

Review / Reseña

Casals, Marcelo. *Contrarrevolución, colaboracionismo y protesta. La clase media chilena y la dictadura militar*. Santiago de Chile: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2023. 374 pp.

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Over the past decade, historian Marcelo Casals has emerged as an indispensable reference for studying the relationship between political conflict and ideological phenomena in the history of contemporary Chile. In his first book, *El alba de la revolución. La izquierda y la construcción de la “Vía Chilena al socialismo” (1956-1970)*, he explored the political-strategic evolution of the Chilean left from 1958 to its electoral victory in 1970.¹ In his second book, *La creación de la amenaza roja. Del surgimiento del anticomunismo en Chile a la “campana del terror” de 1964*, he analyzed the phenomenon of anti-communism in Chile, tracing its origins in the late nineteenth century to the 1964 presidential elections.² In his most recent research, the book under review, *Contrarrevolución, colaboracionismo y protesta. La clase media chilena y la dictadura militar*, Casals delves into the political engagement of the middle class. He examines its counterrevolutionary mobilization during the Unidad Popular government (1970-1973), its role in the installation of the military dictatorship, and its disapproval of and

¹ Marcelo Casals. *El alba de la revolución. La izquierda y la construcción de la “Vía Chilena al socialismo” (1956-1970)*. (Santiago de Chile: Lom ediciones. 2010).

² Marcelo Casals. *La creación de la amenaza roja: del surgimiento del anticomunismo en Chile a la “campana del terror” de 1964*. (Santiago de Chile: Lom Ediciones. 2016).

participation in the massive national protests against Augusto Pinochet's regime during the late 1980s.³

The book is primarily based on Casals's doctoral research conducted in the Department of History at University of Wisconsin–Madison, under the supervision of the renowned Latin Americanist Steve Stern.⁴ The author explains in the introduction that the book draws upon two key fields of historical research: military authoritarianism in Chile⁵ and studies about the middle class and its political engagement in Latin America.⁶ In concert with recent studies, the book explores the dynamics of civil collaboration with authoritarian regimes.⁷ To this end, Casals focuses on social organizations representative of the middle class, especially those that played a prominent role in opposing the Unidad Popular government and explicitly supported the subsequent military dictatorship. Specifically, the book examines unions representing middle-class groups, such as the unions of small merchants, small industrialists, employees, transporters, and professionals who participated directly as counterrevolutionary actors.⁸

The concept of counterrevolution considered in this research is functional to the book's structure and content. Drawing on the work of historian Arno Mayer, Casals affirms that: “counterrevolution as a historical experience cannot be reduced to a reaction to the revolution [...] the counterrevolutionary ‘furies’ have rather been in a dynamic relationship with their revolutionary enemy, which provokes changes and restructuring of forces in the heat of the political struggle” (Casals, *Contrarrevolución*, 24). In this sense, during the Unidad Popular, a counterrevolutionary bloc was forged in which middle-class organizations played a leading role. This

³ Casals, *Contrarrevolución, colaboracionismo y protesta*.

⁴ Marcelo Casals, *Clase media y dictadura en Chile. Consenso, negociación y crisis. 1970-1983*. A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (History) at Wisconsin–Madison, 2017.

⁵ Carlos Huneeus, *El régimen de Pinochet* (Madrid: Taurus, 2016); Pamela Constable and Arturo Valenzuela, *Nation Of Enemies: Chile Under Pinochet* (New York: WW Norton & Company, 1993); Pablo Rubio Apiolaza, *Los civiles de Pinochet: la derecha en el régimen militar chileno, 1983-1990* (Santiago de Chile: Centro de Investigaciones Diego Barros Arana, 2013).

⁶ Ezequiel Adamovsky, *Historia de la clase media argentina: apogeo y decadencia de una ilusión, 1919-2003*, 1a. ed. (Buenos Aires: Planeta, 2013); Maureen O'Dougherty, *Consumption Intensified: The Politics of Middle-Class Daily Life in Brazil* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002).

⁷ Patrick Barr-Melej, *Reforming Chile: Cultural Politics, Nationalism, and the Rise of the Middle Class* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Rodrigo Patto Sá Motta ed., *Dictaduras Militares. Brasil, Argentina, Chile e Uruguai* (Belo Horizonte: Editora UFMG, 2015).

⁸ The author chose to study the Colegios Profesionales: Colegio Médico, Colegio de Arquitectos, Colegio de Ingenieros, and Colegio de Abogados. Also trade organizations: Organización de Camioneros and Comercio Detallista.

situation shifted significantly after Pinochet introduced neoliberalism in Chile, leading to unprecedented precarity among middle-class sectors and, consequently, their slow rejection of the regime until ultimately participating in the protests in support of the return to democracy.

