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1. Introduction

In 2013, one of the key issues under debate during the Chilean Presidential election was the reform of the country's educational system. Not coincidentally, public opinion polls showed that education was among the public policy arenas that most worried Chileans, and that a meager 14% of those surveyed thought the current government was doing a good or very good job on education¹. This has not always been so. Education had not been a key issue in the previous two Presidential elections, nor had there been such a strong call for reform. Its centrality in public debates is the result of the previous two years of massive protests led by university students, which, in turn, have been fueled by high levels of dissatisfaction with the responses given to their demands by both Congress and the Executive power. Beginning in May 2011, hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets to demand educational reform, in a surge of mobilization that surprised both the activists that called these protests and political actors in general. In spite of the war of numbers the actors have waged – the government and the police have downplayed participation, while activists have done the exact opposite – , it is a general consensus that these have been the most massive demonstrations in Chile since the transition to democracy in 1990 (Segovia and Gamboa, 2012; Somma, 2012).

This chapter presents an analysis of this important movement, going back in time to explain its development from 2005 onwards. It pays special attention to the relationship between the students' movement and the political system. More specifically, it presents an analysis about

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¹ According to the public opinion surveys conducted by the Center for Public Studies (Centro de Estudios Públicos – CEP), at the end of 2010, 38% of those surveyed thought that education was one of three key public policy areas in which the government should focus its efforts. This percentage increased to 44% at the height of the protests (June-July 2011), losing in relevance only to security issues (47%). Data comparing answers to this question since 1990 shows that education had never been considered so important by so many Chileans. In mid-2013, on the eve of the Presidential elections, education remained the key policy area for 44% of those surveyed. See the data available in www.cepchile.cl (accessed 08/31/2013).

its changing relationship with political parties. By doing so, we seek not only to contribute to the specific debates about social movements in Chile, but also to the ongoing discussion in social movement literature about the interaction between social movements and political parties in democratic contexts.

In spite of the recent attention given by the literature to the interactions between social movements and political parties (Goldstone, 2003; Van Cott, 2005; Arce, 2010; Almeida, 2010), there is still much to be learned about the ways in which these interactions occur and their changes through time. We agree with the broad assertion that the boundaries between “institutionalized and noninstitutionalized politics” are fuzzy and permeable (Goldstone, 2003: 2). However, we also argue that there is great variation in this permeability, depending on the specific political context as well as on the strategies of the social movement under study. Furthermore, as the students’ case shows, walls separating these actors can be built, demolished and again rebuilt on a different basis.

The students’ mobilizations are similar to other recent protests in Latin America, to the extent that they have put front and center the demand for a greater role of the state in public policy making and, more specifically, on regulating the role of the market (Silva, 2009; Bellinger and Arce, 2011). Led by university students, it has gone from a specific critique of the loans and grants system to increasingly broad demands that call for the end of profit-making in the educational system, egalitarian access to education, the assurance of quality in tertiary programs, and the internal democratization of universities. These demands represent a strong challenge to the basic principles of the Chilean educational model, which, as we will see, is one of the world’s most market-oriented systems. Thus, not unlike other recent protests in the region, the Chilean students’ movement has mobilized around a master frame that links neoliberal policies to inequality and injustice.

However, in countries such as Bolivia, Ecuador, or Brazil, to give only three examples, at least some social movements have turned to electoral politics and to political parties in order to gain the leverage needed to induce change (Almeida, 2010). In spite of significant tensions, in these countries the center-to-left coalitions that came to power in recent years have strong ties to social movements (Silva, 2009). In Chile, though, the student movement did not lead to stronger alliances with political parties. Quite the contrary.

We argue in this chapter that, between 2005 and 2012, there has been a steady process of distancing between this social movement and Chilean political parties, in particular with those center-to-left parties that had had a strong presence within the movement up until then. This general trend is the result of deliberate attempts by groups of activists to build a more autonomous movement. Such a process has had important consequences both within and outside the movement. Internally, it has entailed a loss by political parties of leadership positions in students’ organizations, and a strengthening of groups that are located to the left of the ideological spectrum but reject any ties to traditional political parties. Externally, it has presented political brokers with hard to overcome obstacles in their attempts to build bridges with parliamentarians and government officials, and more resistance on the part of leaders to accept taking part in negotiating arenas with those actors.

This has not been a consensual process, but rather a very divisive one. In fact, we can point to various leaders of the movement who publicly assume and defend their membership to political parties. Some of them have even decided to participate as candidates in elections, either through existing political parties, or through new alternatives that they have helped to create². Still, it is possible to argue that traditional political parties are less present in students' organizations than in the past and, even in the cases of the ones that still have influence on the movement, this influence has weakened in the period studied.

This chapter is divided in two sections. The first presents the demands of the student movement in light of the current situation of the educational system in Chile. It shows that although the country has made significant progress in terms of access to education, there are important problems related to quality of education that are unevenly felt by the different socioeconomic strata of the population. The second section analyzes the students' movement from 2005 to 2012, with a special focus on the massive protests held in 2006 and, most specially, in 2011. The analysis is based on interviews with activists, held between October 2011 and August 2013³, as well as on a review of documents produced by student organizations and texts written by leaders.

