

# Communists, Commissars, and Consumers: The Politics of Food on the Chilean Road to Socialism

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*Abstract* This article examines the politics of food during Chile's Popular Unity (UP) revolution (1970–73). Organized around the rise and fall of the Juntas de Abastecimiento y Precios (Price and Supply Committees, JAPs), a state-backed network of collectively managed stores and ad hoc food distribution sites, the article explores how the UP revolution expanded long-standing practices of community-led price monitoring and food distribution to make the promise of economic democracy more concrete for urban, working-class consumers. As the JAPs' power grew, however, such efforts became a political lightning rod, unifying Chile's domestic opposition around the claim that the state's presence in the food economy—rather than its absence—created scarcity and needlessly politicized domestic life. Ultimately, the article contends that the consumer marketplace was a key arena for competing conceptualizations of democracy and the state in early 1970s Chile, anticipating the centrality of consumption to the neoliberal counterrevolution that the country experienced in the post-UP era.

On the second Wednesday of November 1972, several hundred community members gathered outside a supermarket in the *población* of Santa Julia, a rapidly urbanizing neighborhood on Santiago's southern periphery. They came to celebrate the achievements of Chile's Popular Unity (UP) revolution (1970–73) after two years. More urgent, however, was the task of protecting the revolution's gains from being undone. A few weeks prior, the anti-UP opposition had coordinated a nationwide closure of private businesses to coincide with a weeks-long truckers' strike. The October bosses' strike, as the event became known, crippled the distribution of consumer goods around the country. Given that it occurred as Chile's spring planting season was beginning, the protest would also decimate the country's domestic food supply well into 1973. In response, UP supporters commandeered stalled delivery trucks and pried open the chained-up entrances of privately owned

For their feedback on various versions of this article as well as the larger project of which it is a part, I am grateful to Greg Grandin, Barbara Weinstein, Sinclair Thomson, Peter Winn, Alejandro Velasco, Christy Thornton, Nara Milanich, Heidi Tinsman, Brodwyn Fischer, and *HAHR*'s anonymous reviewers.

*Hispanic American Historical Review* 98:3

DOI 10.1215/00182168-6933567 © 2018 by Duke University Press

grocery stores to halt a cresting counterrevolution and take direct control over Chile's transformative process.<sup>1</sup>

One of the most visible actions taken to break the strike was the occupation of Santa Julia's local supermarket, owned by Almac, Chile's largest private grocery store chain. There, community residents organized a citizens' council to administer the requisitioned establishment and, wasting little time, commenced a system of popular distribution, with fixed prices, for 17 scarce consumer essentials—everything from milk and cooking oil to coffee and canned goods. According to many left-wing activists, the sale of *canastas populares* (popular baskets) was the first step in restoring nutritional security to poor and working-class Santiago neighborhoods.<sup>2</sup>

Observed from one angle, the community takeover of Santa Julia's Almac fits squarely within narratives of the UP era that emphasize dissatisfied consumers mobilizing around the most basic of economic concerns: access to affordable foodstuffs. Indeed, consumer scarcity occupies a prominent place in most accounts of Chile's 1,000-day revolution.<sup>3</sup> Starting in late 1971 and continuing until a September 1973 military coup ended Chile's revolution, Chilean women used their identities as mothers and housewives to stage public demonstrations around shortages, transforming food access into the most significant metric by which the UP would be judged. As historian Mario Garcés D. has written, scarcity, inflation, and a generalized feeling of consumer uncertainty produced a sense of social crisis that Chile's UP coalition was unable to shake and that became part of the opposition's justification for Salvador Allende's overthrow.<sup>4</sup>

However, upon closer examination the proliferation of popular supermarkets and alternative distribution channels within revolutionary strongholds opens the way to other questions about the UP period. Rosa Ríos and María Farías Godoy, residents of Nueva La Habana, another neighborhood

1. "El ALMAC Sta. Julia no se devuelve," *El Rebelde* (Santiago), 13–19 Nov. 1972. On the October strike, see Winn, *La revolución chilena*, 106–21.

2. "El ALMAC Santa Julia será recuperado," *El Rebelde* (Santiago), 2–9 Jan. 1973; "El Almac Santa Julia en manos del pueblo," *El Rebelde* (Santiago), 9–15 Jan. 1973; "Almac de la discordia puede causar conflicto de poderes," *La Tercera* (Santiago), 3 Jan. 1972; "El despojo al Almac de Población Santa Julia," *La Tercera* (Santiago), 4 Jan. 1973. For the typical goods in the *canasta popular* or *canasta básica* (basic basket), see "Centros de abastecimiento rural," *Poder Campesino* (Santiago), no. 28, n.d.

3. Power, *Right-Wing Women*, 126–68; Constable and Valenzuela, *Nation of Enemies*, 26–27; Garcés D., "Los años de la Unidad Popular"; Winn, *La revolución chilena*, 106–9.

