

EDITORIAL RECOVERY

Student Organisation of Social Service (Social Work) under the Chilean Dictatorship: From the University of Chile to the Professional Institute of Santiago.

Organización estudiantil del Servicio (Trabajo) Social en la dictadura chilena: desde la Universidad de Chile al Instituto Profesional de Santiago. Apuntes para una historia

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Abstract

This article examines the forms of student organisation that emerged within the Social Service degree at the University of Chile during its transfer to the Instituto Profesional de Santiago (Professional Institute of Santiago) (IPS) following the 1973 civil-military coup. It argues that, despite the repressive context of the dictatorship, Social Service/Social Work students succeeded in maintaining their student organisation,

Keywords:

Social Service degree; student organization; dictatorship; University of Chile; Instituto Profesional de Santiago (IPS)

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and after 1981, within the IPS, they built a new collective whose identity remained closely connected to the University of Chile. Methodologically, the study is based on in-depth individual and group interviews with former student leaders of the programme and of the FECH during the period, complemented by a bibliographic review and documentary analysis of primary and secondary sources. This approach made it possible to identify continuities and ruptures in organisational forms, student demands, and strategies of resistance against the neoliberal policies and the University Reform imposed by the dictatorship.

Contributing to the historiography of social work in Chile, within the framework of its centenary, this article highlights the legacy of student movements and organisations of the period, helping to reconstruct a collective memory that illuminates the tensions and transformations shaping professional education in times of dictatorship.

Resumen

El presente artículo dilucida las formas que asumió la organización estudiantil de la carrera de Servicio Social de la Universidad de Chile en su traspaso al Instituto Profesional de Santiago (IPS), después del golpe civil militar de 1973. Se defiende la tesis de que, en plena dictadura, los y las estudiantes de Servicio Social/Trabajo Social lograron mantener una organización estudiantil en la Universidad de Chile y que, a partir de 1981, con el traspaso de la carrera al Instituto Profesional de Santiago, conformaron una organización cuya identidad seguía siendo parte de la Universidad de Chile. Metodológicamente, el estudio se sustenta en entrevistas en profundidad —individuales y grupales— a exdirigentes estudiantiles de la carrera y de la FECH del período, complementadas con una revisión bibliográfica y el análisis documental de fuentes primarias y secundarias. Esto permitió identificar continuidades y rupturas en los modos de organización, las demandas estudiantiles y las estrategias de resistencia frente a las políticas neoliberales y la Reforma Universitaria, impuestas por la dictadura.

Aportando a la historiografía del Trabajo Social en Chile, en el marco de su centenario, este artículo invita a reconocer el legado de los movimientos y organizaciones estudiantiles de la carrera en tiempos de dictadura, contribuyendo a la reconstrucción de una memoria colectiva que permite comprender las tensiones y transformaciones de su formación profesional.

Palabras clave:
Carrera de
Servicio Social;
organización
estudiantil;
dictadura;
Universidad de
Chile; Instituto
Profesional de
Santiago (IPS)



Introduction

As noted in other studies, Chilean social work² originated in 1925 at the Dr Alejandro del Río school, of the Servicio Nacional de Salud (National Health Service), and later, with the Supreme Decree of 14 May 1940, promulgated during the government of Pedro Aguirre Cerda. This decree allowed for the organisation of the Dr Lucio Córdova School of Social Work in Santiago, the School of Social Work in Concepción, and later the School of Social Work in Temuco, all of which were under the jurisdiction of the Ministerio de Educación Pública, before being incorporated into the University of Chile in 1948. At the end of the 1960s, as the “Reconceptualisation” process of social work was underway, together with the popular mobilisation that brought Salvador Allende to power in 1970, the Dr Alejandro del Río school was transferred to the University of Chile, joining the Dr Lucio Córdova school (Vidal, 2016).

From the second half of the 1960s onwards, student and popular mobilisation grew, reflected in the participation of social work students in the formation of university student centres, especially at the University of Chile, whose presence and influence also marked the development of professional training and practice. In this sense, the reconceptualisation process at the University of Chile did not arise in isolation from the student movement and organisation, but was intertwined with the politicisation and questioning raised by students and society from the working classes; this was also the case during the Popular Unity period, when student centres were also the subject of dispute by the political forces in which the students were active (Vidal, 2016; Ruz, 2016).

After the civil-military coup, the student organisation and movement, along with the entire popular movement and left-wing political parties, were affected by repression and human rights violations. How was the student organisation of Social Work at the University of Chile affected after the coup? What actions and demands did they raise? How did they organise themselves to have representation in the university when the dictatorship intervened? How did social work students experience the separation of the degree programme from the University of Chile and its installation at the Instituto Profesional de Santiago (Professional Institute of Santiago) (IPS)? Were there student centres for the Social Work programme at the University of Chile after 1973 and at the IPS? Is it possible to identify points of agreement and disagreement in the transition of the Social Work programme from the University of Chile to the IPS? These questions have not been addressed in the disciplinary literature, and it is important to delve deeper into the events that occurred and the testimonies of the protagonists of the

² Throughout this article, we will use the terms social work, social services, and social worker interchangeably, as their usage reflects historical moments in the profession's development, but they all refer to a profession requiring university training.

time in order to contribute to the history of Chilean social work as it approaches its centenary.

