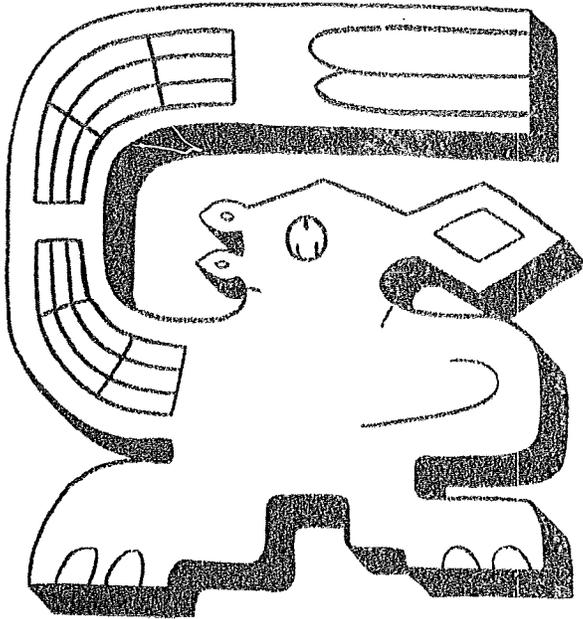


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The Seizure of "Los Cristales"

Terry McCoy

LAND TENURE CENTER

University of Wisconsin
Madison, Wisconsin 53706

The Seizure of "Los Cristales": A Case Study of the Marxist Left in Chile

By TERRY L. McCOY *

With the exception of Cuba, Chile features by far the largest, most active Marxist political movement in Latin America. Because the Popular Action Front (FRAP), composed of the Communist party (PC) and the Socialist party (PS), has decided to and is permitted to function as a legitimate political movement acting within a representative democracy, there is a tendency to forget that it is ultimately committed to remake Chilean society along Marxist lines. Generally the FRAP has chosen to follow the "Peaceful Road" to revolution, but it occasionally deviates from its legitimate role to sponsor illegal revolutionary acts. The purpose of this article is to describe and analyze the significance of a recent instance in which the revolutionary potential of the FRAP was realized, the seizure of the *fundo* "Los Cristales".¹

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¹ In Chile the term "*fundo*" refers to large agricultural holdings or estates.

POLITICS AND AGRARIAN REFORM IN CHILE

The 1964 presidential election represents a watershed in contemporary Chilean politics. It not only brought to power the reformist Christian Democratic government of Eduardo Frei, but it also signaled the eclipse of the traditional conservative and middle-of-the-road parties and confirmed the position of the Marxist FRAP alliance as the second most powerful political group in the country. The pre-1964 political alignment with the traditional parties of the right and center in control gave way to the present situation in which the moderate left government of Frei finds its strongest challenge coming from the Marxist left. Thus, while the election conferred victory on a reformist movement dedicated to the ideals of the Alliance for Progress, it also secured the position of a revolutionary movement of the type which the Alliance is designed to undermine.²

A paramount issue in the 1964 presidential campaign was agrarian reform. In Chile the pressure for agrarian reform stems from a severe concentration of agricultural land in a relatively few hands plus the fact that a potentially rich agricultural country imports foodstuffs.³ The conservative Alessandri administration passed an agrarian reform law in 1962, but it lacked the inclination to implement the somewhat cumbersome law and move in the direction of a meaningful reform program. In the 1964 campaign, Frei and his FRAP opponent, Salvador Allende, each promised that if elected he would immediately launch a drastic structural

² The unequivocal commitment of the United States to the Frei government is indicated by the fact that Chile receives the highest per capita amount of U.S. Foreign aid in Latin America. U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Government Operations, *United States Foreign Aid in Action: A Case Study*, 89th Cong., 2d Sess., 1966, p.VIII.

³ In Chile 6.9 percent of the total number of farms contain 78.5 percent of the total agricultural surface while at the other extreme 37 percent of the total number of holdings contain only .3 percent of the total agricultural surface. *Chile: Tenencia de la Tierra y Desarrollo Socio-Económico del Sector Agrícola* (Santiago: Comité Interamericano del Desarrollo Agrícola, 1966) p. 43.

Regarding the need to import food, President Frei pointed out that for the year 1964 Chile imported \$159,000,000 worth of agricultural products, only \$37,000,000 of which were tropical products Chile could not have grown. *Mensaje de la Ley de Reforma Agraria al Congreso Nacional* (Santiago: Mimeo, [1965], pp. 2-3.

transformation of Chilean agriculture. As presented in the campaign, the proposed agrarian reform of the Christian Democrats appeared just about as radical as that of the FRAP.

With Frei's victory and the strong showing by Allende, there were high expectations — both hopeful and fearful — that profound agrarian reform was about to begin. Building up the expectation for reform proved easier than implementing it, however. In spite of his campaign promise to create 100,000 new agricultural proprietors within his six year term, it took the first year of Frei's mandate to draft a new agrarian reform bill. Once submitted the bill met the determined opposition by what remained of the right, which used parliamentary maneuvers and endless lobbying to try to get Congress and the Executive to soften the bill's provisions. For its part the FRAP declared that the bill was not strong enough but that the FRAP Congressmen would support it and attempt to strengthen it. The FRAP's backing of the bill, however, did not prohibit the Communists and Socialists from capitalizing on the growing unrest in the countryside over the delay of the much heralded reform. While the Christian Democrats steadily built up support for their party (PDC) among the peasantry through their control of the administration and sponsorship of agrarian reform, the Marxist parties stepped up their own activities among the peasants, organizing unions, fomenting strikes, and in isolated incidents supporting forcible take-overs of fundos. What follows is the description of one such violent act.