4. Garcés D., "Construyendo 'las poblaciones,'" 77–79; *Libro blanco*, 15.

that established a citizen-run distribution program, capture some of these less studied questions. Speaking to reporters in early 1973, Ríos argued that the most important accomplishment of her community's new exchange system was its success in ending long lines at local markets, thus providing poor women like herself some semblance of economic stability and additional time to support the revolutionary process.<sup>5</sup> Farías Godoy, meanwhile, responded to a journalist's question about popular attitudes toward rationing by noting that her community had "always lived rationed" because of dismally low wages. "I know what rationing feels like, and I'm not alone; every worker knows what rationing feels like! Now, for the first time, it's the rich who will experience rationing," she contended.<sup>6</sup> As the words of Ríos and Farías Godoy suggest, consumption matters shaped the political horizons of not only those who opposed the revolution but also those who sympathized with the UP's pursuit of a more just national economy.

By focusing on the consumer organizations that emerged as a part of the Chilean revolution, this article illuminates how consumption became both a means and an end in socialist Chile. The defining institutions in this process were the Juntas de Abastecimiento y Precios (Price and Supply Committees, JAPs), a territorially based network of collectively managed stores and ad hoc distribution sites that initially emerged on the periphery of Chile's urban centers. While UP detractors attacked the JAPs as an example of an overbearing regulatory state, supporters saw the neighborhood committees as a way for local communities to democratize the economy and wrest economic power from private interests. When the Chilean state failed to fulfill its regulatory functions, JAPs and other forms of consumer organizing were often what sparked state economic intervention, concretizing the substance and scope of the UP's promise of economic democracy.

Conventional historical accounts of consumption have tended to conceptualize consumer action as either a "prepolitical" form—a mode of mobilization that, while holding political potential, remains ancillary to workplace organization—or an inherently conservative or apolitical act that has the effect of "dulling" social conflict.<sup>7</sup> However, as new work on the history of

5. "Racionamiento sí . . . ¡Pero, para los ricos!" *El Rebelde* (Santiago), 23–29 Jan. 1973.

6. "María Farías Godoy: 'Siempre hemos vivido racionados,'" *Chile Hoy* (Santiago), 19–25 Jan. 1973.

7. For readings of consumer action that emphasize its prepolitical form, see Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels*, 108–25; Rudé, *Crowd*. E. P. Thompson's work on the moral economy moved beyond this more orthodox view by emphasizing the political nature of food riots. However, Thompson remained largely tied to a teleological view of politics that

consumption has demonstrated, citizens' embrace of consumer regulations and institutions has often expanded the state's administrative purview, politicizing popular society in the process. In her analysis of the US New Deal, Meg Jacobs has shown that while state institutions shaped the contours of consumer culture, organized citizens simultaneously widened the expected institutional boundaries of state consumer regulation, producing a "dialectical relationship between state and society"—a process that she calls "state building from the bottom up."<sup>8</sup> More recently, Latin American historians have advanced parallel arguments. In their respective studies of Peronist Argentina, Eduardo Elena and Natalia Milanesio, for example, have documented the cultural and political history of consumption to show how the consumer economy was not only a highly politicized sphere in midcentury urban Latin America but one in which ideas about social justice were contested.<sup>9</sup> This article thus contributes to a growing body of literature in urban history across the Americas that distinguishes consumerism—a narrow cultural concern with the subjective allure of conspicuous forms of individual consumption—from a moral and deeply classed notion of consumer politics in which poor and working-class citizens mobilized around basic household needs to make economic demands on a growing social welfare state.<sup>10</sup>

And yet while the history of consumer politics on Chile's road to socialism closely mirrors those of the New Deal United States or Peronist Argentina, there is something peculiar about the case of Chile—namely, the enduring centrality of food as an object of consumer mobilization.<sup>11</sup> That is, how to

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saw struggles in the marketplace as antecedent to modern workplace organizing. See Thompson, "Moral Economy." For a summary of historical work emphasizing consumption's "dulling" effect, see Jacobs, "State of the Field." In modern Chilean scholarship, consumption has been equated with conservative, antipolitical activity by scholars on both sides of the political spectrum. For example, Moulian, *El consumo*, offered a critical view of consumer culture, while Lavín, *Chile*, praised it.

8. Jacobs, "How About Some Meat?," 912. See also Jacobs, *Pocketbook Politics*.

9. Elena, *Dignifying Argentina*; Milanesio, *Workers Go Shopping*. Similarly, Brodwyn Fischer has examined how Brazil's organized Left used discourses about collective consumption to organize shantytown dwellers beyond the workplace in Rio de Janeiro in the mid-twentieth century: Fischer, "Red Menace." In his history of urban Venezuela, Alejandro Velasco has also revealed how demands for urban provisioning of basic collective services and goods—from trash collection to drinking water—grounded radical democratic practices of accountability: Velasco, *Barrio Rising*, esp. 133–93.

10. On this distinction between consumerism and consumption politics, see Jacobs, "State of the Field"; Cohen, "Class Experience."

11. For an excellent exploration of the long history of consumption politics in Chile, see Tinsman, *Buying into the Regime*.

explain the outsize and persistent role that concerns about basic food availability played in generating both citizen demands and state policies aimed at fostering a more just, democratic national economy in mid-twentieth-century Chile? And further, what impact did struggles against the absence of food in urban economic life have on the development of the UP's socialist project?