Considering that, starting in 1981, with the Ley General de Universidades (General Law of Universities), the University of Chile began the process of closing its campuses nationwide and transferring some degree programmes—such as Social Work, Cartography, and Library Science, among others—to the nascent Professional Institute of Santiago, we defend the thesis that, after the coup, in the midst of the dictatorship, social work students managed to maintain a student organisation at the University of Chile, while after 1981—with the creation and transfer of the degree programme to the IPS—they formed a student organisation whose identity and professional significance remained part of the University of Chile. This reflects not only the existence of a social service student organisation during a period of fragmentation and disarticulation at the University of Chile, but also the subjectivity of social service/social work students who confronted the dictatorship's neoliberal-refoundational university policies, which complicates the socio-historical process studied and enriches its analysis. In general, Chilean social work historiography has devoted little attention to the study of militancy in the profession-discipline over the last hundred years of history, and even less to student organisations during a tragic period in Chilean history, the civil-military dictatorship and its impact on professional training at the University of Chile. Thus, this article fills a gap in this field.

193

Methodologically, this article is based on qualitative research, with in-depth individual and group interviews with actors from the period, as well as the tracking and analysis of primary and secondary sources. The analysis technique used for the interviews was content analysis. Overall, it is hoped that the findings will shed light on a period marked by death, censorship and human rights violations, but also by student organisation and struggles, which enriches social work in Chilean history.

The Student Movement and the University of Chile: Historical and Political Background

The University of Chile, founded in 1842, with a modern stamp characteristic of the influence of Andrés Bello, had a student movement that played a leading role in the country's history from the beginning of the 20th century. According to studies by Moraga (2012), the first student centre in Chile was established in 1904 at the Faculty of Medicine, followed by the founding of the Federación de Estudiantes de Chile (Student Federation of Chile) on 21 October, 1906, which was the direct predecessor of the Federación de la Universidad de Chile (University of Chile Student Federation) (FECH). Unlike the latter, the former incorporated students from this university along with those



from the Institute of Commerce and the School of Arts and Crafts, as well as secondary school students from across the country. University students, through the Federation, initiated a struggle within the university and for the country, especially in favour of the most impoverished sectors.

Within the framework of this student organisation, they developed their own publication in 1907: *Piton*. In 1911, they worked on their own literary and avant-garde magazine, called *Juventud*, and in 1920 the first issue of the magazine *Claridad*³ was published, influenced by the Bolshevik Revolution and pacifism. The First Congress of Students of the University of Chile was held in 1918, and two years later, at the First Student Convention, its Declaration of Principles was issued.

After the end of the First World War and with the triumph of the Bolshevik Revolution in 1918, the student movement became more radical, giving rise to an eclecticism within the university in which anarchists, Radical Party militants, future hygienist doctors, lawyers, poets and writers, among others, participated. Among them were José Domingo Gómez Rojas, a poet, anarchist and Christian, a member of the Radical Party and workers' organisations, who was arrested and tortured by the government of Juan Luis Sanfuentes and later died in the Casa de Orates.⁴

194

In the early 1930s, the Federation split into the FECH and the Federation of the University of Concepción (created in 1919). The FECH had greater influence on political activism, which "channelled the social and ideological concerns of young people" (Moraga, 2012, p.30), linked to the left and the Church. However, it was the post-war period and the Cuban Revolution that marked the radicalisation of the university student world in the 1960s. Although the need for social and educational transformation first appeared at the Catholic University of Valparaíso and the University of Santiago, with criticism of the university authorities and the ecclesiastical hierarchy, from 1968 onwards, the politicisation of the student movement focused on the need for transformation at the University of Chile, where the 1918 reform was taken up again (Moraga, 2012), along with the democratisation and participation of students in co-government and in the election of authorities. All this was part of the university reform that sought to break with the old hierarchies and exclusions generated by the structure of the University of Chile.

³ Several of these publications can be viewed at:

<https://www.memoriachilena.gob.cl/602/w3-article-547182.html>

⁴ First establishment created in 1852, predecessor of what is now known as a psychiatric hospital.



Between 1957 and 1970, the FECH was led by the Christian Democratic Party.⁵ In 1965, it pointed out that this Federation had historically three periods

that speak to its maturation as a group of conscience and pressure in the country. In its early days, it emphasised critical denunciation of the prevailing socio-economic structures, exposing their vices and contradictions. In a second stage, it complemented that action with the formulation of some guidelines for social change. In a third period, we have enriched this task by participating in efforts to bring about a new way of life for the people of Chile. (FECH, 1965, p.7)

This shows a connection between the Federation and the country's problems, but also its support for the 1968 University Reform process. By 1970, the FECH had positioned itself in favour of the Popular Unity and, through its magazine *Claridad*, showed its internationalist commitment to anti-imperialist struggles and solidarity with Cuba and Vietnam (FECH, 1970). Likewise, the FECH was of central importance to the Popular Unity government, as expressed on the day of victory, when President Salvador Allende asked Alejandro Rojas (then president of the FECH) to deliver his victory speech from the balcony of the student organisation's office on 4 September 1970 (Ramírez, 2016).