"LOS CRISTALES" ⁴

The Seizure. "Los Cristales" is a large fundo of approximately 1,600 acres located south of Santiago in the rich agricultural province of Curicó. On October 28, 1965, under the leadership of a Socialist member of the Chamber of Deputies, the peasants who resided on "Los Cristales" as sharecroppers (*medieros*) and farm

⁴ The information for this section comes from a variety of sources, the principal one being a series of in-depth personal interviews carried out by the author in the last two months of 1966. The interviews were held both in Curicó and Santiago with government officials, political leaders from the FRAP and PDC, union officials, large landholders and the peasants of "Los Cristales". This information was supplemented with accounts of the seizure carried in a variety of Santiago newspapers representing all views on the political spectrum, in *La Prensa* of Curicó and in miscellaneous articles and documents. Furthermore, a limited amount of

laborers (*inquilinos*) barricaded themselves on the fundo and took it over. An analysis of the events surrounding the seizure of "Los Cristales" provides a concrete means for arriving at an understanding of the contradictory role played by the Marxist left in contemporary Chilean politics.⁵

The principal figure in the seizure of "Los Cristales" personifies the dilemma of a revolutionary movement that accepts a legitimate position in a society which it is dedicated to destroy. Oscar Naranjo, a member of the PS, was elected to the Chamber of Deputies from Curicó. In this capacity he serves as a legally constituted representative in the Chilean political system. Yet as the organizer and personal leader of the peasant take-over of "Los Cristales," he attempted to undermine that system.

Naranjo occupies a unique position in contemporary Chilean history. He is universally and ironically referred to as the "man who defeated Allende." Running as a fervent Socialist in a special election held in Curicó in the spring of 1964 to fill the seat vacated by the death of his father, he won such an overwhelming victory that the presidential candidate of the Democratic Front coalition of Conservative, Liberal and Radical parties resigned and the conservative sectors united behind Frei in order to block victory by Allende and the FRAP.⁶ In retrospect, Naranjo's victory should not have

data was derived from structured questionnaires administered to 33 of the 44 members of the peasant union of "Los Cristales". Systematic data from these questionnaires forms the basis of a forthcoming study by the author which analyzes the political consciousness of peasants who have taken part in a revolutionary act. The author wishes to thank Maurice Zeitlin and Marion Brown of the University of Wisconsin for permission to use the questionnaires which they designed and administered to a national sample of Chilean peasants in a 1966 study of peasant attitudes.

⁵ Although not common there have been a few other fundo seizures recently in Chile. For the description of one such seizure, also conducted by a prominent Socialist in the Mapuche Indian province of Arauco, see William Thiesenhusen, "Grass Roots Economic Pressures in Chile: An Enigma for Development Planners". Land Tenure Center, Research Paper No. 28, Madison, Wisconsin. (November 1966).

⁶ The Democratic Front candidate, Julio Durán, eventually reentered the race as the Radical candidate in a gesture aimed at holding his faction-ridden party together, but he received only 5 percent of the vote as the bulk of the Conservatives, Liberals, Radicals, and independents who had elected Alessandri in 1958 voted for Frei. Naranjo's victory was such a set back for the right, which was so confident that it had insisted on giving

been a surprise. He was such an attractive candidate that the Christian Democrats even considered not entering a candidate and supporting Naranjo.⁷ He had the support and sympathy which existed for his father plus growing stature among the politically awakening peasantry of the province.

Before being elected Naranjo, a doctor, was well known among the peasants for giving free medical care. As a Socialist militant, he was also active in organizing them politically. Once Naranjo was in office, his peasant constituency continued to come to him for medical care and political leadership. Naranjo personally conceives of his mandate as using his influence as a deputy to serve the peasants and to balance out their lack of economic voice with political power. As a result much of his time in Curicó and in Santiago is spent helping the peasants to penetrate the bureaucracy by opening the doors for which only an elected official has the key. Yet for Naranjo, serving the peasants is more than tending their medical needs and guiding them through the bureaucracy. He sees his task in larger terms: following through on his ideological commitment to revolutionize Chilean society on the Marxist model where the peasants as a class supposedly cease to exist. He has made clear his commitment by stating publically in the chamber of Deputies: "I am an agitator. More: I am proud to be one."⁸ Naranjo's revolutionary commitment entails helping peasants form unions, write petitions, plan strikes, and ultimately using his privilege of parliamentary immunity from arrest to plan and direct illegal seizures of property. Such was his role in the take-over of "Los Cristales."

Another member of the PS also played a key role in the events leading up to the seizure of "Los Cristales." He has been a Social-

the Curicó election a national significance, that the presidents of the three Democratic Front parties also resigned. The significance of Naranjo's victory is evidenced by the fact that it is universally known as the "*Naranjazo*."