New scholarship in food studies offers some important ways of making sense of both the cause and consequences of food's ubiquity in Chile's revolutionary process. As recent work in food history has shown, the state, particularly in moments of political transformation, has embraced food policy or fetishized national consumption of certain foods in an effort to reform and integrate the national community.<sup>12</sup> Others have highlighted the role that food distribution has played in providing those traditionally excluded from formal politics, particularly women, an avenue of participation in transformative processes, though often on deeply gendered and unequal terms.<sup>13</sup> Both of these observations ring true in the case of Allende's Chile, where the state drew on the plans of past governments to turn the popular consumption of nationally produced goods and the process of food distribution itself into the basis of a new, revolutionary economic culture while simultaneously encouraging working-class women to become the driving force behind such change. Far from becoming a substitute for citizenship, the struggle to fulfill consumers' basic demands was a path through which the boundaries of citizenship were challenged and class relations transformed.

However, the consequences of building the nation around food were not always discernible to state policymakers. In an essay on the state of food scholarship, Sidney W. Mintz contended that one of the principal "conundrums" of food politics is the tension that it exposes between competing demands for regulation and individual choice. "Democratic governments must struggle over food issues because, among other things, they are obliged to protect their citizens from harm, but can interfere only at some political risk with citizens' rights to buy as they wish," Mintz noted, adding that an "obsession" with dietary choice often embodies a citizenry's notion of freedom.<sup>14</sup> Mintz's analysis captures all too well the political environment in early 1970s

12. Pilcher, *¡Qué vivan los tamales!*, 4. Other important works in food history that have highlighted food's role in the formation of national identity include Ochoa, *Feeding Mexico*; Appadurai, "How to Make." See also Bender and Pilcher, "Editors' Introduction."

13. On women's political participation through food provisioning and rationing, see Bentley, *Eating for Victory*; Chase, *Revolution*; de Grazia, *Sex of Things*; Kaplan, "Female Consciousness."

14. Mintz, "Food and Eating," 27–28.

Chile, where the UP's emphasis on urban food distribution transformed a mode of nation building into a crucible of conflict and polarization, particularly as state efforts to regulate the availability of basic foods ran headlong into a belief that long-standing individual preference for certain foods should not be restricted in the process. The UP would expend great energy trying to reconcile this tension between taste and regulation, but as this article shows, the impassioned discourses and practices that emerged around food distribution and consumption would come to represent distinct definitions of economic democracy.

### The Hunger of Revolution

The UP leadership often described both the economic crisis that it inherited in 1970 and its policies for resolving that crisis as unprecedented. In its 1970 program of government, the socialist coalition contended that steady increases in the cost of living throughout the 1960s had created an unparalleled "hell" for Chilean consumers. In response, the UP laid out an economic plan to provide for the country's nutritional needs by hastening agrarian production through land redistribution, socializing basic consumer distribution, and suppressing food prices with strict price ceilings.<sup>15</sup> One year later, when isolated shortages reemerged during Allende's first winter in power, top UP economic officials sought to dispel the notion that the old inflationary demons of Chile's past were returning. As one minister argued, unlike at other moments of consumer dearth, instances of scarcity that materialized in the revolution's first year were ultimately "good problems" since unmatched consumer demand was their driving force.<sup>16</sup>

But contrary to the UP's claims about the exceptional character of both the late 1960s and early 1970s, popular movements and key state institutions had been working to resolve the problem of basic consumption long before Allende's government took power.<sup>17</sup> As the historian Rodrigo Henríquez Vásquez has observed, few issues propelled state intervention—and the formation of citizens' movements demanding such intervention—more frequently in

15. "UP Program," 132, 138–39.

16. Vuskovic, "Conversation," 460. Economic statistics from 1971 show that consumption of poultry, pork, sugar, and potatoes increased by 16 percent, 18 percent, 37 percent, and 55 percent, respectively, between 1970 and 1971. Rojas Sandford, *Murder of Allende*, 99.

17. For more on consumer mobilization in Chile going back to the early twentieth century, see Frens-String, "Hungry for Revolution," 25–154.

midcentury Chile than the rising cost of living and scarcity of essential goods, particularly food.<sup>18</sup> When World War I concluded, Chile's most powerful social movement of that era, the Workers' Association for National Nutrition (AOAN), dedicated its entire existence to the problem of popular consumption, organizing a series of hunger marches in 1918 and 1919 that many Chilean scholars now see as an antecedent to the broad-based Popular Front coalition of socialists, communists, and middle-class reformers that won the presidency in 1938.<sup>19</sup> Composed of an array of popular movements and labor organizations, the AOAN advocated for a national economic program that guaranteed basic consumption for all Chileans through land reform, the state-subsidized production of basic foodstuffs, and urban price controls.<sup>20</sup> Like similar movements that took hold in post-World War I Europe, the AOAN used the language of hunger to critique economic liberalism and offer an ethical rationale for state economic intervention.<sup>21</sup> "We are not marching for a social revolution today," read an AOAN handbill in 1918; "we are marching simply to ask [the state] for bread for the common man."<sup>22</sup>

Chile's brief Socialist Republic, which took power in June 1932, maintained that the task of consumer protection was an issue that the national government, not local municipalities, was best suited to control.<sup>23</sup> Amid the global economic crisis of the 1930s, the Socialist Republic's leaders advocated for a nationwide consumer price freeze and the creation of dozens of state-supported popular restaurants and soup kitchens for low-wage workers and the unemployed.<sup>24</sup> In August 1932, a group of independent socialists also drafted a far-reaching architecture for permanent consumer regulation, the centerpiece of which was a national price control agency known as the General Commissariat for Staple Goods and Prices, or *Comisariato*. The agency's intellectual author, Juan Bautista Rossetti, touted the agency as the first permanent national

18. Henríquez Vásquez, *En "estado sólido."* See also Espinoza, *Para una historia*.

19. Diego Maestri, Peña Rojas, and Peralta Castillo, *La Asamblea Obrera*; Rodríguez Terrazas, "Protesta"; Salazar V., *Del poder constituyente*, 40–51.