The atmosphere of the 1960s also carried over into the social work programme at the University of Chile, which coincided with the beginning, in 1968, of the process known as "reconceptualisation", the merger of the Dr Alejandro del Río and Dr Lucio Córdoba schools, student participation in the programme and university bodies, and in the political activism of students. This happened especially after the victory of the Popular Unity and the new training experiences, together with the production of knowledge (theses) that problematised traditional-classical social work or social service from a perspective that took authors from the Marxist tradition (Vidal, 2016), among others, as references.

Dictatorship and Higher Education: Neoliberal Transformations

Restructuring of the higher education system during the dictatorship

The foundational core of the Chilean higher education system was established over approximately a century, from the creation of the University of Chile in 1842 to the emergence of the Catholic University of the North in 1956 (Brunner, 2008). During these 114 years, the system consisted of eight universities: two state-run and six private. The two state universities were the University of Chile (founded in 1842) and the Technical

⁵ "Democracia Cristiana" was a Chilean centrist political party founded in 1957, inspired by Christian humanism and social reform principles.

University of the State (founded in 1947), which changed its name to the University of Santiago in 1980. Of the private universities, three originated under the influence of the Catholic Church (the Catholic University of Chile in 1888, the Catholic University of Valparaíso in 1928, and the Catholic University of the North in 1956), while the remaining three were founded with a secular orientation (the University of Concepción in 1919, Universidad Técnica Federico Santa María, in 1926; and Universidad Austral de Chile, in 1954).

According to Fernández & Fernández (2005), these institutions, to varying degrees, received state funding and offered virtually free education, conceiving higher education as a public obligation or responsibility of the state. Over time, state universities significantly expanded their coverage, spreading throughout Chile by opening regional campuses and diversifying their academic offerings with new faculties, degree programmes, and research centres. These universities were able to absorb student demand without difficulty. The university enrolment rate grew slowly, from 1.4% of the 20–24 age group in 1935 to 2% in 1946 and 3.5% in 1957 (Brunner, 2008). By 1955, between three and four young people out of every hundred were attending university, which allowed them to be characterised as universities of elites and for elites, regardless of the social background of the student body (Brunner, 2008). Economic dependence on the state, which provided resources without much oversight, led Chilean universities in the mid-20th century to innovate and modernise internally, without competitive pressure and in a highly protected environment (Brunner, 2008).

The university reform of the 1960s represented a radical change for the Chilean higher education system. Its results were evident in the rapid expansion of university enrolment, which grew from 55,000 (before 1967) to 145,000 in the following seven years (1967–1973). This growth was accompanied by a significant increase in the gross enrolment rate, which jumped from 7.1% to 16.8% in the same period, marking the transition from an elitist system to mass education (Brunner, 2008).

The 1973 civil-military coup in Chile marked the end of the democratic process and a rapid takeover of social institutions by the military, including universities. Less than a month after the coup, the eight existing universities were taken over by the Military Junta, with military delegates appointed as rectors with full powers of university governance, through Decree Law No. 50, promulgated on 1 October 1973, which granted the rector delegate of the Governing Board the following powers:

- 5.- The power to decide on all matters relating to the status of the staff of the University of Chile and its Television Corporation, their rights and duties, and to exercise broad disciplinary authority over this staff; the power to declare that certain positions and functions are of his exclusive confidence, to abolish or create permanent and contract



positions; the power to hire and terminate employment, service provision and fee contracts in advance; the power to suspend staff from their duties with or without full or partial remuneration for an indefinite period and to transfer them to other university departments anywhere in the country for reasons of good service. The Deputy Rector may also make appointments without being subject to competition regulations and impose working hour obligations on professional and full-time staff who enjoy special reduced working hours, except in the case of staff paid by the hour.

6.- The power to appoint a substitute for the position of Rector; to appoint and terminate in advance the legal term for which the Secretary General was appointed; and to establish substitution arrangements among other authorities and officials.

7.- The power to exercise broad disciplinary authority over university students, including the power to apply sanctions such as reprimands, suspensions, cancellation of enrolment and expulsion. (Ministerio de Educación, 1973, pp. 1–2)

The first actions were aimed at expelling professors, students, and officials linked to the government of Salvador Allende, who suffered serious consequences such as detention, execution, torture, exile, or disappearance. Some academic units were also completely dismantled. In this way, the advances achieved with the university reform, such as institutional autonomy, freedom of expression and teaching, and ideological pluralism (Bernasconi & Rojas, 2003), were completely lost, and a repressive regime was established with a vertical command structure and absolute concentration of power in the rectors appointed by the dictatorship.