⁷ Luis Hernández Parker, "Frei: Revolución en las Urnas," *Ercilla*, No. 1.529 (9 de Septiembre de 1964), p. 11. The PDC eventually entered its own candidate since the FRAP insisted on making the Curicó election complementary to the presidential election with the slogan, "To vote for Naranjo is to vote for Allende."

⁸ "Intervenciones de los HH. Diputados Socialistas, señores Oscar Naranjo y Luis Aguilera en Defensa del Campesino Chileno," reprint of the *Boletín* de la Cámara de Diputados, República de Chile, [1965], p. 7.

ist militant for over 30 years, has held responsible positions in the party, and was a subsecretary in the Ibañez administration (1952-1958) during the phase when the left formed part of the government. Notwithstanding his Marxist affiliation, he rented the fundo "Los Cristales" for the five years immediately preceding the take-over.

As a national leader of the PS, the renter opened the fundo to political activities, thus exposing the peasants to the party and its ideas. During the 1964 campaign, "Los Cristales" was a FRAP staging center for Curicó. Allende stayed on the fundo during his campaign swings through the area and one campaign speech at "Los Cristales" drew several thousand spectators. Furthermore, although the renter publically denied at the time of the seizure that his fundo was used to train Socialist militants in agitation and violence, in private FRAP members admit that "Los Cristales" was utilized for such purposes.⁹ It is clear that the existence of such activities was a key factor in awakening the political consciousness of the peasants of "Los Cristales." The renter, as a Socialist, likes to take full credit for inspiring and organizing the peasants. The facts, however, indicate that, while his role in the events leading up to the seizure was important, his motivations were, at best, questionable.

He originally rented the fundo with the best capitalist intentions of improving the property and operating it for handsome profit. Unfortunately the fundo was in such bad shape that it required a tremendous investment. The financial strain on the renter was increased, by such things as crop failures, to the point that he could pay neither the rent payments to the owner nor the salaries of his workers. The peasants, who in retrospect, at least, hold a sympathetic view of him, tolerated the lack of pay for as long as possible, but in October 1964, they began to form a union for the purpose of seeking a solution to their grievances. In the process they sought Naranjo's advice. The deputy, whose opinion of the renter as a Socialist is not very high, urged the peasants to take whatever

⁹ The renter's denial is found in a letter prominently displayed in the Communist paper, *EL Siglo*, 5 de Noviembre de 1965. On the other hand, the rumor was corroborated by FRAP militants and peasants on the fundo. They told the author that the PS's *Grupo de Choque*, a strong-arm elite used to incite and lead demonstrators, did in fact train on the more remote sections of "Los Cristales."

measures were necessary to obtain their salaries.¹⁰ Eventually, however, a settlement was reached without open conflict between the renter and his workers. The formation of a union was also halted although the renter now claims that he helped the peasants form and operate a union during his tenure on "Los Cristales." In fact it appears that, once it became clear that he would lose the fundo because of defaulting on the rent, he did encourage the peasants to begin forming a union which would be ready when the owners reassumed control. Bitter over losing "Los Cristales," the renter was determined to get even with the owners by turning the workers against them. This desire for personal revenge led him to organize and start the workers on a path which ultimately culminated in the take-over.

The owners of the fundo, a family of seven brothers and sisters, reassumed control in July 1965. They had inherited "Los Cristales" along with other property but intended to devote the majority of their time and effort to "Los Cristales." With this in mind they quickly invested what limited capital they had — given the fact that the rent had not been paid four out of the last five years — in fertilizer and equipment to better exploit the fundo. On assuming control, however, they were greeted by a hostile labor union which immediately went on strike in the heart of the planting season. Between July and October the union presented a series of petitions (*pliegos de peticiones*), backed by strikes, demanding better salaries and working conditions. At each instance the owners signed contracts (*actas de avenimiento*) agreeing to meet the peasants' demands, but, beset by internal disagreements and a severe shortage of funds, they were subsequently unable to fulfill the contracts. After months with no salaries, the peasants of "Los Cristales" were desperate.

While Naranjo provided indispensable counsel and leadership, he did not have to prod a reluctant group of peasants to act. They assumed a great deal of initiative themselves. After the renter departed, the peasants, acting in secret because they feared repressive measures by the owners, completed formation of the union. When ready, they advised Naranjo, who called in labor inspectors to supervise the election of officers and certify that the

¹⁰ Personal Interview. Naranjo, to indicate the low esteem in which he holds the renter as a Socialist, refers to him as a "paternalistic Socialist."

union was legal. Even with legal recognition, however, things did not go well for the union. The president, who admits that he knew practically nothing about running a union, had to rely increasingly on the PS, in addition to Naranjo's aid. He journeyed to the party's headquarters in Santiago where the Secretary-general of the PS (who is also the head of the FRAP) helped him draw up petitions. As conditions on the fundo degenerated, the Secretary-general urged the peasants to seize it, and Naranjo assumed close supervision of the planning. The central committee of the PS also dispatched additional help in the person of an expert in such matters who had helped direct the successful take-over of the fundo "Culiprán" near Santiago earlier in the year.