2. Education as a right or as a consumer good? The educational system and the students movement demands

*¡Lo que el pueblo necesita es educación gratuita,
porque el pueblo está cansado de las leyes del mercado!
("What people need is free education, because the people is tired of market laws!"
Students' chant during the 2011 protests)*

On July 2011, while students demanded in the streets the recognition of education as a citizen's right, President Piñera publicly declared that tertiary education was a consumer good that should be conceived as a personal investment that improves the prospects of the people who acquire it⁴. After several months of protests, this statement showed the abysmal gap that separated the government and the mobilized students. In order to understand this polarization, it is important to understand the basic characteristics of the Chilean educational system.

The current educational system was established in the 1980s, during the military dictatorship (1973-1989). Following an economically liberal credo, the military regime made deep changes to the traditional educational system, one of the main goals of which was to promote a greater participation of the private sector in the provision of educational services. After the 1990 democratic transition, the governments led by the center-left coalition *Concertación de*

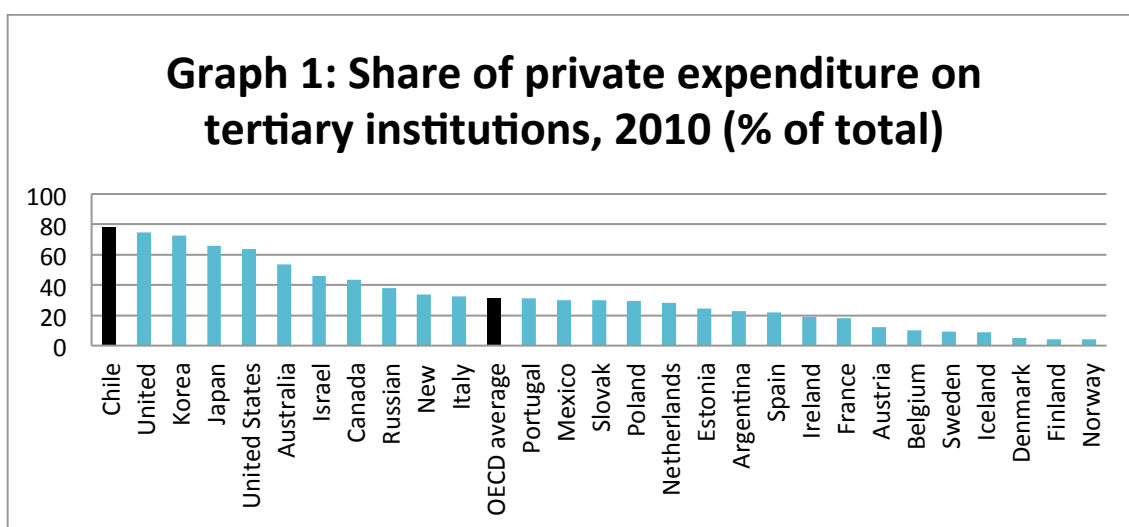
² The best known examples are of the most visible 2011 leaders, both of whom ran for seats in the Chamber of Deputies in 2013: Camila Vallejo, of the Communist Party, and Giorgio Jackson, for a new independent movement, the Democratic Revolution.

³ We conducted 30 interviews with leaders (those that held key elected positions in students' organizations in 2006, 2010, 2011 and 2012) in the cities of Santiago, Concepción, Antofagasta and Punta Arenas.

⁴ See: <http://www.emol.com/noticias/nacional/2011/07/19/493428/presidente-pinera-afirma-que-la-educacion-es-un-bien-de-consumo.html> [accessed 08/21/2013].

Partidos por la Democracia (hereafter *Concertación*) invested more state resources in the educational system, aiming at improving the quality of the education as well as extending its coverage (Arellano, 2005; Donoso Díaz, 2005). However, the basic structure set by the dictatorship, which privileged market provision and private funding, was maintained (Cox, 2003: 16).

The changes made during the democratic period have yielded mixed results. On the one hand, they have been highly successful in terms of coverage. In 1990, only 52% of the population between 20-24 years old had completed secondary education. As of 2006, this percentage had risen to 80% (OECD/IBRD, 2009: 76). Regarding tertiary education, the enrollment numbers are impressive as well: while in 1980 there were less than 120 thousand students (OECD and IBRD, 2009), by 2011 there were over one million (OECD, 2013). Those results are particularly good in the Latin American context (OREALC/UNESCO, 2012: 58; 91). On the other hand, the country's system has persistently failed to diminish the inequality in access to high-quality tertiary education, and it has one of the lowest average public expenditure for tertiary institutions in the OECD (OECD, 2013). Accordingly, as shown in Graph 1, it is the OECD country in which private funds account for the highest share of expenditures in tertiary institutions. In 2010, 70,12% of expenditures in tertiary institutions came from households, 22,11% was public expenditure, and 7,78% came from other private entities⁵. The students' organizations were very successful in rallying support around a strong critique of the role of the market in education. This was done by focusing initially on the high levels of indebtedness of students and their families.