From 1980 onwards, with neoliberalism established in Chile, the traditional state-centred development model was left behind. The promulgation of the 1980 Constitution facilitated the legalisation of various “modernisations”, including the privatisation and deregulation of the education system. These modernisations had a dual objective: to create or open up markets to stimulate competition and to encourage private sector participation in the production of goods and services (Brunner, 2008). This change meant a transition from a vision of higher education as a public right, based on universality and free access, to a decentralised, privatised and deregulated system. The first steps in this transformation were taken with Decree Law No. 3,541 of 1980 and were consolidated and expanded with the Ley Orgánica Constitucional de Educación (Organic Constitutional Law on Education) (LOCE) No. 18,962, enacted on 10 March 1990, just before the end of the military government. According to Fernández & Fernández (2005), the main reforms in higher education in the institutional, financial, accreditation and evaluation areas were as follows.



Firstly, the institutional reform distinguished four categories of institutions: universities, professional institutes, technical training centres, and academic centres of the Armed Forces and Carabineros. Additionally, with the intention of controlling the political influence of state universities (Fernández & Fernández, 2005), the dictatorship segregated the regional campuses of the University of Chile and the Technical University of the State. This gave rise to fourteen new autonomous public universities, called “derivatives” because of their inheritance of the regional structures of the original universities. As a result, the old system of eight universities expanded into a more complex system of twenty-five universities, called “traditional,” to which were added the private universities created in the 1990s. Data from the Ministerio de Educación (Ministry of Education) (2024) show that, in Chile, the tertiary system is made up of fifty-seven universities, of which eighteen are state-owned, nine are private with state funding, and thirty are private. In addition, there are thirty professional institutes, twenty-seven private technical training centres and fifteen state technical training centres (located in each of the country’s regions) that are part of the tertiary system.

Meanwhile, in the financial sphere, a radical reform was carried out to support competition, forcing institutions to raise funds in the market through various channels for self-financing. The current financing system is complex and, since 2016, following a period of widespread student protests, includes free tuition for students from the poorest 60% of the population who study at accredited universities for at least four years and are enrolled in the free tuition system. Other sources of funding include direct fiscal contributions to traditional universities, which do not cover the operating costs of state universities, student fees, (scarce) research funds, student grants, etc.

Finally, in the area of accreditation and evaluation, the LOCE established the creation of the Consejo Superior de Educación (Higher Education Council) (CSE), an autonomous body with legal personality and its own assets, whose purpose, among others, was to administer the system for supervising private higher education institutions. Currently, the accreditation function falls to the Comisión Nacional de Acreditación (National Accreditation Commission) (CNA), an autonomous body created by law and responsible for verifying and certifying the quality of higher education institutions, as well as their undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. Its main function is to ensure quality and promote continuous improvement in the Chilean higher education system.

The result of these transformations can be seen, among other things, in the exponential growth in total higher education enrolment, which in 2024 reached 1,385,828 students, including undergraduate and post-graduate programmes (Servicio de Información de Educación Superior [SIES], 2024). While in 1990 only 18% of young people between the ages of 18 and 24 were enrolled in higher education, by 2022 that figure had reached 52% (Zarzuri & Vásquez, 2023). On the other hand, statistics also show a change in



the socioeconomic profile of students accessing higher education, with a significant increase in the most vulnerable deciles. In 1990, only 6% of young people in the lowest income decile were enrolled in higher education, while in 2022, that figure reached 44% (Zarzuri & Vásquez, 2023).

In the case of social work, the transformations described above severely affected the social work profession and its training processes. In 1970, there were five universities in Chile (Iturrieta, 2005; Vidal, 2016); however, "of the 11 existing social work schools, 7 of these depended on the University of Chile" (Vidal, 2016, p. 31). After the coup, the social work programme at all universities underwent a complex process of internal restructuring that included not only curricular changes but also changes in academics, students, and staff.

In the case of the Social Work programme at the University of Chile, the campuses in Arica, Antofagasta, Valparaíso, La Serena, Talca and Temuco (Vidal, 2016) did not reopen as a result of the dismantling of the University of Chile's regional campuses, reducing it to Santiago only, but removing the Pedagogical Institute—turning it into the universidad Metropolitana de Ciencias de la Educación (Metropolitan University of Educational Sciences) (UMCE)—and some degree programmes (such as Social Work) that would make up the IPS, a situation that we will return to later. This break not only limited the continuity of the process that had been initiated by the Reconceptualisation movement within the profession, but also considerably restricted its scope for development. A significant number of social work professionals, academics and students were persecuted, detained, executed and disappeared.