20. AOAN, "Primer memorial dirigido al presidente de la república," reprinted in *El Mercurio* (Santiago), 23 Nov. 1918.

21. On hunger as a political discourse to critique economic liberalism, see Vernon, *Hunger*, 5–6. For a similar take on food as the language of popular urban protest in recent Latin American history, see Salvatore, "Market-Oriented Reforms."

22. Quoted in Rodríguez Terrazas, "Protesta," 56.

23. Henríquez Vásquez, *En "estado sólido,"* 208–16.

24. "Ollas comunes para alimentar cesantes," *Zig-Zag* (Santiago), 2 July 1932. See also Vergara, "Chilean Workers," 62–68.

price control office anywhere in the Americas, adding that other countries around the Americas “copied” the terms of Decree-Law 520 (DL 520).<sup>25</sup> Bautista Rossetti even argued that the *Comisariato* provided the foundation for socialism in Chile. “We have buried the old liberal State, which has been the cause of so many difficulties, and set the stage for a socialist era that will be the savior of Chile’s future,” he declared a few days after the *Comisariato*’s establishment.<sup>26</sup> Though overly effusive at the time, Bautista Rossetti’s words were also prescient: the agency’s founding DL 520—which said that the government had a responsibility to “ensure the most just economic conditions of life” for all Chileans—gave the state power to expropriate any economic enterprise dedicated to the production or distribution of “primary necessity” goods.<sup>27</sup> Four decades later, the decree served as the legal basis for the UP’s worker-controlled social property area of the national economy.<sup>28</sup>

During much of the 1930s and 1940s, various consumer commissars (*comisarios generales*) worked to create and administrate new national registries of products that were of either “basic necessity” or “habitual use.”<sup>29</sup> Teams of price inspectors, accompanied by the police, were then dispatched to carry out routine inspections of commercial establishments and distribution firms. While only a handful of goods came under the *Comisariato*’s control in the 1930s, during World War II the state’s consumer inspection mandate ballooned; by 1945, the state set maximum prices on well over 200 goods.<sup>30</sup> The Left used the inconsistencies between the state’s on-the-books regulations and actual enforcement as a mobilizing tool, arguing that only popular organization could widen the interventionist state’s economic reach. To that end, in September 1936 supporters of the Popular Front reconstituted a national consumers’ league.<sup>31</sup> In the lead-up to the 1938 presidential election, Popular Front base committees implored their local branches to organize price watchdog units, and

25. Bautista Rossetti, *La conspiración*, 13–14.

26. *La Nación* (Santiago), 8 Sept. 1932, quoted in Merino Jarpa, “El *Comisariato*,” 371.

27. Decree-Law 520, Santiago, 30 Aug. 1932.

28. Novoa Monreal, “Vías legales,” 29–31. For a conservative perspective of the role that DL-520 played in the expansion of the state into the Chilean economy, see Brahm García, *Propiedad*, 230–43.

29. Henríquez Vásquez, *En “estado sólido,”* 218–19.

30. “Nómina de los artículos declarados de primera necesidad o de uso o consume habitual clasificados por Decreto Supremo (hasta el 28 de febrero de 1945),” *Boletín Oficial del Comisariato General de Subsistencias y Precios* (Santiago), Mar. 1945, pp. 30–35.

31. “Contra la especulación se coaliga el pueblo,” *Frente Popular* (Santiago), 14 Sept. 1936.

for four hours every evening Popular Front activists in Santiago collected consumer-related petitions from the community, which they later presented to state officials for adjudication.<sup>32</sup> Shortly thereafter, the coalition issued a declaration that insisted that it was the government's obligation to "requisition articles of primary necessity" such as potatoes, beans, wheat, and sugar whenever those items were sold at exorbitant prices.<sup>33</sup> Ultimately, Popular Front presidential candidate Pedro Aguirre Cerda turned the 1938 election into a referendum on the food policies of outgoing president Arturo Alessandri and his handpicked successor, former Chilean finance minister Gustavo Ross, whose social spending cuts earned him an unflattering nickname: the minister of hunger.<sup>34</sup>

Once the Popular Front took office, consumer mobilization persisted. The formation of neighborhood-based inspection committees, called *juntas de vigilancia* (vigilance boards), continued to petition Chile's provincial government, claiming that Comisariato officials rarely prosecuted those found guilty of commercial infractions.<sup>35</sup> Popular groups—from Chile's women's movement, the Movement for the Emancipation of Chilean Women (MEMCh), to the Chilean Communist Party (PCCh)—filled the vacuum left by state regulatory tepidness. On the pages of MEMCh's monthly magazine female supporters of the Popular Front denounced food-producing monopolies, publicly identified those suspected of price gouging, and, as mothers and wives, made demands on the state for greater protection of the household economy.<sup>36</sup> During World War II, MEMCh leaders dedicated themselves to organizing public meetings about women's role in a time of global economic insecurity and insisted that

32. "Se formarán comisiones de vigilancia contra los acaparadores de viveres," *Frente Popular* (Santiago), 2 Oct. 1936.