The seizure itself was impeccably conceived and implemented. It was carried out in complete secrecy and caught the owners and authorities by surprise. The success of the venture can be measured by the obvious joy the peasants take in relating the drama to visitors on "Los Cristales." Beginning several months previous to the seizure, Naranjo and the other organizers met with members of the union in the dead of the night to plan the seizure. Every man, woman and child (with the exception of two families who were suspected because of their loyalty to the owners) were eventually appraised of the impending event. They were repeatedly warned of the dangers involved, but they wholeheartedly agreed to carry the plan through regardless of the consequences. All were given specific assignments, even the children who were instructed in the arts of using sling-shots and throwing stones. Naranjo warned the peasants against drinking wine, for fear that they might leak plan of the seizure while under the influence of alcohol. After one false start because of fear that the police had been tipped off, in the predawn hours of October 28, 1965, the peasants sealed off the fundo with barricades, trapping one of the unfortunate owners. They proclaimed that they would not surrender the fundo until their grievances were remedied. In fact, what began as a movement to force the owners to fulfill their legal obligations was subsequently transformed into a struggle to win control of "Los Cristales."

Simultaneously with the events leading to the seizure of "Los Cristales," the peasants on the neighboring fundo of "El Porvenir" laid the plans to take over their fundo. This seizure was also directed by Naranjo and was to be coordinated with that of "Los

Cristales." In the case of "El Porvenir," however, the owner, who lived on the fundo and had a great deal of time and money invested in it, was aware that Naranjo was meeting with peasants. Furthermore, the peasants themselves lacked the unity and resolve of their counterparts on "Los Cristales" where conditions were much worse. Therefore, when a group of them acting under Naranjo's leadership moved to take over the fundo on October 28, the owner met the attempt with a threat to use force, and singlehandedly defeated the seizure in the course of several hours. So great was the owner's victory that he summarily dismissed all those taking part in the plot.¹¹ With the seizure of "El Porvenir" eliminated by the owner, "Los Cristales" became the center of attention.¹²

Reactions to the Crisis. The events on "Los Cristales," occurring just as the debate over agrarian reform was about to begin in earnest, immediately assumed national importance. They presented the Frei administration with an ugly crisis which it still has not completely resolved. President Frei was determined to implement far-reaching reforms which would alleviate peacefully situations similar to that which led to the seizure of "Los Cristales." On the

¹¹ Personal Interview. The owner of "El Porvenir" is a very strong-willed individual who proved to be more than a match for Naranjo. He traced the blame for the attempt to seize his fundo to the fact that it is one of the best in the area and thus a constant target of leftist agitators. A gun collector, he armed himself with a pistol and a submachine gun before investigating the disturbance. He warned the participating peasants and Naranjo to get off his property and then demonstrated the effectiveness of his weapons by shooting down their signs. The peasants were properly impressed and quickly retreated.

¹² One of the Christian Democratic deputies from Curicó interprets the simultaneous uprising on "Los Cristales" and "El Porvenir" as proof of a leftist conspiracy to take over the whole area by force. He bolsters his novel "guerrilla theory" by alleging the presence of armed Marxist militants in the hills ready to sweep down in a coordinated action with the peasants. In general he shows little familiarity with what occurred on "El Porvenir" and "Los Cristales" and obviously has received his information from very conservative sources. In a personal interview in Curicó, he located himself in the right wing of his party by engaging in the conservative practice of labeling those working for the government agrarian reform agencies (CORA and INDAP), as well as the leftist-leaning members of his own party, as Communists and Socialists in disguise. In contrast and relevant to the stressful diversity of the PDC were the actions of another Christian Democratic deputy from Curicó who immediately after the seizure sided with FRAP congressmen in support of the peasants of "Los Cristales."

eve of the introduction of his agrarian reform bill, Frei could not afford to alienate needed moderate support for his regime by failing to act against the illegal seizure of "Los Cristales." Neither could he react with the violent repression characteristic of previous conservative governments.

Given the nature of the problem and the suddenness with which it presented itself, some confusion was inevitable. The indecision of the government was aggravated by the absence of the President from the country on an official state visit. The Minister of the Interior was acting chief executive in Frei's absence. After efforts by the *intendente* of Curicó, the highest public official and personal representative of the President in the province, failed to persuade the peasants to relinquish their control of "Los Cristales," the Ministry of the Interior took charge of the problem.¹³ The officials in charge in Frei's absence apparently decided that the main threat presented by the seizure was that of undermining confidence in the government's ability to protect private property, for they made it eminently clear that "Los Cristales" would be restored to its owners.¹⁴ When repeated efforts failed to dislodge the peasants by peaceful means, the government ordered 250 heavily armed national policemen on to the fundo to subdue the peasants with force. The peasants were taken by surprise but quickly recovered to give the police a furious battle. Although outnumbered and armed with only crude weapons, they refused to surrender. The serious wounding of one on their number (he later died from the wound) increased the peasants' resolve to fight. Finally under Naranjo's prodding and in order to avoid further bloodshed, the police were withdrawn before achieving their objective.

Government officials agreed with Naranjo's demand that the police be withdrawn on the condition that "Los Cristales" would subsequently be decreed "intervened" by the government. "Intervention" is the legal means, provided in both the Chilean labor code and interior security law through which the state can assume

¹³ Not only did the crisis merit top level attention by the acting chief executive, but by its nature it came under the normal jurisdiction of the Minister of the Interior.