Another consequence of the dictatorship was the loss of the profession's university status, following the implementation of Decreto con Fuerza de Ley (Decree with Force of Law) (DFL) No. 1 of 1980 by the Ministry of Education, published on 3 January, 1981. This decree set standards for universities, establishing that only twelve degree programmes would be exclusively university-based, i.e. they required a bachelor's degree in a specific discipline in order to obtain a professional qualification. In the social sciences, only the degree programme in psychology remained exclusively university-based. The rest of the degree programmes could be taught by other non-university higher education institutions. In the case of social work, professional institutes could award a professional qualification as a social worker (not a bachelor's degree) and technical training centres could award a higher technical qualification in social services or social work. This phenomenon represented a huge step backwards compared to major international academic centres and resulted, among other things, in a delay in the provision of postgraduate courses in the country (González & Morales, 2010) and exclusion from official scientific research support circles, such as the Comisión Nacional



de Investigación Científica y Tecnológica (National Commission for Scientific and Technological Research) (CONICYT).

With the restoration of democracy in 1990, the possibility arose to make a joint demand for the reinstatement of the profession's university status, which was finally obtained in August 2005 through Law No. 20,054, which re-establishes the university exclusivity of social work. Despite this, professional institutes continue to award professional degrees in social work or social assistance. Within this framework of change, social work, like all other higher education programmes, became legally subject to the liberalisation of education and market forces. This resulted, among other things, in a gradual and progressive increase in the number of social work programmes offered throughout the country by various universities (public and private), professional institutes and technical training centres, with both daytime and evening classes, varying in duration and programme offerings. Currently, there are more than 136 social work programmes in Chile (Subsecretaría de Educación Superior, 2025), which affects the quality of training because they are taught in face-to-face, blended and online formats with varying requirements and durations.

Social Work from the University of Chile to the Professional Institute of Santiago

200

It is public knowledge that, in 1968, the political left won the student council of the social work programme at the University of Chile, thereby deepening the process of reconceptualisation that was taking place at the university, which reflected the degree of mobilisation among the students in the programme. During the Popular Unity government, the student union maintained its support for the changes that the people's government proposed with regard to the programme. This atmosphere is expressed in the account of the process experienced by a former social work student, Mario, who is now seventy years old. He entered the programme in 1970, when the Dr Alejandro del Río and Dr Lucio Córdoba schools had already merged, so political activism, participation in the FECH student organisation and in the social work student union were part of his daily life during the Unidad Popular (Popular Unity). The close relationship between the director at the time, Lucía Sepúlveda, and the student union was very promising, adding to the school's openness to experimenting with new areas where social work students could be trained. In this regard, Mario comments:

There was an election for the student council, and I was asked to be the candidate for the Jota—Juventudes Comunistas (Communist Youth) (JJCC)—for the student council, and I was elected vice-president; a colleague from the MAPU (Movimiento



de Acción Popular Unitaria) (Unitary Popular Action Movement)⁶ was the president, and I was the vice-president. I was elected in 1971, again in 1972, and I was in charge of all teaching matters and activities at that time, participating in the implementation process of the University Reform, the structuring of the faculties and departments. We belonged to the Faculty of Legal and Social Sciences at that time, and there was the Department of Social Work, which had to be structured in terms of university councils and student participation in the councils under the tripartite system: teachers, workers and students. And in that process, and already elected as a leader, I worked with the school's management, Mrs Lucía Sepúlveda, the director at that time, to contribute not only to the process of change in the university, but also to the process of change in the country. With her at the helm, steps were taken to do professional internships in peasant settlements and in the trade union sphere, linked to trade unions. The role of the degree programme was very important, very active; it was a programme with a high level of political and social participation (...) In addition, I was elected director of the FECH, which played an active role throughout that period in organising volunteer work. And in the Communist Youth, I was given the task of being in charge of volunteer work, and as a result of that, in 1972, we organised the first reforestation project in the Pampa del Tamarugal. We had to spread the word, repair, finance. I was responsible for organising two important concerts, one with Inti Illimani and the other with Quilapayún, which took place in the old building, now Gabriela Mistral, which at that time was the UNCTAD building.⁷ (Entrevistado 1, 2023)

The civil-military coup had an impact on all levels. In the case of the social service (or social work) programme at the University of Chile, it led to the brief closure of the programme between 11 September 1973 and early 1974. At the same time, there were detainees/disappeared persons, politically exonerated persons and persecutions. A former leader of the degree programme during the Popular Unity period tells us how he experienced the consequences of the coup on the degree programme:

I wasn't there in '73. The Jota offered me a place on a political training course in the Soviet Union, so in February of that year I left for the Soviet Union for five or six months, until the end of June. So, I wasn't here for the first semester of 1973. It was a very interesting experience, and in the meantime, the Tanquetazo⁸ took place, the first coup attempt at the end of June 1973, which caught us abroad, in Moscow, and I arrived at the end of July, around then. And in my degree programme, I failed the first semester. But that first semester, because of everything that was happening in Chile, had been

⁶ Left-wing political party, which began as a split within the Christian Democracy party.

⁷ UNCTAD III building, so named because it was built to host the Third United Nations Conference on Trade and Development held in Santiago, Chile, in April and May 1972.