33. "Alza de las subsistencias preocupa al Frente Popular," *Frente Popular* (Santiago), 7 Oct. 1936.

34. Vergara, "Chilean Workers," 68.

35. "Junta de vigilancia a intendente de Santiago," 17 Feb. 1939, Archivo Nacional Histórico, Santiago (hereafter cited as ANH), Fondo Intendencia de Santiago, vol. 1014.

36. "Trust del pan," *La Mujer Nueva* (Santiago), June 1936, p. 2; "¿Por que es cara la vida?," *La Mujer Nueva* (Santiago), Aug. 1936, p. 4. One of the biggest victories for the MEMCh came when Chile's national price control agency accepted a petition demanding that baby formula be added to the list of Comisariato-regulated goods. "Un pequeño triunfo del MEMCh," *La Mujer Nueva* (Santiago), July 1937, p. 1. The Chilean women's movement spurred the creation of "milk bars" around Santiago—a public health initiative that provided low-cost dairy to mothers and young children—and a series of Comisariato-run "yardstick" stores, which vigorously maintained state price ceilings. See Illanes Oliva, "En el nombre," 333, 350–55.

women be allowed to serve as unofficial Comisariato inspectors—despite their inability to vote in national elections.<sup>37</sup>

Such actions peaked as the war ended and calls for economic democracy grew louder throughout the hemisphere. In September 1946 a group of Santiago residents, reported to have included both housewives and PCCh members, gathered just a few blocks south of the city's center to express their discontent with state efforts to normalize the city's supply of tea and cooking oil, two basic household goods that had become almost unobtainable at neighborhood food dispensaries. After failing to receive a satisfactory response from the Comisariato, local consumers decided to "take justice into their own hands," in the words of *El Siglo*, the PCCh's main newspaper. Marching together, the self-fashioned consumers' brigade proceeded to a small grocery store where suspicions of hoarding were verified: discovered inside were two barrels of oil being held off the shelf. Foreshadowing what would happen two and a half decades later in Santiago's shantytowns, the group of frustrated consumers pushed the store's owner aside and carried the concealed oil to the street. An editorial published in the PCCh's daily described the incident as one of "justice-seeking ire" and a "warning to speculators and the government, which either does not know how to attend to the most basic demands of the people or is simply unwilling to do so."<sup>38</sup>

What is most striking about the event, however, is the order and restraint that followed the seizure: rather than ransacking the store and its effects, the protesters began their own sale of oil to passersby at a cost of 16 pesos per liter—some 30 pesos less than the store's marked sale price.<sup>39</sup> In the wake of the occupation, PCCh activists also established a grassroots system for neighborhood distribution and rationing of cooking oil. The project, which included the creation of more than 70 consumer committees and the issuance of ration cards to thousands of PCCh supporters, distributed an estimated 80,000 liters of cooking oil throughout Santiago in late 1946 and early 1947.<sup>40</sup> Similar

37. Historian Corinne Antezana-Pernet has noted that some 3,400 women went through training courses to monitor speculation in the mid-1940s. Hundreds more participated in the over 500 courses that MEMCh branches organized to promote nutrition. Antezana-Pernet, "Mobilizing Women," 182–83, 234–35, 351–52.

38. "El pueblo hace justicia con sus propias manos," *El Siglo* (Santiago), 30 Sept. 1946.

39. "El pueblo se apoderó de té acaparado," *El Siglo* (Santiago), 29 Sept. 1946; "Obligarón a vender alimentos," *El Siglo* (Santiago), 30 Sept. 1946.

40. "Quince mil personas adquirieron aceite y azúcar," *El Siglo* (Santiago), 3 Oct. 1946; "Ochenta mil litros de aceite se repartieron en una semana," *El Siglo* (Santiago), 26 Nov. 1946; "Más de un millón de pesos semanales ganan comunistas con la venta de cupones de aceite," *La Opinión* (Santiago), 27 Nov. 1946; "El intendente comprobó correcta distribución de aceite por comités," *El Siglo* (Santiago), 29 Nov. 1946.

initiatives took hold in the northern nitrate plains. Building on the work of the MEMCh, which led organizing campaigns into Chile's northern provinces in the mid-1940s, left-wing militants revealed the underutilized political power that housewives possessed in their domestic roles as food providers.<sup>41</sup> Kitchen strikes, in which female canteen workers refused to cook for their male partners until food shortages were resolved, became a means of community resistance for those most affected by the postwar dip in commodity prices.<sup>42</sup> In the nitrate camp of La Santiago, for example, over 600 workers followed the lead of the community's women, citing their inability to find basic foodstuffs at the company-run store as the motivation for a 24-hour strike in early 1946.<sup>43</sup>

While consumers were a bastion of support for the Popular Front, the radicalization of consumer activism at the end of World War II also divided the Popular Front. The PCCh's direct distribution of oil and other essentials in 1946 was met by a contentious round of countermobilization by the Chilean Right and anticommunist elements of the broad-front Left. Even the newspaper *La Opinión*, then owned by the Comisariato's architect, Juan Bautista Rossetti, accused PCCh leaders of using their control of cooking oil to coerce residents into joining the party.<sup>44</sup> Hearsay or not, the anticommunist campaign that emerged in response to direct food distribution efforts deeply affected Chilean president Gabriel González Videla, who in his memoirs dedicated a long passage to how PCCh-led cost-of-living struggles informed his decision to break with—and eventually proscribe—the party, just two years after its support had sealed his presidential victory.<sup>45</sup> Indeed, González Videla's state-led campaign against inflation and hoarding became as much about reining in the

41. Luis Reinoso, "La solución de los problemas nacionales a través de la movilización de las masas—Enseñanzas del XIII Congreso," *Principios* (Santiago), Feb.–Mar. 1946, pp. 15–19.