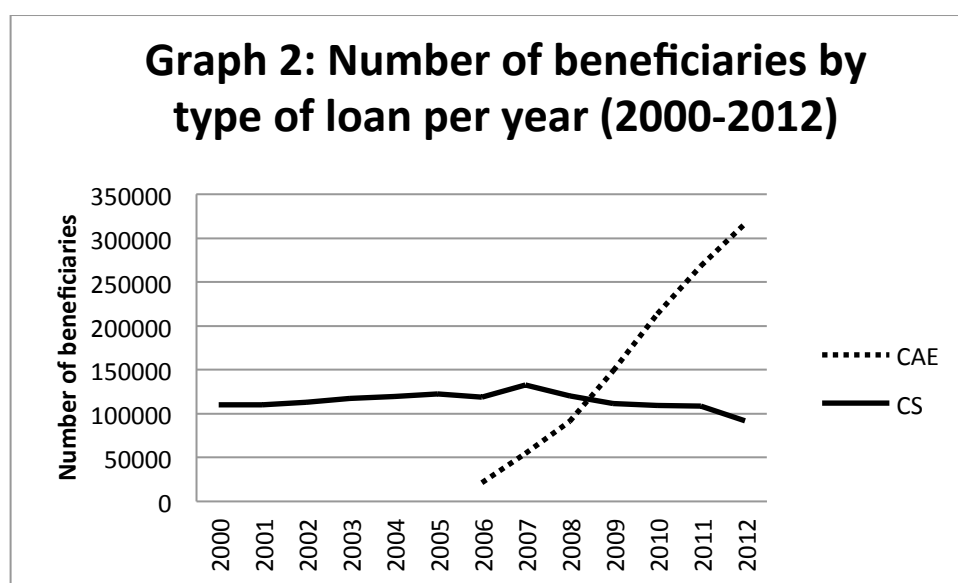


Source: own elaboration, based on OECD data (OECD, 2013).

These data reflect the fact that, since the reforms of the 1980s, there is no free tertiary education in Chile. The 2013 OECD Education at a Glance Report proposes a taxonomy that takes into account the cost of the tuition fees and the financial support available for the students in different countries of the world. Chile is classified as part of the group of “countries with high tuition fees but less-developed student support systems” (OECD 2013, p. 228).

⁵ See the data available in <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932846975>.

There are two main financial support tools in place for low and middle income households: grants and loans. The grants are usually conditioned on the resources of the households and the scores of the student in the university entry exam. In 2009, only 13,8% of the students in tertiary education institutions received some kind of grant (OECD, 2009: 106)⁶. With respect to loans, there are two main state supported options. The most attractive one for the students (with lower interest rates and softer conditions) is the Solidarity Loan (*Crédito Solidario*, CS). Nonetheless, only the students enrolled in 25 “traditional” universities (as are known the institutions that existed before the 1980s reforms, which are also the most prestigious and the ones that demand the highest entry exam scores) have access to this program⁷. The second was established in 2005, as a result of a partnership between the Chilean state and private banks (but with sensitively worse terms for the students than the CS loan). This new loan, the Government Guaranteed Loan (*Crédito con Aval del Estado*, CAE), is available for all students, and it quickly became highly successful. In 2009, after three years of implementation, the number of CAE debtors was higher than the number of debtors of the traditional CS (see graph 1).



Source: own elaboration with Ministry of Education data (MINEDUC 2011; 2013).

Thus, the expansion of tertiary enrollment in Chile occurred in parallel with the growing indebtedness of large sectors of the society. If we only take into account the students that used the CS and CAE loans, by 2012 almost half of all students were financing their education through those two state supported loans, a number that is even higher if we add the students that contract private loans⁸.

⁶ Scholarships usually do not cover all the tuition fees. According to the OECD, “It is estimated that the scholarships today cover between 63% and 70% of the actual cost of tuition fees. For the rest, students must take out loans” (OECD; 2009: 106).

⁷ Between 1994 and 2010 over half a million students used the CS to pay for their education (MINEDUC, 2010: 11).

⁸ It is very hard to know the exact number of private loans contracted, but the number is high. In only one case, of the CORFO (Corporación de Fomento de la Producción de Chile) loan, in 2012 there were 106,000 students indebted with this type of loan. Information disclosed by the Executive Vice President

In direct connection with the critiques students made of the financing system was the demand for enforcement of the law that forbids universities from having a profit. In fact, the most important slogan of the 2011 student movement was “Say no to profit”⁹. Profit making was presented by student leaders as one of the core problems of the educational system, one that was both immoral and illegal. There are three types of tertiary institutions in the Chilean educational system: universities, Professional Institutes – Institutos Profesionales (IPs) and Technical Training Centers – Centros de Formación Técnica (CFTs). According to Chilean law, universities are prohibited from profiting from their activities. Nonetheless, it is widely known in Chile that many private universities do in fact have a profit (Mönckeberg, 2007), a situation that has been tacitly accepted by all governments since the 1980s, regardless of political orientation. In the students’ view, universities should reinvest all their profits in order to improve their quality. These two key demands – a review of financing schema and the enforcement of the prohibition to profit – were complemented by a third one, which was to guarantee access to high quality education for all.