⁸ Refers to the attempted coup d'état in Chile on 29 June 1973 against the Popular Unity government.



extended; the second semester hadn't started yet when the coup came, and the course was closed. The degree programme was closed and did not reopen until the following year, until 1974. So, from 1973 onwards, I didn't study, and well, the coup came and then another stage began, another phase, and it was basically a matter of immediately continuing with clandestine work. (Entrevistado 1, 2023)

When reviewing the list of students enrolled in courses at the University of Chile, we observed that in 1973 and 1974 students enrolled in the social work course at Antofagasta, La Serena, Valparaíso, Talca, Santiago, Osorno, and Ñuble (the seven campuses where the programme was offered), which shows that the closure—if effective—was for a very short period and in no case meant that students stopped enrolling in the programme at the University of Chile campuses in 1974, after the tragic and bloody civil-military coup.

A student from the class of 1978 recounts the traumatic experience associated with the move from Pedagógico, where the University of Chile's Social Work programme was taught, to the building on Sazié Street, where the programme remained until 1989, as a first sign of what was to come with the structural changes of 1981.

I started studying social work in 1978, and I had to experience the departure from the Pedagógico. It was extremely traumatic for us to be taken to Sazié, isolated. We hated that building in República, full of DINA⁹ everywhere (...) Those were very difficult times, the internships in 1981 and 1982, with the horrible economic crisis (...). They were very clever in designing the social sciences programmes to be scattered around so that the concept of a university was nowhere to be seen. Being at Sazié felt like being at school. (Entrevistado 2, 2025)

With the transformations implemented by the dictatorship, mentioned above, on 10 April 1981, Decree No. 2 created the Department of Social Work at the Santiago Professional Institute. On 25 July 1983, the Regulations for the Social Work Degree at the Santiago Professional Institute were approved with Exempt Decree No. 74.

However, since 20 March 1981, Professor Pilar Alvaríño had been serving as director of the IPS Department of Social Work, which was made official on 23 July 1981 by Exempt Resolution No. 0173, which "appointed social worker Pilar Alvaríño Martín as director of the Department of Social Work at the Professional Institute of Santiago" (IPS, 1981, p. 1). As has been discussed in other studies, Ms. Pilar Alvaríño had been a teacher at the Dr Lucio Córdova School of the University of Chile in the 1960s, long before it merged with

⁹ Dirección de Inteligencia Nacional (National Intelligence Directorate) was a secret police of the military dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet, which operated between 1973 and 1977.

the Dr Alejandro del Río School, serving, among other roles, as editor-in-chief of the *Revista Servicio Social* de la Universidad de Chile, Santiago headquarters (Vidal, 2016).

This phenomenon provides a certain continuity in the transfer of the academic team from the University of Chile's Social Work programme—those who were not dismissed, persecuted or exiled during the early years of the dictatorship—to the Instituto Profesional de Santiago, as well as civil servants. The library with course materials and curricula was also transferred. This dynamic of transfers from the University of Chile to the IPS is also expressed in the account of a former IPS student, who recalled that

two of the professors we had in the programme came from Chile, Professor Beatriz Peña and Marta Jara. It was not for nothing that they passed the screening process; they were very Mary Richmond, very case-oriented, very welfare-minded (...) At school, in general, they sent you to do internships in super-authoritarian centres, where there were military mayors (...). On the other hand, when talking to the assistants, two had been officials at the University of Chile. In 1980, they were employees of the University of Chile, and in 1981, they moved with the building, the library, and the teachers to Sazié. (Entrevista grupal, 2025)

203

However, this indicator of continuity is also linked to the awarding of degrees. We know that the University of Chile continued to award professional degrees to those students who were initially admitted to this university but who obtained their degrees at universities or institutions derived from the University of Chile and were thus able to 'exchange' them for one from the University of Chile. This was upheld in DFL No. 30, published on 29 July 1981, which stated that:

Students from universities and professional institutes derived from the legal restructuring of existing universities as of 31 December 1980, who applied and were admitted to their universities of origin until the 1981 academic year, may exchange their diplomas for those awarded by their respective universities of origin when the students began their studies.

This option may only be exercised once, within one year of the date of graduation from the new university or professional institute, by means of a written request addressed to the rector of the university of origin, who will accept it if, in his or her opinion, the plans and programmes of the new universities and professional institutes are equivalent to those that existed at the university of origin or to those that have been modified with the authorisation of the latter. (Ministerio de Educación Pública, 1981, s/p, 1981, n/p)

According to data from the University of Chile's degree office, a total of 417 people made use of this mechanism, of whom 223 came from the IPS and 5 from the



Universidad Tecnológica Metropolitana (Technological Metropolitan University) (UTEM) (Valdebenito, 2025). It should be noted that the UTEM was created by law on 30 August 1993 and is the successor to the IPS.

The last Social Work degree formally awarded by the University of Chile was on 14 June 1983, after the programme had been transferred to the IPS. However, most degrees were awarded until 1981. A different situation applies to degrees awarded through "exchange," as the last one is dated 28 March 2003, even though most of these exchanges took place between 1982 and 1988 (Valdebenito, 2025).