42. "A protestar contra la falta de alimentos, dueñas de casa declararon huelga en Iquique," *El Siglo* (Santiago), 5 Oct. 1946.

43. "Da cuenta de paro ilegal que afecta faenas salitreras," 17 Jan. 1946, Archivo Regional de Tarapacá, Iquique, Fondo Intendencia de Tarapacá (hereafter cited as ART, IT), vol. 1839; "Proporciona nuevos antecedentes sobre paro ilegal en la pampa," 18 Jan. 1946, ART, IT, vol. 1839; "Da cuenta para momentáneo de obreros en campamento 'La Santiago,'" 27 Mar. 1946, ART, IT, vol. 1839.

44. "Indignación pública provoca escándalo de la venta de cupones de racionamiento de aceite," *La Opinión* (Santiago), 22 Nov. 1946; "Ofrecen en venta vales para adquirir aceite solo a quienes ingresen al Partido Comunista," *La Opinión* (Santiago), 24 Nov. 1946; "Consumidores se organizan para combatir la especulación comunista con el aceite," *La Opinión* (Santiago), 26 Nov. 1946.

45. González Videla, *Memorias*, 583–87. On the PCCh's proscription, see Pavlack, *Mining for the Nation*; Huneeus, *La guerra fría chilena*.

power of the PCCh, which had been granted key posts at the Comisariato, as about rooting out the unscrupulous activities of private merchants and importers.<sup>46</sup> González Videla's actions also helped transform consumption into a matter that received national attention every six years during presidential elections but was otherwise of little concern to administrations more focused on jump-starting growth through industrialization and agrarian development.<sup>47</sup> This focus on development through growth reached a fever pitch under the administrations of Carlos Ibañez del Campo (1952–58) and Eduardo Frei (1964–70). While the former eventually coupled his development efforts with an orthodox economic austerity program to reduce inflation and stimulate exports, the latter committed Chile to an agrarian reform project whose goal was, among other things, to diversify Chile's economic production by improving agricultural yields.<sup>48</sup>

The failure of both austerity and moderate attempts at agrarian reform to place Chile on sure economic footing pushed the question of consumer regulation to the center of the national political agenda as the 1970 presidential election approached. In his fourth bid for the presidency, socialist Salvador Allende attacked the political center and right for failing to address chronic problems of food scarcity and malnutrition, pointing out that 50 percent of Chilean children under the age of 15 remained undernourished by the late 1960s and that the cost of food imports had increased from US\$97.2 million in

46. For González Videla's own recollections about the war on speculation, see González Videla, *Memorias*, 525. A defining feature of the antispeculation campaign was González Videla's appointment of his wife as figurehead of a new women's organization, the Chilean Housewives' Association. Presenting itself as apolitical, the association co-opted the consumer advocacy of MEMCh and actively suppressed the local influence of the PCCh. See, for instance, Inocenta Rios de Rios to Rosa Markmann de González Videla, 5 Nov. 1947, ANH, Colección Gabriel González Videla, vol. 18. For a discussion of the PCCh's own struggle against inflation and scarcity, see, for example, "Los grandes monopolios tienen pase libre para especular," *El Siglo* (Santiago), 4 June 1946; "Monopolio obtuvo alza en el precio del arroz," *El Siglo* (Santiago), 5 June 1946; "10 millones de pesos en productos acaparados tiene la Firma Menichetti," *El Siglo* (Santiago), 6 June 1946; "A formar comites contra el hambre!," *El Siglo* (Santiago), 5 Oct. 1946.

47. Hirschman, "Inflation," 183–92; Giusti, "Participación popular."

48. "Klein-Saks: Chile's First Experiment with Neoliberalism," in Hutchison et al., *Chile Reader*, 340. See also "Property and Production: A Pamphlet Promoting Christian Democracy's Agrarian Reform," in Hutchison et al., *Chile Reader*, 356–61. For a comprehensive assessment of how concerns with growth and production overshadowed food politics as consumption politics during the 1950s and 1960s, see Frens-String, "Hungry for Revolution," 155–215.

1961 to US\$200 million by 1969.<sup>49</sup> As an alternative to Frei's "revolution in liberty," Allende advanced his notion of socialist economics in which consumer desires would be harmonized with the country's productive capacity through a combination of price controls and agricultural production incentives. In moving one step beyond the tenets of economic structuralism, an economic philosophy that contended that inflation was the result of dwindling domestic agrarian supply, Allende's economy minister Pedro Vuskovic promised that the UP's economic model would no longer dedicate resources to the "production of luxury commodities" but instead would promote the manufacture and distribution of specific popular consumer goods.<sup>50</sup> Another set of Chilean economists coined a name for this strategy: a "popular option for development."<sup>51</sup> Simply put, the notion of popular development meant that the UP would fulfill the promise of DL 520: that the state had a duty to guarantee the basic necessities of life for all Chileans and would use its powers of intervention anywhere that private capital impeded that objective.

