

New University Law Decreed in Chile

Rationale is updated version of laissez-faire economics, but critics say aim is to neutralize the universities

Chile's military government is carrying out a radical restructuring of higher education. A new university law narrowly emphasizes professional preparation in the universities and conforms to the market-oriented economic theories now espoused by the government in Chile.

The new law banishes degree-granting programs in many disciplines, including most of the social sciences and, apparently, some natural science fields. Responsibility for teaching and research in disciplines excluded from the university will be shifted to the private sector on the assumption that new institutions can be created if a demand exists.

Critics of the new law argue that its underlying purpose is to end the university's role as a source of social criticism and political opposition. They say that the law fits into a broader government policy of refashioning Chilean institutions according to political, economic, and moral criteria approved by the regime.

Because the university law was promulgated in early January at the beginning of the summer vacation, details of the restructuring will not be known until after the universities have resumed on 16 March and new charters have been approved by the government.

The law makes clear, however, that degree programs and graduate training are to be offered in only a dozen fields* in universities supported by the government, a reduction of about half.

Hardest hit are the social sciences and humanities, while faculties providing traditional professional training have been retained. In technical fields there are indications that engineering and applied sciences will be favored over basic sciences.

In implementing the new law, the government is expected to concentrate first on the University of Chile,[†] which is the

largest and politically and culturally the most important of Chilean universities.

As a result of the law a new wave of dismissals of faculty and departures of students seems to have begun. The 1973 military coup which ousted the government of President Salvador Allende was followed by a wholesale dismissal of university faculty and expulsion of students. Cases of disappearance, torture,

With deep cuts in government spending a major element in its economic plan, the government took the line that universities must share these cuts. At the same time, the university was condemned as an inefficient and wasteful organization. Therefore, a major overhaul was needed, for example, so that it would not go on turning out graduates for whom there were no jobs.



Central offices of the University of Chile

and imprisonment documented by human rights organizations in that period included many academics.

Since the coup, the government of President Augusto Pinochet has exercised direct control of the universities through *rectores delegados* named by the president, who, in turn, hold power to appoint deans and faculty members.

Government strategy in the universities has been guided by principles being applied to Chilean institutions generally. Faced with a prostrate economy and high rates of inflation and unemployment, the government sought to follow policies associated with the so-called Chicago school of economics. The leading current exponent of free-market theories, Milton Friedman, provided informal advice to the Chilean government in 1975; and policies are now directed by a group of Friedmanite technocrats known in Chile as the "Chicago boys."

The government has decreed new financial policies aimed at making the universities largely self-financing. Tuition has been sharply increased and future tuition levels are likely to vary from faculty to faculty according to the income students can expect to earn as graduates.

As for the traditional Latin American view that the university should be an autonomous institution open to the discussion of all political views, the government's own concept of the university is made clear in the new law's section defining autonomy and academic freedom.

Under the law, the university is not permitted to "foment actions or conduct" incompatible with public order or to "propagate directly or indirectly" partisan political tendencies. Political instruction is excluded from the university beyond what is "understood as objective information."

Despite government controls on the universities, political activism has revived. There was open opposition by students to a new national constitution pushed through by the government last year and protests over arrests and dismissals of students and faculty have occurred.

Criticism of the new law seems to focus less on the changes in structure it makes than on its effects on the place of the university in Chilean life. Typical of the views of many Chilean scientists outside Chile are those of Claudio Teitel-

(Continued on page 1406)

*Law, architecture, biochemistry, dentistry, agronomy, civil engineering, business and economic sciences, forestry, medicine, veterinary medicine, psychology, and pharmacy.

[†]Chile has eight universities including Catholic universities in Santiago and Valparaíso which have ties to the church but are funded primarily by the national government. The University of Chile with its main campus in Santiago is the largest university with about a third of all students. Total university enrollment this year is about 135,000, down somewhat from the time of the coup.

(Continued from page 1403)

boim, a theoretical physicist at the University of Texas, Austin. Teitleboim has worked in the United States since 1969 when he came here to complete his studies.

"It is extremely important to put the law in broader context," he says. "One can fall into the trap of discussing details." In respect to the universities, he says "It is clear that the law tries to put an end to what is considered a risk to the state."

"The university had a tradition of free and creative thinking. All of that has a connotation of political subversion to the people in power. That is why all humanistic programs are most directly under attack. That is why pure science programs are being transferred back to professional schools. Now the university is seen as forming experts in narrow fields."