This creates a more diffuse picture of the transition of the social work (or service) degree programme from the University of Chile to the IPS, an issue that becomes even more complex if we examine the understanding that the student movement or organisation had of the degree programme after the civil-military coup and during the 1980s. To do so, we must delve into the process experienced by the student organisation at the University of Chile at the time.

The Recovery of the University of Chile Student Federation (FECH) during the Dictatorship and the Struggle for Democracy

204

In 1973, the FECH was banned after the civil-military coup; its legal status was revoked and its leaders imprisoned. It was replaced by the la Federación de Centros de Estudiantes de la Universidad de Chile (Federation of Student Centres of the University of Chile) (FECECH), which was controlled by agents of the dictatorship. Around 1978, Student Participation Committees were created to contest the student centre elections under difficult conditions, because the dictatorship had informers and guards at the university who controlled and even prevented access to the educational campus

by the leaders of the newly conquered student centres, whose leaders were Patricia Torres, Manuel Canales, Jorge Pesce, Javier Sáez, Tito Pizarro, José Weinstein (...) One day, like any other, Patricia Torres was beaten at the entrance to the Faculty. The student reaction was immediate. (Brodsky, 1988, p. 26)

and began the strike. The leader at the time, Patricia Torres, was a social work student and was elected as a delegate, which allowed her to participate in the student reorganisation and the FECH after the coup. The FECH was refounded in 1984, after a constituent assembly drafted its statutes, which were endorsed in a plebiscite, and universal elections were held for the executive committee (Ramírez, 2016). Yerko Ljubetic was its first president, but the whole process highlighted the importance of student mobilisation in resisting the dictatorship and defending democracy.



Among the issues addressed in the constituent assembly's discussion was the incorporation of the IPS and the Pedagogical University, whose degree programmes

were separated from the University of Chile for political and repressive reasons. The demand for their reintegration into the University of Chile has been a demand of the student movement. For this reason, all democratic sectors agreed to incorporate them into the FECH, as a demonstration of the spirit of breaking with the dictatorial project that inspired us and also as an example of our appreciation for the history of the university. (Ljubetic, 1988, p. 69)

Likewise, in April 1986, the FECH declared the profound crisis that Chilean universities and the University of Chile were experiencing as a result of military intervention and the failed self-financing system, which forced the entire university community to fight for autonomy and freedom in order to use it for the benefit of the people. To this end, among its demands was "The reincorporation of the Pedagogical and IPS into the University of Chile (...). In addition, we demand the participation of students, academics and staff in the decision-making processes that affect us" (FECH, 1986, p.1). This reflects the profound and ongoing criticism of the educational system implemented by the dictatorship and a call for recognition and unity of the student movement at the University of Chile, which had become fragmented as a result of that model. One way of rejecting this fragmentation was to allow students from these new universities in Santiago (UMCE and IPS) to vote in FECH elections, even accepting that the FECH leadership and presidencies could be held by students from either the UMCE or the IPS.

205

The FECH set out to fight for university autonomy and democratisation, to end military intervention, the clearest expression of which was the struggle "against Federici" in 1987, which succeeded in removing Rector José Luis Federici, appointed on 21 August 1987 by Pinochet to reduce staff, sell assets, close degree programmes, among other things; in short, to transform the university according to neoliberal logic. After months of strikes and mobilisation by the University of Chile community, on 29 October 1987, Pinochet asked him to resign.

Among the cases of social work students at the University of Chile after the coup, that of Patricia Torres stood out because she played an important role as a student leader. She enrolled in the programme in 1976 and participated in the first student protests, in the context of military intervention in all university spaces, including student organisations. As a result, she suffered persecution, sanctions, detention and expulsion from her degree programme, but she valued the ethics, commitment, participation and action of the students in the face of the dictatorship, which restored her conviction that things could be changed and that there was hope, despite the fear generated by the dictatorship with its policies of terror.



I was just an ordinary citizen. I started studying and did really well, but I was always concerned about the social and economic situation (...). The federation of student centres of the University of Chile—spelled with a “C”—was supposed to appoint presidents and leaders at the beginning, until we had to elect two delegates per degree course in 1979. Those delegates per degree programme formed the faculty student union, and we were going to have a faculty student union, not a degree programme student union. We were representatives of the degree programmes, and I was elected (...). What I remember is that we were an icon in social service, we had a presence in many of the committees and in many of the activities that were carried out; and I, as president of the student union, even more so; but we managed to close down the CNI¹⁰ at the Pedagogical University, which was a great achievement (...). They had started to punish me in March 1980. They wouldn't let me in because, according to them, I wasn't a student. So, I went in anyway, climbing over the walls or entering with a group of friends (...). They brought disciplinary proceedings against me three times (...), but in January 1981, they expelled me on the same date that the General University Law came into force. All of us were expelled, all the leaders of the Pedagogical University (...). Several of us leaders who had been expelled from the university in 1981 went on hunger strike and they arrested us because they had an arrest warrant (...). I think that perhaps we were very naive, we fought very bravely at that time, which meant that I spent more than ten years under this decree with the label of military prosecution, and I couldn't leave the country, and I was signing for many years in the military prosecutor's office, but I think it did help with the state of mind, that is, to say 'hey, the conditions were terrible, but organised students can defend themselves, they can move forward and achieve some of their demands'. (Torres, 2025)

