similar treatment.

▲ Two students preparing to confront the police, with rocks to throw if necessary. There were rumors that a dislodgment was imminent.

▲ A banner in front of the school: “If Jesus were alive today, he wouldn’t have an education. His father was a Karpinter [sic].”

▲ Students peddling for money from supportive passerbys. By painting their faces as mimes, a common image during the protest, the students identified themselves as pinguinos, and, more practically, didn’t have to say anything while asking.