The central idea of the book is that the middle class reacted to the changing institutional contexts based on their ability to maintain access to channels of participation and negotiation with the state (25). Thus, those social organizations that identified with—and were recognized as—middle class underwent an acute process of counterrevolutionary radicalization during the Unidad Popular government as the state ceased to recognize the symbolic, moral, and material importance of the middle class (27). This process of radicalization led to organization and social mobilization, ultimately destabilizing the government and paving the way for the coup d'état on September 11, 1973. Once the dictatorship began, the middle class expressed their support for the regime in different ways, to the extent that it was interpreted as a reestablishment of threatened social hierarchies and “institutional normality” (28).

Casals demonstrates that after the coup d'état in Chile in 1973, state violence was deployed against the left and its social bases. This violence was legitimized and became a crucial tool for the closure of the generalized politicization of the previous period and, above all, of structural changes oriented towards the socialist platform of the Unidad Popular (Chapter 1). However, neoliberal reforms caused a new shift in the relations between the State and civil society by positioning the market as the primary sphere of social identification. The author maintains that the economic crisis that began in 1982 ended up puncturing the mesocratic social base of the dictatorship. The beginning of the cycle of national protests the following year signaled the reemergence of opposition political parties, which led a social movement that demanded the restitution of the democratic regime (247). In all these processes, mesocratic groups and debates around the importance of the middle class played a central role with respect to the power of that social identity in terms of defining hierarchies and the legitimation of power (300). The author argues that the social representatives of the middle class acted based on the possibility of reproducing their mesocratic condition in the government, thereby participating in the dispute over the importance of the middle class in the political conflict.

Chapter I of the book, titled “The Insurrection of the Middle Class,” explores the reaction of this social group to Salvador Allende’s policies and to the radicalization of the grassroots movements, as well as the counterrevolutionary redefinition of the

practices and standing of the middle class (50). Chapter II, titled “Applauding the Victors,” analyzes the initial support middle-class organizations had for the imposition of Augusto Pinochet’s military dictatorship. In this sense, Casals proposes that there was an “ideological synchronization” that emerged among mesocratic sectors, driven by anti-communism and a desire to restore social hierarchies that these groups had yearned for during the *Unidad Popular*, even justifying the repression and murder of leftist militants (134).

Chapter III, “Collaborating with the New Order,” examines the reopening of the channels of negotiation and participation between the dictatorial state and the middle class. Casals explains that the absence of political parties elevated the organizations of the middle class—such as *Colegio Médico*, *Colegio de Arquitectos*, *Colegio de Ingenieros*, and *Colegio de Abogados*, as well as trade organizations like *Organización de Camioneros* and *Comercio Detallista*—to the level of advisors to the regime, while at the same time limiting dissent to a minimum and reducing discussions to technical aspects (176). Chapter IV, “From the State to the Market,” addresses the introduction of neoliberalism to economic policies in Chile and the response of the middle sectors. From 1975 onwards, the mesocratic organizations became aware that the changes introduced directly attacked the material foundations that had sustained the middle class. It resulted in a redefinition of the middle-class identity through its participation in the market, distancing itself from the state, the historical framework upon which it had been constructed in the twentieth century (225). Chapter V, “The Middle Class and the Moral Opposition,” identifies the reasons for the political turn against Pinochet by an important part of middle-class organizations in the context of the political and economic crisis of 1982-1983. The closure of channels of dialogue by the dictatorship, the limitation of the *Colegios Profesionales*, and the precarity of material living conditions sparked early resistance to the military dictatorship (274).

The last chapter, “The Middle Class in Democracy,” analyzes the process of political and social conflict of the 1980s—which led to the defeat of the regime in the 1988 plebiscite and the subsequent agreed-upon transition to democracy—from the perspective of politically active middle-class groups. Along these lines, it ponders the importance of the middle class as a social group ideally situated to serve as a legitimizing factor for the democratic restoration, as well as the participation of the main mesocratic representatives in the configuration of a moderate and pragmatic opposition to the regime (336).

The greatest contribution of Casals's book is a definition of the middle class in Chile from a historian's point of view. It puts forth a definition that conceptualizes the middle class as an ideological tool that defends conservative positions in times of change. As such, this book opens a door toward the understanding of counterrevolutionary mesocratic groups in Latin America, the role of civilians during dictatorial regimes, the sense of class and the awareness of its possibilities of "reestablishing order" when social hierarchies are reversed. To conclude, we think that this work will become an essential work for those who want to delve into a rigorous panorama of the middle class in Chile during the twentieth century.

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