¹⁴ In a personal interview the president of the agricultural association of Curicó confided that the Minister of the Interior had personally called him to assure him that the government could enforce the property rights of the owners.

control of a vital economic activity which has been paralyzed. Strictly interpreted, these provisions were not applicable in the case of "Los Cristales" since agricultural strikes, much less seizures, are illegal according to the existing law, but they were applied anyway.¹⁵ The decree declaring the fundo "intervened" opened the way for negotiations by giving the government legal control of the fundo without physically removing the peasants.

Whereas the actual physical conflict had been terminated relatively rapidly, the ensuing negotiations over the future of "Los Cristales" continued to have national political repercussions. The seizure and the government's reaction had immediately precipitated a confrontation between the Frei administration and the FRAP. The national leaders of the PS and the PC declared their solidarity with the peasants and denounced the government's use of force. The largest national labor federation, the FRAP-controlled CUT, issued a statement criticizing the government, announcing that it was sending officials to advise the peasants, and ordering its regional council in Curicó to lend all available assistance to the peasants.¹⁶

The government countered such leftist criticism by issuing an official declaration charging that "Los Cristales" had long been known as a center of Socialist party agitation. It justified the use of force by claiming the government had attempted to work out a peaceful solution but the peasants had been incited by politicians to take over the fundo, thus leaving no alternative for government officials who had to see to it that the law was enforced and that agrarian reform was carried out legally.¹⁷

Just as the left was drawn into the conflict so also was the right, specifically the large landholders of Curicó who had a profound interest in the outcome of "Los Cristales" affair. Large landholders in Chile are grouped together into regional agricultural associations. These regional groups in central Chile together form the National Agricultural Society (SNA). Traditionally the SNA

¹⁵ Frei submitted a bill early in his term which would considerably liberalize the restrictions on forming rural unions and on agricultural strikes. He had instructed public officials to act as if the bill were law. The bill was signed into law in April, 1967.

¹⁶ *El Clarín*, 31 de Octubre de 1965.

¹⁷ *El Mercurio*, 3 de Noviembre de 1965.

and its regional affiliates have formed strong, effective pressure groups representing the interests of the large landowner. They have been especially adamant and vociferous in their opposition to agrarian reform. The president of the Curicó association takes great pride in emphasizing that his group is among the progressive agricultural associations which are abandoning all-out opposition to anything suggesting reform. He points out that his association accepts as members only those agriculturalists who exploit their land well and treat their workers according to the norms specified in the labor code. He personally goes so far as to say that agrarian reform is necessary and that rural labor unions are beneficial. In discussing the problem of "Los Cristales," however, like other Chilean landholders, he places the original blame on the Frei administration's program of sending governmental agents into the countryside to organize the peasants, thus stirring them into action in search of a better life and their legal rights. He echoes the conservative charge that these organizers were either Communists or Communist-inspired.

The position that the Curicó association took on the seizure of the fundo was limited to demanding that the government see to it that the property rights of the owners be respected by restoring them their property. It made no attempt to defend the owners, who were not members of the association, but merely insisted that the government could not sanction illegal and violent violations of private property. The Frei administration was sympathetic to the association's concern over the violation of property rights; the government was reluctant to publically side with the landholders and did not immediately invite them to take part in the discussions convoked to solve the problem. For his part, the association's president claims that his group refused to participate in these early discussions which were dominated by "political concerns." Eventually both the government and the association altered their resistance, and the association entered the negotiations. It is evident that the restrained behavior of the agricultural association and its endorsement of the final settlement helped keep the conflict under control.

Once negotiations did begin the peasants of "Los Cristales" were well represented. In addition to Naranjo, other deputies from the PS, PC, and PDC quickly came to aid the peasants after the seizure had made the headlines. Furthermore, officials from the FRAP-oriented CUT and National Federation of Peasants and In-

dians were permitted to have a voice in the efforts to reach a settlement. Although the primary reason for seizing the fundo had been to force the owners to comply with their legal responsibilities, by the time negotiations began the chief objective of the peasants, with the encouragement of their supporters, was to extract from the government a commitment to expropriate "Los Cristales," handing it over to them. The peasants had come to believe that the fundo was rightfully theirs. Immediately after seizing the fundo, the peasants sent a petition to the Agrarian Reform Corporation (CORA) requesting that "Los Cristales" be incorporated into the agrarian reform program. The Frei administration's determination to avoid encouraging similar seizures — which would endanger the credibility of its promise for a legal, orderly agrarian reform — by acceding to the demands of the peasants can be seen in the following answer by the zonal CORA chief to the peasants' petition:

I wish to emphasize that the seriousness with which the Supreme Government [has] decided to carry out Agrarian Reform in the country does not permit this Corporation to act under pressures of any kind and that its action will be determined by technical standards it deems appropriate to the particular situation.¹⁸

The negotiators representing the peasants, the family, the other landowners, and the government reached an agreement on October 30, 1965, which convinced the peasants to lower the barricades and open the fundo. The settlement did not contain any provision ordering CORA to expropriate or even to study the possibility of expropriating "Los Cristales," although such a provision may have been agreed upon informally since the impression persists among the peasants that the fundo is under consideration for expropriation. The heart of the agreement was the naming of an "interventor" for the purpose of administering the fundo and searching for a permanent solution. During the period of intervention the Agricultural Development Institute (INDAP) was to supply credit and technical aid while the profits were to be divided: 25 percent for the owners and 75 for the peasants. On November 14 the original decree and negotiated agreement were combined into a decree issued in Santiago which declared that the period of intervention would last for six months during which time a final solution would presumably be reached.