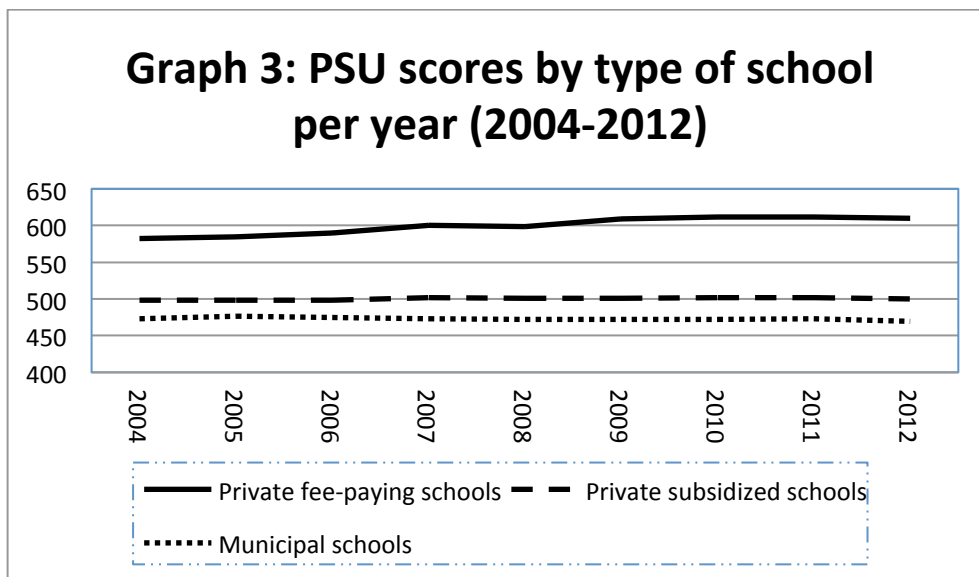
The inequality produced (and reproduced) by the educational system can be presented as a two step process. First, primary and secondary institutions segregate according to the economic level of the families: poor students go to public schools, middle income ones attend publicly-subsidized private schools, and the high income sectors attend private fee-paying schools (Cox, 2003; García Huidobro, 2007)¹⁰. The second consecutive step regards access to tertiary education. In Chile, the “University Selection Test” (“Prueba de Selección Universitaria”, PSU) is an entry test used by the best universities. The higher the score a student has in the PSU, the better the tertiary education he/she can choose. The problem with the PSU selection system is that the scores obtained reflect the differences in the quality of the education that schools provide (see graph 2). As the poorest strata go to public schools, they get lower PSU scores. The doors of the best-ranked universities and technical schools thus remain closed to them. Student leaders argued repeatedly that this was the hidden reality behind the celebrated increased access of popular sectors to tertiary education, often citing data from OECD Reports. According to them, the PSU system doesn’t select the best students, but the richest ones.

of COFO during the the 11/06/2013 session of the Education, Sport and Recreation committee of the House of Representatives. The session transcription is available online:

<http://www.camara.cl/pdf.aspx?prmID=15577&prmtipo=ACTACOMISION> [accessed 08/09/2013].

⁹ “No al lucro” in Spanish.

¹⁰ According to the Ministry of Education (2012), in 2011 39% of the students were enrolled in public schools, 52% in private subsidized schools and 7% in private paying fees schools. The remaining 2% of students were enrolled in secondary institutions financed by the State but administrated by private actors that provide technical and professional qualification.



Source: Own elaboration using data from the Department of Evaluation, Measurement and Educational Registry (DEMRE-University of Chile)¹¹

From the 1990s onward, successive governments have made efforts to enhance the quality of tertiary institutions. In 1999, the National Undergraduate Accreditation Commission was created, replaced in 2006 by the National Accreditation Commission and the National System of Quality Assurance of Superior Education. This system does not mandate institutions to be accredited, but accreditation entails some benefits,¹² and has become a common practice among universities. In 2011, 92% of the universities were accredited. The technical schools, which can grant professional and technical degrees, have a very different situation. Only 39% of the IPs and 19% of the CFTs were accredited in 2011 (Jiménez de la Jara, Lagos Rojas and Durán del Fierro, 2011: 100). The quality of the education provided by those institutions was severely criticized by the students, and a mandatory accreditation system was demanded. Moreover, even if almost all universities are accredited, the students argued that the accreditation system hasn't been transparent enough and, therefore, didn't assure the quality of the accredited institutions. Those suspicions were proven true in 2012, when a corruption scandal that directly involved the president of the National Accreditation Commission exploded in Chile, who was accused of receiving bribes. As a result, he quit his post¹³ and the Ministry of Education announced a profound reform of the accreditation system¹⁴.

¹¹ DEMRE is the institution in charge of the PSU test. The graph is based on data from their yearly statistical compounds, available at www.demre.cl

¹² For instance, only the accredited institutions student's can benefit from some government supported loans.

¹³ See: <http://ciperchile.cl/2012/03/30/eugenio-diaz-renuncio-a-la-cna/> [accessed 08/27/2013].

¹⁴ On January 2013 the Executive sent a bill to Congress, which proposed a reform of the accreditation system of tertiary education institutions. This bill is currently under debate. See: <http://www.gob.cl/destacados/2013/01/08/presidente-pinera-firmo-proyecto-de-ley-que-crea-nuevo-sistema-de-acreditacion-para-la-educacion-sup.htm> [accessed 05/09/2013], and <http://www.biobiochile.cl/2012/12/17/ministro-beyer-pondra-suma-urgencia-a-proyecto-que-busca-reformar-sistema-de-acreditacion.shtml> [accessed 08/27/2013].

Finally, a very important component of the educational reform demanded by the students was the democratization of the tertiary institutions. The Chilean student movement has traditionally demanded participative instances that foster the student's involvement in the decision making process of their institutions. The traditional far-reaching demand of the movement is the institution of co-government, which would assure the participation and right to vote of the students and university workers in the decisive instances of the tertiary institutions, along with the academics. The current legal frame, inherited from the dictatorship, explicitly forbids all tertiary institutions to give the representatives of the students and workers the right to vote in their governmental bodies¹⁵. In fact, the current reality of the student's organizations in the Chilean tertiary institutions is quite far from the students' demand. While the "traditional" universities allow students to elect representatives and form student federations, in some universities the representatives are designated by the authorities and in many cases the right of association is denied (CONFECH, 2011). The student movement denounces this practice as unconstitutional and the result of the deregulation of the system. This situation accounts for the long way that should be covered before even thinking in the possibility to establish co-government in all the Chilean tertiary institutions.