Because of the reduction in size of the university and the increase in cost to students, he says the university law "goes to the heart of Chilean life, especially for the middle class. One of the traditions of the middle class family was

professors, staff, and students. The new decision-making machinery was clumsy and contributed to the confusion as partisan political activity increased.

After Allende won the presidency in 1970 a contest for dominance in the national universities developed between the left and the Christian Democrats. In the Catholic Universities of Santiago and Valparaiso the right also had solid support. Tactics favored in the past by students had been strikes and demonstrations. Opponents of Allende began to charge that the universities had become an incubator of revolutionaries. The military junta which staged the coup in 1973 argued that the government was planning to install a Marxist dictatorship, thus, at least by implication, to justify the harsh measures used.

During the Allende period, faculties and disciplines subdivided on political lines into smaller units. When the coup occurred, therefore, it was easy for the government to take punitive action against particular institutes. Precise figures are unavailable, but estimates published in Chile in 1980 put the number of persons expelled from the university af-

Catholic Church and may develop into an academic umbrella organization.

Industry and financial institutions have expressed interest in establishing new educational institutions to train employees in relevant fields. Other groups are expected to have more difficulty in raising funds and obtaining the required permission from the government.

Research in the natural sciences has continued at a reduced level because of funding restrictions and the departure of many of the ablest Chilean scientists. University science education, which was among the best in Latin America, is said to have declined in quality because of shortages of equipment and supplies as well as of faculty. The consensus among Chilean scientists abroad and American scientists with experience in Chile is that a key factor is the loss of much of the generation of Chilean scientists trained in the 1960's and early 1970's who have gone abroad for political or professional reasons.

University research receives some university funds and the government continues to seek involvement in international scientific projects through its national commission on scientific and technological investigations (CONICYT) which resembles the U.S. National Science Foundation, but is now operating on a sharply reduced budget.

Official attitudes toward research, particularly basic research, are cool at best. One widely circulated remark by an official is that research is not really necessary since technology can be bought abroad.

Prospects for change in such attitudes do not seem bright. The late 1960's and early 1970's marked a watershed in Chilean political life. The military had a record of staying out of politics—unusual in Latin America—which it abandoned in 1973. The regime has left no doubt that it is not simply playing a caretaker role until regular civilian rule can be restored.

The proclamation on 11 March by General Pinochet that Chile had entered a "constitutional transition" phase on the way to promised democratic elections in 1989 affirmed that the junta intends to carry through its plan of reconstruction.

In moving to neutralize the university and use it in its effort to remold Chilean society the government is not alone in Latin America today. Military governments in Argentina and Uruguay, for example, have taken a similar course. What is unusual in Chile is the comprehensiveness of the grand design and the apparent strength of the determination to carry it through.—JOHN WALSH

Under the law, the university is not permitted to "foment actions or conduct" incompatible with public order.

to have at least one child in the university. It was possible because the university was free. The new law will be seen as closing one more road open to the middle class. The policy is to increase the gap between the rich and the poor."

On the government side, spokesmen explaining the new law have said that the intention is to restore the "normal functioning" of the university that between 1967 and 1973 became hopelessly politicized.

The 1960's saw a rapid growth of graduate education, particularly in the natural sciences and social sciences, and of research in Chile, much of it supported by international organizations and U.S. government and private foundations. University enrollment was swelled by students from lower income families who had been virtually excluded earlier.

In 1967 Chilean universities underwent major reforms similar to those produced by student pressures in Europe and the United States. Aimed principally at democratizing the university the reforms provided, for example, that university rectors be elected by vote of all

ter the 1973 coup at 18,000, including 30 to 35 percent of faculty in all Chilean universities. Dismissals of faculty have continued sporadically, in many cases attributed by the government to reductions in budget.

Social science disciplines have been regarded by the government as a seedbed for troublesome political views and dealt with severely. By the late 1970's, most serious social science research was being done in private research centers outside the universities. Almost all depend on funding by international organizations or U.S. private foundations.

Some of the centers provide seminars for university students, but virtually no organized graduate study in the social sciences is available today. The new university law permits the creation of new higher education institutions including new universities to teach disciplines no longer in the curriculum of the national university system. It is possible that some of the existing private centers will be able to acquire academic status under the wing of the Academy of Christian Humanism which is supported by the