¹⁸ *La Prensa* (Curicó), 31 de Octubre de 1965, p. 5.

The selection of someone to fill the post of interventor was also a product of political give-and-take; the office was important as the link between the government and the peasants. The man finally chosen, an agricultural engineer familiar with the Curicó region, admits that he received the post, by process of elimination, because he was a political independent.¹⁹ Originally reluctant to accept the assignment, he eventually agreed to undertake it because of the gravity of the situation and because he felt successful resolution of the problem would provide a valuable guide for dealing with similar conflicts. It appears that, despite failure to reach the desired final settlement, the interventor has been successful in both his role as official representative of the government and as administrator of the fundo. He has achieved the peace desired by the government and boosted production of the fundo by giving the peasants a great deal of independence and responsibility in the day-to-day operations.²⁰

The Current Situation. With the agreement to search for a final solution over an extended period, "Los Cristales" disappeared from the headlines and national attention. While the controversy has declined, the problem has not been solved, however, as indicated by the fact that the decree of intervention was renewed in April, 1966, for an indefinite period. But rather than force the issue and risk unknown consequences, the major parties seem to have reached a *modus vivendi* satisfactory to all, at least for the present.

For their part, the peasants, who do not hold legal title to the property, are in *de facto* control. Despite the instructions of the original decree and the promises of the Frei administration to restore the fundo to its owners, the peasants have never relinquished control of "Los Cristales." With the acquiescence of the interventor, the peasant union administers virtually every aspect of life on the fundo.

Membership in the union is limited to the 44 heads of family

¹⁹ Personal Interview.

²⁰ In a personal interview, the interventor, who does not reside on "Los Cristales" but visits it only two or three times a month, indicated the degree to which he has become attached to the peasants by confessing that he has personally obtained credit for them when official sources have failed.

(and their male descendents) who took part in the original seizure.²¹ The controlling voice in the fundo affairs is the union leadership, especially its president. The union president, who is freely elected by the members, draws up yearly planting and investment program as well as making major day-to-day decisions. The fundo is exploited collectively, a situation which the peasants themselves justify in pragmatic terms.²² Under this system the president has the responsibility not only for assigning work but also for deciding how the profits will be distributed among the membership. Given the dominant position of the union president, the current administration of "Los Cristales" resembles the traditional system in which the owner completely dominates life on his fundo. But the resemblance is only superficial. Both the peasants and their president know that he — a man elected from their ranks — is ultimately subject to their veto. Furthermore, the peasants accept the system because it delivers results.

Everyone familiar with "Los Cristales" agrees that, since the peasants took over, the fundo has been transformed from a community eyesore into a profitable agricultural enterprise. Under the vigorous leadership of its president, along with occasional aid from Naranjo and the interventor, the peasant union has taken full advantages of the services made available to it. It immediately secured credit worth around \$8,000 from INDAP for the purchase of hybrid seeds, fertilizers, draft animals, and the use of government owned machinery.²³ With the aid of the INDAP credit plus the realization by the peasants that they were now working for themselves, "Los Cristales" was subjected to intensive cultivation for the first time in its existence. After only one year in the hands

²¹ The peasants of "Los Cristales" take great pride in pointing to the seizure as a great victory for the landless, rural laborer. They like to consider themselves champions of the cause of the Chilean peasant. However, they adamantly refuse to share the material benefits of their victory by permitting other peasants to join the union and live on "Los Cristales."

²² Personal Interview. They argue that it makes no economic sense . . . to subdivide and assign individual plots. Apparently unanimity does not exist on this question as Naranjo admitted in an interview that some of the peasants continue to want individual pieces of land. He added, however, that they were gradually coming to see the "superiority of the collective system."

²³ *Vea*, 4 de Agosto de 1966, p 4.

of the peasants the production of the fundo yielded a profit of approximately \$5,000.²⁴

The success of "Los Cristales" has not been limited to increased agricultural output and profits. The life of the peasant has improved. In addition to securing a loan from INDAP, the peasant union invited INDAP extension experts to give classes in health, cooking and sewing for the women.²⁵ Naranjo set up a conference on farm management with professors from the University of Chile while a student drama group from the university performed on the fundo at the invitation of the union. Whereas the peasants received practically no salary in the past, they now are guaranteed a daily wage in excess of the national minimum along with the full array of social security benefits.²⁶ Each family also is supplied with a house, a garden, and grazing privileges for his private animals. Finally, as was mentioned, 75 percent of the net profits are divided among all members of the union.

Even though the peasants are unquestionably better off than before the seizure, their indefinite legal status creates insecurity and difficulties, such as the inability to secure long-term credits for needed infrastructure improvements, so that they are unlikely to rest until a permanent settlement is reached. In this final solution the peasants, who are entrenched as the real owners of "Los Cristales," will accept nothing less than legal ownership.