3. From "Betrayal" to Distancing: students and political parties

In order to have a proper understanding of the students' mobilizations and their relationship with the Chilean party system, it is essential to present a very brief overview of three important features of the country's political system. In the first place, the electoral rules put in place by the military dictatorship present a strong incentive toward the concentration of actors in two electoral alliances. Not only that, but the so-called "binomial" system in place for parliamentary elections stipulates that, to win the two seats available in each district, the most-voted coalition must receive twice the number of votes of the second majority. Therefore, in the great majority of the districts each coalition wins one seat, splitting the final composition of the Congress in two parts.

The coalitions that resulted from these rules are the "Concertación de Partidos por la Democracia" (center to left), and the "Alianza por Chile" (center to right). Between 1990 and 2010 the Concertación won four presidencies in a row. In 2010, the Alianza won the Presidential elections for the first time since the country's transition to democracy. The electoral rules in place not only tend to overrepresent the first minority in Congress, but they seriously restrict access to the political parties not included in one of the two coalitions (Nohlen, 2000; Navia; 2008).

Furthermore, stringent rules regarding the number of votes needed to make important legislative changes represent an important obstacle to reforms. Before abandoning power, the military government promulgated Constitutional laws in strategic areas, including education. Changing these laws require what is known in Chile as "supermajorities". In practice, these voting requirements together with the electoral rules ensure that each coalition can act as veto player to any reform of the Constitution.

¹⁵ DFL 2 2010, articles 56 (letter e), 67 (letter e) and 75 (letter e). This was a reaction of the dictatorship against the institution of co-government in the Universities in the 1968 Reform.

Thirdly, the Executive Power is the most important actor in the political process, because of the Presidential power to set the legislative agenda and dominate the legislative process. This situation has been described by scholars as “super-presidentialist” (Shugart and Carey, 1992) or “exaggerated presidentialism” (Siavelis, 2002).

While the Concertación has traditionally argued that it was unable to do substantial educational reforms during their governments because of the right wing parties veto capacity, the students’ movement progressively realized that within the Concertación itself there was a lot of resistance to some of its key demands. As we will argue below, the 2006 experience was an important landmark in this process of learning that whichever the coalition in power, broad changes to the educational system would be very hard to achieve without also making changes to the electoral system and the political party system.

3.1 The students movement in time: back to 2006

Bachelet, ¿estás con nosotros? (“Bachelet, are you with us?” – students’ slogan, paraphrasing Presidential candidate Bachelet’s slogan “I am with you”)

The “Penguin Revolution” was not even close to really being a revolutionary movement. Its name has to do less with impacts on public policy and more with the surprising entrance in the Chilean political scenery of secondary students, an actor that nobody thought had an extensive mobilizing power. In fact, the massive protests that began in April 2006 put great pressure on the then newly elected government of the socialist president Michelle Bachelet, and catapulted the educational system to the top of political debates.

We argue that it is impossible to understand the relationship between political parties and the 2011 social movement without considering what happened in the period 2005-2008. However, in many aspects the Penguin’s Revolution was very different from the protests that rocked the country five years later. First of all, it was led by high school students, in contrast to university students in 2011. In fact, mobilized students were nicknamed “penguins” after the black-and-white uniforms they had to wear for school. Thus, its demands focused on secondary education: student leaders called for the end to public subsidies of private schools, the demunicipalization¹⁶ of the system, and free public transportation. Furthermore, although they were able to promote massive mobilizations, these were more limited in time. Street protests and school occupations were concentrated in a period of three months, between March and May of 2006. In contrast, the wave of mobilizations that began in 2011 has been much more sustained and widespread (in fact, as of 2013 it was still ongoing).

Third, at that time at least part of the students’ leadership was closer to political parties of the then ruling coalition than the 2011-2012 leaders. Parties such as the Socialist and the Christian Democratic Parties, the largest parties in the *Concertación*, had close ties with the student

¹⁶ The 1980s military reforms decentralized primary and secondary education. This process is known in Chile as the “municipalización” of the education, because the municipalities became administratively responsible of the schools located in their jurisdictions. The demand for “demunicipalization” aimed at reinforcing the role of the central government in public education provision.

movement, dating from before the dictatorship. As we will argue below, the gap between the student movement and these traditional political parties became larger in 2011-2012 than it was during the 2006 protests.

For the purposes of the analysis presented in this chapter, we will focus on this last difference. At first glance, the 2006 mobilizations are a clear-cut case of a social movement that tries to take advantage of the opening of the political opportunity structure. The election of a Socialist president that based her 2005 campaign discourse on the need for greater citizen participation was perceived by many Penguin leaders as a moment in which there would be less repression, while at the same time the presence of allies in the government allowed for greater openings for change (Donoso, 2013: 21). In fact, many students perceived that the government really wanted to make changes, but it was limited to what it could do because of the opposition, and that the student movement could help by exercising pressure from below¹⁷.

After several weeks of denial, in which the government either ignored the protests or criticized them as “undemocratic” and violent¹⁸, on June of 2006 it reacted proactively, accepting some of the more minor student demands, and proposing the creation of a Presidential Advisory Commission on the Quality of Education to discuss a broader reform proposal. This large Commission had 74 members, 12 of which represented student organizations. Whether or not to take part in this commission was a matter of strong contention within the student movement. However, finally the majority decided to participate.