To that end, Allende implemented a significant increase in wage rates for Chile's lowest-paid workers in his first month in office. Rising wages caused purchasing power, and in turn national production, to soar. In 1971, national gross domestic product rose by 8 percent, the highest growth rate since 1950. Inflation was cut nearly in half, falling from over 36 percent in 1970 to just over 20 percent by late 1971. Whereas white-collar workers made 49 percent more than blue-collar workers in 1970, a year later the salary difference between the two amounted to just 35 percent.<sup>52</sup> And redistribution made wage-earning Chileans not only a motor of economic growth but also its primary beneficiaries as tens of thousands of Chileans gained access, often for the first time, to goods that would soon seem quite basic—everything from cotton bedsheets to domestically produced leather shoes. The coalition would even begin plans to manufacture an affordable car for the common Chilean family at a nationalized Citroën factory and a low-cost, black-and-white television at a plant once controlled by US electronics maker RCA Victor.<sup>53</sup>

However, it was improved access to basic comestibles, more than any other consumer good, that defined the early socialist experience. During the

49. "UP Program," 132–33.

50. Vuskovic, "Chile," 424. This piece contains a good discussion of the UP's economic vision and how proponents distinguished it from structuralism.

51. Bitar and Moyano, "Redistribución del consumo," 31–32.

52. Meller, *Un siglo*, 118–19.

53. *La buella del Yagán*, directed by Patricio Díaz and Eduardo León (Santiago: SobreRuedas Producciones, 2002).

revolution's first six months, an abundance of powdered milk packages for school-age children and the required sale of a uniform, high-quality cut of bread in neighborhood bakeries energized and expanded the UP's base.<sup>54</sup> As the historian Camilo Trumper has noted, the powdered milk packages were supplemented by the production of a nested plastic spoon set that was durable, easy to wash, and precise in its measurement.<sup>55</sup> According to data collected by Chile's national beef distributor, the Corporation for Building and Agrarian Operations (SOCOAGRO), at least 22,339 more heads of cattle were processed in state-run slaughterhouses during the first half of 1971 than in the first half of 1970—a nearly 62 percent increase.<sup>56</sup> Other studies noted a surge in caloric intake that coincided with Allende's first two years in office. One such analysis showed that between 1971 and 1972 caloric availability increased by 8 percent when compared to the period between 1965 and 1969. Another study cited even higher increases in food consumption more broadly: a 14 percent increase in 1971 and another 12 percent increase in 1972 compared to the period running from 1966 to 1970.<sup>57</sup> These early policies gave concrete meaning to the UP's promise that in Chile the revolutionary experience would be flavored with the taste of "empanadas y vino tinto" (meat pies and red wine).<sup>58</sup>

54. "Pan y leche," *El Siglo* (Santiago), 10 Dec. 1970; "El medio litro de leche," *El Siglo* (Santiago), 5 Jan. 1971. The creation of a single cut of bread (*pan único*) ended the long-standing tradition of bakeries selling two types of bread, of varying qualities. "Hoy debuta el pan único," *El Siglo* (Santiago), 2 Jan. 1971; "Hay algunos problemas, pero el nuevo pan, gusta y se vende," *El Siglo* (Santiago), 4 Jan. 1971; "Precio del pan: Primer freno a la inflación," *El Siglo* (Santiago), 4 Jan. 1971; "DIRINCO toma medidas drásticas para hacer cumplir corte y precio del pan," *El Siglo* (Santiago), 5 Jan. 1971; "Centros de madres fiscalizarán el precio y calidad de pan," *El Siglo* (Santiago), 6 Jan. 1971; "El pan único," *El Siglo* (Santiago), 8 Jan. 1971.

55. Trumper, *Ephemeral Histories*, 27–28. Trumper also details the UP's development of other food-related technologies, including an "economical and practical china set" with space-saving plates and stackable cups. *Ibid.*, 27.

56. "Faenamiento de carne—Primer semestre 1970," 13 Aug. 1970, Archivo Nacional de la Administración, Santiago (hereafter cited as ARNAD), Archivo CORFO, Empresas CORFO, Fondo SOCOAGRO, vol. 316.

57. On caloric availability and food consumption, see Giorgio Solimano and Peter Hakim, "Development, Reform, and Malnutrition in Chile," 1976, University of Wisconsin–Madison, Steenbock Memorial Library, Land Tenure Center Files, CH 42 S65, chap. 2, pp. 18–19. Solimano and Hakim note that the largest increases in both caloric intake and overall food consumption were for low-income groups.

58. The slogan, a favorite of Allende's government, referred to the unique national character of the UP as well as a tacit promise that structural transformation would occur with minimal sacrifice. Winn, "Furies of the Andes," 240.