While Naranjo and the Socialist party occasionally confront the government with the problem of "Los Cristales," they seem satisfied enough with the present situation not to press for a formal, fixed solution. For the time being the Socialists have ignored the option of further revolutionary action and confined their activities to the conventional channels of protest, such as petitioning the government to incorporate "Los Cristales" into the official agrar-

²⁴ *El Siglo*, 20 de Agosto de 1966. According to *El Siglo*, the Communist newspaper, the profit was 25,000 *escudos*, with the *escudo* being worth at that time, a little over \$.20. *El Siglo* claims that this is net profit, arrived at after deducting wages, social security payments, and payments on the loan from INDAP. In a personal interview the interventor confirmed this figure.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 4 de Agosto de 1966, pp. 4-5.

²⁶ According to the interventor the peasants receive a daily wage of E° 6 while the national minimum is E° 4.104.

ian reform program.²⁷ The mere fact that the peasants now control the fundo represents a victory for the party, and there is, therefore, no need for it to threaten trouble. Furthermore, forcing the issue might bring the government and landowners together in an effort to destroy "Los Cristales" as the base for Socialist agitation in the Curicó area.

An instrument of political penetration, "Los Cristales" is ideal. Not only does its mere existence serve to remind the peasantry in Curicó of the PS, but the peasants on the fundo are proud and eager to spread the story of how the party helped them become the real owners of the land they work. Each member of the peasant union is a card carrying Socialist militant, and the president ran as a candidate for local office on the Socialist ticket. The union itself is associated with the FRAP-controlled National Federation of Peasants and Indians.

The union has developed the fundo into the social and recreational center for peasants in the area. While on the fundo the visiting peasants are exposed to a successful peasant-operated enterprise. As their interest develops on repeated visits, they are instructed and aided in forming unions on the fundos on which they are working, in writing petitions, and in striking successfully.²⁸ Finally, Naranjo has intimated that the fundo is also utilized for more occult political activities, specifically the organizing of other seizures.²⁹ Given the privacy "Los Cristales" affords the Socialists, its value to them in its present state is too great to jeopardize.

The government's reluctance to push for a final solution is

²⁷ *El Siglo*, 27 de Abril de 1966.

²⁸ In Chile where soccer is the principal sport and Sunday soccer matches the primary diversion, the key organization in attracting visitors and subsequently engaging their political interest is the soccer club. As cleverly conceived by Naranjo, the club has organized teams among the peasants of 26 of the surrounding fundos. These teams meet every Sunday to play on the field on "Los Cristales." In this manner the participants and spectators are continually drawn back to the fundo where not incidentally, they engage in political conversation as well as athletic endeavors. The president of the peasant union of "Los Cristales" just happens to be president of the sports club as well.

²⁹ Personal Interview. Shortly after this interview the peasants temporarily seized a fundo in Curicó as a means of forcing the owner to agree to their demands.

easily understood. In seeking a formal settlement it faces two unpalatable alternatives. On the one hand, it could carry through on its original commitment, demanding that the peasants give the land back to its legal owners. The Frei administration is painfully aware, however, that the peasants would not surrender the fundo without a violent struggle, an event which could hardly be expected to win popular support for the government. On the other hand, the government could order the fundo expropriated and incorporated into the agrarian reform program, thus legalizing the *de facto* situation. Despite the constant urging of the peasants, their Socialist allies, and even the owners, the government has not shown any disposition to expropriate the fundo or even to study the possibility.³⁰ Rather it has made it eminently clear that it will not reward the illegal seizure with a place in the official agrarian reform process. It is also safe to conclude that the Christian Democrats, who are competing with the FRAP for the political allegiance of the peasantry, have no desire to increase the stature of their rivals by formally conceding a Socialist victory in the case of "Los Cristales."

Rather than confronting the problem directly, the administration of President Frei has permitted it to become lost in the bureaucracy. Repeated efforts to locate an official responsible for seeing that a final solution is reached proved to be futile. An official in the Ministry of the Interior, which is legally in charge during the period of intervention, was under the impression, as are many other, that CORA was studying the problem, but CORA officials denied that they are considering the case of "Los Cristales." The interventor, who is sincerely concerned about definitely settling the conflict but who as a mediator can not impose a solution, has suggested several possible solutions which up to the present have fallen on deaf ears. It is apparent that the government prefers to let the problem solve itself without direct intervention on its be-

³⁰ A check of the expropriations planned by CORA for 1967 reveals that "Los Cristales" is not on the list. Furthermore, CORA officials deny even having the fundo under study. They claim that they can not consider the fundo as it is under the legal state of intervention. If their assertion is valid, and it must be doubted since other intervened fundos have been expropriated, the government, if it were so disposed, could terminate the intervention in order to facilitate expropriation.

half.³¹ Such a strategy may indeed prove successful in terms of protecting the government but only as long as the peasants and their Socialist supporters choose not to provoke a serious incident in which the government must intervene.

Conclusions

The case of "Los Cristales" suggests some conclusions about the paradoxical role of the Marxist left in the Chilean political system which are worthy of elaboration. The take-over of "Los Cristales" directed by the PS was clearly a revolutionary act, yet it is notable because it represents an isolated case not an integral act of an overall policy. Therefore, as an exception, the incident reemphasizes the basically conservative political strategy of the FRAP alliance which resorts to revolutionary tactics only occasionally enough to remind non-Marxist Chileans of the potential threat that the FRAP holds for the current political system. The net effect of this contradictory policy is to make possible the day-to-day participation of the Marxist left in Chilean politics, yet always under somewhat strained conditions.