A few days before the presentation of the Commission’s Report, in December of 2006, the students’ representatives withdrew from it, arguing that the text did not reflect their call for a clear and overall reform of the educational system. In 2007, the government sent a legislative proposal to Congress that did include the end of public funding for private profitmaking schools, among other changes. However, this proposal was strongly criticized not only by the opposition, but also by members of the governing coalition. When a new educational law was finally approved (the “General Law of Education”) with votes from both coalitions, in 2009, it did not include any of the key demands of the Penguins’ Revolution. In fact, throughout 2008 students protested against the bill, but were unable to reproduce the massiveness of the 2006 protests. Student leaders involved at the time tell this story as one of frustration and, most importantly, of “betrayal” by those they perceived as political allies.

Although the main leaders in 2011 are not the same ones that led the 2006 mobilizations, they were socialized in the experience of the Penguins’ movement, and many have participated personally in both waves of protest. Evidence of this continuity comes from the interviews we have undertaken, but also from the documents and speeches that show the extent to which the movements’ current vision has been shaped by the previous experience. As the president of one of the most important university federations in 2006 argued: “I don’t think I will ever forgive Michelle Bachelet for the approval of the General Law of Education, and the picture of the presidents of the *Concertación* and the rightwing with their hands in the air celebrating the agreement. I mention this because in the political debate not only arguments and reason have

¹⁷ Personal interview with Daniel Carrillo, 2006 secondary student leader, Concepción, August 30, 2013.

¹⁸ President Bachelet’s first speech to the nation, in May of 2011, ignored the students’ demands and focused on a critique of violence during the protests.

weight, but also experience, trust..."(Grau, 2013). Another important leader in 2011 remembers the same picture, which was taken when the new law was approved: "Hand in hand... the presidents of the right-wing and the Concertación political parties... This picture represented the answer of the political party system to 2006, and it had a profound impact among students, conditioning the relationship that they would establish with the political system in the following years" (Figuerola, 2012: 81).

3.2 The student movement and the political parties in 2011

"El pueblo, unido, avanza sin partido"
("The people, united, moves forward without political parties",
Students' chant during the 2011 protests)

When confronted with massive protests in May of 2011, the initial reaction of then President Piñera was to "wait and see", betting that the movement would wear out eventually. As the President's approval rates plummeted and support for the movement rose in public polls, the Executive power tried to adjust its strategy to a "carrot and stick" one. In July of 2011, in a speech on national television, the President proposed a series of changes in educational policy. On that occasion, he acknowledged the need to improve quality, access and funding, three cornerstones of the movement's agenda. The President offered a "Grand Agreement for Education" (GANE), which included more public funds for education, an increase in the number of grants, and a decline in interest rates for educational loans. However, the President also referred to the possibility of legalizing profitmaking universities. At the same time, repressive tactics against protestors were used intensively, reaching their height in August of that year¹⁹.

A fundamental aspect of the 2011 student movement was that none of the parties in the governmental coalition had any kind of representation within the most important students' organization. The students of the traditional universities elect federations and the elected presidents of the federations reunite regularly in an assembly: the Confederation of Chilean Students (Confederación de Estudiantes de Chile, CONFECH). While each university federation is autonomous, the CONFECH is an articulating space for strategic decisionmaking of the movement as a whole. In the beginning of 2011, only one federation had a right wing president, but once the mobilization gained importance this president was overthrown and replaced by a new leader, who was critical of the government²⁰. Thus, the Alianza had no influence on the movements' internal decision-making processes nor much access to information on what was being discussed within the students' organizations. Moreover, student organizations adopted a defensive attitude towards the government once it assumed in 2010, because they expected it to deepen the market oriented focus of the Chilean educational model. The 2010 president of the Universidad de Chile students' federation put it this way: "When the right won [the elections], this provoked a total change in our agenda. We

¹⁹ According to official police data, the protests organized on 4, 18, 24 and 25 of August resulted in 2,434 demonstrators arrested (Data provided to the researchers by Carabineros de Chile).

²⁰ See: <http://www.diarioelcentro.cl/?q=noticia&id=6536> [accessed 05/09/2013].

wanted to be in an offensive stance but we had to assume a defensive one because the government arrived with a privatization agenda”²¹.

In contrast, during the previous Concertación governments, that coalition had always counted with allies inside the student movement, usually activists that belonged to the youths of center-to-left political parties. This meant that the government could not only monitor what was happening inside the students’ organizations, but also try to influence its decision-making processes. Úrsula Schöler, a former 2001 secondary leader and 2010 leader of the Universidad de Chile, underlines the demobilization capacity of the Concertación and the difference with Piñera’s government: “the [political] right in Chile... does not even have a direct communication line with leaders. The Concertación did have that, it had its operatives in the meetings (...) individuals that talked directly to the ministry [of Education]... If you were a militant of the Socialist Party, someone from the Socialist Party in the ministry would call and say ‘hey, tell me about the CONFECH meeting’... and ‘don’t exaggerate it’s enough’... The right had nothing that could compare to that”²².