Once the degree programme was transferred to the IPS, there was resistance and student demonstrations chanted “back to Chile”, which “served to unite people in the protests” (group interview, 2025). There was hope that they would return to the University of Chile. Similarly, this demand was expressed in 1984 with the election of student representatives in the re-founding of the University of Chile Student Federation, since

when the FECH is refounded, all faculties are called to vote, and that includes, as part of the demands, that the IPS and Pedagógico had to return to Chile to be part of the presidents' council (...) The student centre had already been established there, because it participated in the first FECH with Yerko Ljubetic (...). At the school, in 1984, there was a DC [Christian Democrat] board. (Entrevista grupal, 2025)

¹⁰ Central Nacional de Informaciones (National Informations Centre): Chile's secret police and intelligence agency created in 1977 to replace DINA, operating under the Pinochet dictatorship until its dissolution in 1990.



The Christian Democrats were the first political force to rebuild the student union for the Social Work programme, with Andrés Lastra. Lastra, who was the leader of the IPS Social Work student union, was also secretary general of the FECH and, later, in 1988, became president of the FECH as representative of the Christian Democracy Party youth.

The most committed Social Work students at the time were active in politics, whether in the Communist Party, the Socialist Party, the Revolutionary Left Movement¹¹ (MIR) or the Christian Democracy, something that the interviewees greatly value, as political party activism played a fundamental role.

because it taught you many things that school did not, such as a more strategic vision for analysis, learning to read the economy, understanding what was happening, but also in the daily struggle during the protests after 1983. (Entrevista grupal 2025)

IPS social work students also proposed, together with the Catholic University, the creation of the Confederation of Social Work Schools (Confederación de Escuelas de Trabajo Social) (CONETSO) in 1985, to bring together social work students in the defence of the university-level degree, the change of the curriculum, because it had been ideologically intervened, and to demand that the IPS degree be returned to the University of Chile:

We advocated for democracy in the streets and in the halls, an end to delegated rectors, for the University to be the national university, for social work to once again be part of Chile, and to create a social work student chapter in the College. (Entrevista grupal, 2025)

At the same time, IPS and Social Work students were permanently and committedly involved in the FECH demonstrations throughout the 1980s. For example, in that most emblematic demonstration against Rector Federici, these students were committed to the struggle, without making distinctions, because they felt part of the same university, as they had been historically.

[The students of] Chile assigned tasks and we had to go to Engineering to receive the specific tasks we had to do, to be at a certain point, for example, in the takeover of the Central House of the University of Chile [against Federici]. When Rovira spoke on the balcony, we all had specific tasks to support that activity (...). When Pachi Santibañez was shot, we got together very quickly at the IPS and said, "We have to go," and we

¹¹ The Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria (MIR) was a Chilean political and social organisation of Marxist orientation, founded in 1965.

EDITORIAL RECOVERY

set off walking along the Alameda and there were a lot of pacos [police] (...). It was extremely harsh repression, but it was a remarkable mobilisation (...), I admire that rigour, that conviction, that strength. In addition, there were very violent events (...) in which you risked your life (...), it was epic. (Entrevista grupal, 2025)

The demands of the IPS Social Work students were not only related to the return of the degree programme to the University of Chile, but also to the idea of returning to a University of Chile with a national vocation, given that the institution's campuses throughout the country constituted an important physical and cultural heritage. Therefore, this demand aimed to recover the presence of the national wealth that the University of Chile represented until 1981. This has not been possible to date.

Conclusions

Based on the above, we consider that the thesis proposed at the outset has been confirmed, namely that, after the civil-military coup, in the midst of the dictatorship, social work/social service students managed to maintain a student organisation at the University of Chile; and that, after 1981, with the creation and transfer of the degree programme to the IPS, they formed a student organisation whose identity and professional significance remained part of the University of Chile.

208

It has been demonstrated that these students participated in the FECH itself, as evidenced by the fact that there was a Social Work student president at the IPS, that they raised the demand for the reincorporation of the degree programme into the University of Chile, and that they fought for the demands of the University of Chile students against the dictatorship and neoliberalism. There was also continuity or transfer of academics and workers, as well as the Social Work library from the University of Chile to the IPS, and continuity in the awarding of degrees by "exchange" from the University of Chile. Not to mention that Social Work students fought and risked their lives to defend democracy at a time when military repression was severe.

The legacy of the epic student struggle in Social Work at that time, despite the fact that the IPS Social Work programme was not returned to the University of Chile, allows us, on the one hand, to appreciate a history that had not been told and, on the other, to learn that thanks to the hope, resistance, organisation and struggle of anonymous generations of IPS Social Work students, we can see the common thread between IPS Social Work and the University of Chile as a historical whole, during the hardest and most tragic years in Chile's history.



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