Within the FRAP, which was formed in 1958, the PC is the less revolutionary and more prone to compromise ultimate goals in order to maintain its position within the current political configuration. As the largest Communist party in Latin America outside of Cuba, it has traditionally advocated the "Peaceful Road" to revolution. Furthermore, the current policy of the Soviet Union obligates the bloc of Moscow-oriented Communist parties in Latin America — of which the Chilean party is definitely a member — to work for change from within the system rather than attempting to overthrow it.

In the specific instance of "Los Cristales," the PC took no role

³¹ A plan suggested by the interventor may well offer the possibility of "self solution." According to this proposal "Los Cristales" would be offered for public sale, but, since it is over valued and since prospective buyers would be scared off by the power of the workers, it would not be sold. Then, after a waiting period specified by the law, the fundo could be offered for sale at a lower price. Eventually, according to the interventor, the price would be lowered to the point where CORA could afford to buy the land, the proceeds going to pay off a tax debt. In this manner the Frei government would avoid the distasteful alternatives either of removing the peasants or of directly endorsing their illegal seizure.

in organizing the seizure. After it became an accomplished fact, the party and its followers in the CUT quickly and publically declared their solidarity with the peasants of "Los Cristales." However, when questioned about such events, the president of the National Federation of Peasants and Indians, a Communist, insisted that "Los Cristales" was a very special case, what occurred there could not be pursued as a matter of natural policy by his organization. He reiterated the "trade unionist" philosophy of the Chilean Communists which holds that it is the function of the unions to work for reforms, such as better working conditions and wages, while the party works through legitimate, democratic channels to gain political control. Only after the party is in power, continued the Federation president, can the workers through their unions engage in revolutionary acts. The Communists have criticised their FRAP partners, the Socialists, for permitting individual members, such as Naranjo, to engage in isolated reckless acts which endanger the political gains made by the FRAP as a whole.³²

The PS tends to be more independent and revolutionary than its Communist ally. The Socialists argue, at least on the intellectual level, that the FRAP must not rely solely on the ballot box to achieve power but at times must consider revolutionary tactics.³³ Although less committed to legitimate participation in the political system, the PS has steadily resisted movements within its ranks to break with the Communists in favor of a more revolutionary stance. Naranjo admits that he is castigated from within his own party for harboring "caudilloist" tendencies, which criticism can only be interpreted as an attempt to put a damper on his agitation among the peasants. Even in the case of "Los Cristales" where the PS took the initiative in the original seizure, it has not sought to force

³² In referring critically to the exploits of Naranjo and other Socialist deputies, who also have led peasant seizures, the Communists reprimand the Socialists for allowing "caudillismo" to develop within their ranks. Presumably in this instance "caudillismo," commonly used in reference to the Latin American phenomenon of men not movements dominating politics, may be interpreted as the Spanish equivalent of the term "personality cult" as employed in Marxist jargon.

³³ For example see: *El Socialismo y la Unidad (Cartas del Partido Socialista al Partido Comunista)*, Colección Documentos del PS, N° 1 (Santiago: n.p., 1966), pp. 8 and 13.

the event through to its logical conclusion nor has it encouraged similar acts.³⁴

The isolated nature of the seizure of "Los Cristales" as well as the less than enthusiastic reaction it evoked within the FRAP hierarchy seem to confirm the commitment of the Marxist left to play a legitimate role in Chilean politics. This commitment, which makes possible normal political relations between the FRAP and the Frei government, challenges the notion that the FRAP is really an "anti-system" movement. Certainly the definitive answer to this question can not be provided by the preceding case study, but the original seizure of "Los Cristales" does suggest that the Chilean Marxists are still capable of revolutionary action. Furthermore, when speaking in Congress on the "Los Cristales" affair, Naranjo revealed the Marxist idealism — dedicated to replacing the current Chilean political system — which motivated him to assume leadership of the seizure:

This afternoon I have interrupted a long silence as a member of parliament. I am not a man who likes to give speeches. I am a provincial person who as a Socialist is loyally dedicated to serving his principles.

I look with absolute skepticism on the oratorical competition which is produced in this Chamber from time to time in a totally unfruitful way; but at the same time *I feel encouraged when I think that this Parliament is essentially transitory, as all practices which coincide to create the sensation of a false democracy.*³⁵

Analysis of the seizure of "Los Cristales" and subsequent events does not resolve the contradictory nature of the Marxist left. Rather it suggests that the contradiction is real not apparent and a fundamental factor in contemporary Chilean politics.

³⁴ In the course of writing this work it has been brought to my attention that Naranjo and the peasants have discovered a plan which would enable them to buy "Los Cristales," paying for it over an extended period. If they follow through on this scheme — which they seem determined to do — they will not only solve the problem for the Frei administration in a most acceptable manner, but they will transform the fruits of this original act of "revolutionary socialism" into a "utopian socialist" community which chooses to withdraw into self-contained communal life rather than challenging the larger system of which it is a part.

³⁵ "Intervenciones . . .", p. 9. Emphasis added.