However, as argued in the last section, these ties were severely weakened after the 2006 Penguin Revolution and the approval of the new educational law in 2009. Thus, although in 2011 there were some student leaders that belong or sympathized with the Concertación parties, they didn’t have as much leverage as before within the movement. As one of the participants argues: “I don’t think that in 2011 there was a Concertación [within the movement]... There were only deputies and senators that were closer to the movement, that talked more with Giorgio [Jackson, president of the Catholic University Student Federation] and Camila [Vallejo, president of the University of Chile Student Federation] and with Camilo [Ballesteros, president of the University of Santiago Student Federation]...”²³

Among the opposition parties, the Communist Party was undoubtedly the one with the most important presence among the student leaders²⁴. Some of the most important ones belonged to the Communist Youth, and played an important role during the 2011 events. However, in 2012 even the Communist Party’s influence had declined, having lost many students’ federations to radical independent groups. A moderate student leader that participated in the CONFECH states: “There was a shifting process ... At a time, the Communist youth and the moderate independents were a clear majority. But as the year advanced, this group progressively retrenched. The Communists lost the control of many of their federations, and the radical groups became progressively more influential within the CONFECH²⁵.” The will to negotiate with the parties during the conflict and their proximity with the Concertación

²¹ Personal interview with Julio Sarmiento, 2010 president of the Universidad de Chile Students’ Federation, Santiago, August 15, 2013.

²² Personal interview with Úrsula Schöler, 2009 general secretary of the Universidad de Chile Students’ Federation, Santiago, June 5, 2013.

²³ Personal interview with Julián Parra, 2010 vice president of the Universidad Católica Students’ Federation, Santiago, May 23, 2013.

²⁴ In the Congress this was a very small party, with 3 deputies out of 120 in the House of Representatives and no Senators.

²⁵ Personal interview with Sebastián Vielmas, 2011 general secretary of the Universidad Católica Students’ Federation, Santiago, June 11, 2013.

student leaders were two of the main recurrent arguments used by independent groups to dispute the Communist presidencies in many federations.

Besides the Communist leaders and the few Concertación ones, there was an important group of federations' presidents that self-defined themselves as independents from the traditional parties. Within this third group, two subgroups can be distinguished. The first was integrated by moderate leaders who believed that it could be desirable to reach agreements with the government and the opposition. Many of them had been affiliated to Concertación parties in the past, but became independent as part of the process of distancing from the coalition that we have already described. One of these leaders, a former Socialist activist, describes his interaction with the Socialist Party in the context of his campaign for a federation: "(...) the person in charge of the Socialist youth in the universities called me to give me his support because I was, formally, still a militant. I asked him to please not show up nor support me. If he wanted us to win the election, the best thing to do was not to show up. First, because I did not identify with the party anymore. Plus, nobody would trust you if you were supported by a party like the Socialist Party²⁶". The second group of independents was an important group of more radical leaders that defined themselves as "anti-partisan" and progressively gained space in the CONFECH as the mobilization increased and larger sectors of the studentship were incorporated. Those leaders had a very negative perception of all the political parties represented in Congress and tried to avoid any possible alliances with them, arguing that the movement could be manipulated. The anti-partisan student sectors are known in Chile as the "ultra", even if many of their members disagree with this label.

One element that unified all the three political factions was their perception of Piñera's government as a threat. Nonetheless, as the movement started to gain force the differences among these factions became increasingly evident. While the "ultra" groups were vehemently opposed to any alliance with political parties, the Communists, the pro-Concertación and the more moderate independent sectors wanted to work with the opposition, in order to pressure the government. The balance of power between those two large groups conditioned the strategies of the student movement towards the Executive and Congress. These tensions and their relevance in the definition of the movements' strategy were emphasized by the Communist student leader Camilo Ballesteros. While he disagrees with the more radical position towards institutionalized politics, when asked what would have happened if those radicalized factions didn't have an important role, he answered: "Probably, in the first round of negotiations I would have taken what they offered me, I would have accepted that. But in the end, the "ultra" didn't allow us to do that.... in the end, besides the role played by each one of us, what happened, the good and the bad, happened because we were all there²⁷".

Using the 2006 experience as a mantra, many student leaders emphasized that "there can't be negotiation without mobilization²⁸", that is, that they could never accept to demobilize as a condition to open a dialogue. The 2006 experience was also important in the sense that it

²⁶ Personal interview with a 2011 student leader.

²⁷ Personal interview with Camilo Ballesteros, 2010-2011 president of the the Universidad de Santiago Students' Federation, Santiago, August 15, 2013.

²⁸ Personal interview with Pablo Iriarte, 2011 president of the Universidad Católica del Norte Students' Federation, Antofagasta, July 15, 2013.

changed the perception with respect to whom could be the movements' allies. According with the student leader Sebastián Vielmas, "(...) the 2006 experience was a ghost recurrently mentioned by everyone. In the moments when we were debating about possible dialogue instances, one out of five interventions was of someone stating that we could not be screwed again, as in 2006. (...) Learning has meant a total mistrust". This mistrust of all political authorities often put student leaders in awkward situations, for example when they were photographed with political party officials and this led to harsh criticism from other participants and accusations of "selling out" the movement²⁹.

As a result, throughout 2011 the students' movement prioritized confrontation, using its traditional repertoire of collective action: street protests and occupation of public buildings and schools. Some secondary students also went on hunger strikes, a radical tactic that was not supported by the whole leadership.

As the movement gained momentum and public opinion support, it broadened its collective action frame, focusing on an overall restructuring of the educational system as well as on criticisms of the electoral system and on calls for a fiscal reform and for a new Constitution. Faced with an Executive power that was unwilling to negotiate this broadened frame and with an internal debate on whether to do so even if there was an opportunity, the students movement turned to the Legislative power as a platform from which to give their critiques greater visibility. Such a move presented real limits in terms of achieving change, because of the relevance of the Executive in the Chilean political system, but by participating in public audiences and in public debates with parliamentarians in issues that ranged from quality of education to the next year's national budget, they were able to have new "vitrines for the movement" (Figueroa, p. 144-145).

In 2012, student leaders recognized that "we have not been strong enough"³⁰ to have demands attended by the government. In fact, the overall evaluation of the past year was a very pessimistic one, as well as the prospects for the future of the movement. Although the movement had put education in the center of the political debate and has even led to the fall of Education Ministers, the only concrete change in public policy was the diminishing of interest rates charged in student loans. Because of the large demands that aimed to a structural change of the educational system, this change has not been considered by the students' organizations as an important victory. Nonetheless, it should be emphasized that the changes in the CAE loan conditions had important consequences for the 365.000 indebted students that benefited from this loan. The law promulgated on September 2012 reduced the interest rate of the loan from 6% to 2% as well as conditioned the reimbursement of the loan on the salary of the indebted students. While previous to the reform the indebted people should pay a fixed payment, according to the new law the monthly payment of the debtors could not exceed 10% of their salary³¹. Without any doubt, this law, a direct consequence of

²⁹ Personal interview with Sebastián Vielmas, 2011 general secretary of the Universidad Católica Students' Federation, Santiago, June 11, 2013.

³⁰ Mesa Directiva FECH, "Agosto Estudiantil: declaración mesa FECH sobre la toma Casa Central Universidad de Chile", August 18, 2012.

³¹ See: <http://www.gob.cl/informa/2012/09/26/presidente-pinera-promulga-ley-que-otorga-beneficios-a-deudores-cae.htm> [accessed 06/09/2013].

the wave of contention, benefited an important number of low and middle income Chilean families.

In this context, at least a part of the leadership began to think about change in a broader time frame. As Federico Huneeus, president of one of the most important student federations in 2008 stated: “The fact that we did not negotiate allowed the debate to remain open which, in turn, permitted our demands to reach higher levels (...) today they are part of the Presidential debate (...) We are in a process in which we can still continue to accumulate, denounce and expose’ (apud Donoso 2013, pp. 27-28). In a meeting of the Confederation of Students’ Federations, held in April of 2012, it was decided that the movement would think in terms of short and long-term goals, “with the understanding that reaching short term goals does not mean the end of the students’ struggle”³².

Conclusion

The year of 2011 went by without an end to the students protests, which spilled over to 2012 and, as we write this chapter (at the end of 2013), are still ongoing. While 2011 was the peak of the mobilization, in 2012 and 2013 massive demonstrations took place regularly throughout Chile, school or university occupations almost became part of the normal political life, more Ministries of Education fell, and legislative initiatives to reform various aspects of education continued to be discussed. Nevertheless, the core of the students’ demands remains far from being achieved. Therefore, it is still too soon to draw strong conclusions about this case. However, as we have argued, it is possible to identify interesting trends that help to explain the paradox lived in the past three years: the students’ movement has shown great resilience and mobilization capacity, but at the same time it faces seemingly insurmountable obstacles to reaching the broad impacts it seeks.

In order to understand this paradox, we have argued that it is important to consider the contradictory and ambiguous but progressive distancing between the student movement and political parties. This distancing is most clear in the case of parties such as the Socialist and the Christian Democratic Parties, which have historically had a strong presence in social movements in general, and in the students’ movement in particular. However, we have shown that the Communist Party has also been affected, and that, more generally, there is a greater gap between this social movement and political institutions.

The relevance of the interaction between political parties and social movements has been pointed out by many scholars, in Latin America as well as elsewhere. It has been argued that “The party acts as a bridge between society and government, and it is a bridge that movement strategists cannot resist attempting to cross” (Maguire, 1995: 202). The case of the Chilean student movement shows that this is not necessarily true. It also shows that the possibility to cross that bridge can create internal tensions to the movement, with important consequences in terms of its strategies and actions.

Nonetheless, this is not a story of a total breakdown of the relations between social movements and political parties. The recent evolution of political events in Chile provides evidence of the contradictory character of these interactions. In 2013 Michelle Bachelet once more was chosen as the center to left coalition’s presidential candidate. For the first time since the transition to democracy, the Communist Party allied with the Concertación, extending and

³² Minute of CONFECH meeting, April 27, 2012.

renaming the coalition, which became the “Nueva Mayoría³³” (“New Majority”). This turn of events put 2011 Communist leaders, some of whom became parliamentary candidates in 2013, in a hot spot, because throughout 2011 and 2012 they had continuously denied the possibility of collaborating with a Bachelet campaign³⁴.

For at least some student leaders, especially those affiliated to the “ultra” factions, the alliance between the Communist Party and the Bachelet campaign reinforced their call for a rupture with the traditional political parties. Evidence of their strength is that the students’ federations decided that they would not support any of the 2013 Presidential or parliamentary candidates. The case of the Chilean students movement is useful to illustrate the complexity of the relations between social movements and political parties, as well as the relevance of having broader timeframes in order to understand the changing dynamics of these interactions.

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³³ In 2009 the Concertación and the Communist Party reached an electoral agreement that allowed the Communists to have parliamentarians in Congress for the first time since transition (three deputies were elected). Nonetheless, this electoral pact didn’t integrate the Communist Party to the coalition. In fact, the Communist Party integrated a different coalition with its own presidential candidate.

³⁴ See, for example, declarations by Camila Vallejo in <http://www.lanacion.cl/camila-vallejo-jamas-haria-campana-por-bachelet/noticias/2012-01-15/171839.html> [accessed 06/09/2013].

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