### Mobilizing Consumers

To be sure, the economic boom of 1971 was not without challenges. Scarcity for certain high-demand foodstuffs resulted from the UP's inability to increase consumer supply at the same rate as purchasing power.<sup>59</sup> Large landowners made this disequilibrium more acute by shipping between 160,000 and 200,000 heads of cattle across the Andes to Argentina just weeks after Allende assumed office, claiming that the UP's acceleration of land reform brought market uncertainty.<sup>60</sup> Other landowners slaughtered their herds outright, fearing that either their cattle would be seized by the state or beef prices would fall precipitously. The government was thus forced to unexpectedly spend millions of dollars in foreign exchange to meet growing domestic consumer demand with expensive food imports.<sup>61</sup>

Upper-class members of the consuming public followed large landowners in expressing their displeasure with the UP's understanding of political economy. In early December 1971, several hundred women marched through the streets of Santiago, shielded by right-wing paramilitary forces as they banged empty pots and pans.<sup>62</sup> While scarcity was largely limited to the country's beef supply at the time, the *marcha de las ollas vacías* (empty pots and pans march) opened new political space for the Chilean Right to articulate its oppositional message. Just days after the first *marcha de las ollas vacías*, leaders from Chile's small retailers' association joined members of the conservative National Party to inaugurate a new anti-UP umbrella organization. Known as the National Front for Private Enterprise (FRENAP), the association formally united conservative women, disgruntled landholders, professionals, and many small businessmen against the government.<sup>63</sup> Starting in early 1972, the organization

59. "Amplían prohibición para consumir vacuno," *La Tercera* (Santiago), 9 July 1971; "Santiago quedó sin carne ni pollos," *La Tercera* (Santiago), 19 July 1971; "Incidentes en el matadero por la falta de abastecimientos," *La Tercera* (Santiago), 23 July 1971; "La broma en vida," *La Tercera* (Santiago), 27 July 1971.

60. "No subirá la carne," *El Siglo* (Santiago), 8 May 1971.

61. Of the nearly 86,000 tons of beef consumed in Greater Santiago in 1971, the government imported nearly 42 percent—more than double the amount that had been imported one year earlier. SOCOAGRO—Departamento Estudios Económicos, "Consumo de carnes en el Gran Santiago," 1972, ARNAD, Archivo CORFO, Empresas CORFO, Fondo SOCOAGRO, vol. 316.

62. Power, *Right-Wing Women*, 126–68.

63. "Acordada formación del Frente Nacional de Actividad Privada," *La Tercera* (Santiago), 5 Dec. 1971; "Solidaridad del área privada," *La Tercera* (Santiago), 6 Dec. 1971; "Discurso del presidente nacional don Rafael Cumsille en el Teatro Caupolicán," 2 Dec. 1971, reprinted in *Revista Oficial del Comercio Detallista y de la Pequeña Industria de Chile* (Santiago), Nov. 1971–Jan. 1972.

attacked the government in the national press for its growing role in the production, distribution, and regulation of basic goods.<sup>64</sup>

The Allende government took concerted steps to recalibrate its economic policies in the face of distortions and protest. When officials realized that they had overestimated the capacity of urban sectors to tolerate a temporary lag in agrarian production while a more equitable system of property relations was established in the countryside, the UP inaugurated two new land tenure institutions designed to reduce bureaucratic delays in accessing rural credit and land.<sup>65</sup> As a result, between 1970 and 1972 the number of tractors used in Chile jumped from just 10,000 to over 20,000—a “veritable technological revolution,” in the words of one historian—with some 70 percent of these new farm implements going to agriculturalists associated with Allende’s reformed sector.<sup>66</sup> The UP also expanded policies that had been used under its Christian Democratic predecessors, such as market incentives, to dictate the content of agrarian production. SOCOAGRO rewarded butchers who produced nontraditional beef subproducts like kidneys, blood sausage, and tripe as short-term alternatives to more desirable, but prohibitively expensive, beef cuts.<sup>67</sup> Drawing on plans drafted by Frei, UP agrarian officials also pumped new funds into enterprises that raised more traditional domestic food products such as chicken and pork.<sup>68</sup> The most emblematic endeavor of what Chileans referred to as the

64. For a sampling of FRENAP’s propaganda campaign, see Santiago’s *La Tercera* in March and April 1972. For example, “El almacenero no tiene la culpa,” *La Tercera* (Santiago), 18 Mar. 1972; “El campesino no tiene la culpa,” *La Tercera* (Santiago), 22 Mar. 1972; “El empleado no tiene la culpa,” *La Tercera* (Santiago), 8 Apr. 1972; “La dueña de casa no tiene la culpa,” *La Tercera* (Santiago), 11 Apr. 1972.

65. De Vylder, *Allende’s Chile*, 179–83; Winn and Kay, “Agrarian Reform.”

66. De Vylder, *Allende’s Chile*, 192.

67. Servicio de Cooperación Técnica, Oficina Regional Valdivia, “Informe preliminar industria de subproductos matadero,” Sept. 1971, ARNAD, Archivo CORFO, Empresas CORFO, Fondo SOCOAGRO, vol. 309, pp. 1–9 (plus appendixes). The decision as to what lines of alternative food production should be prioritized was likely grounded on a 1966 survey-based study on the propensity of low- and high-income consumers to substitute common foodstuffs for alternatives—for example, frozen fish for fresh beef. Centro de Estudios Socioeconómicos, Universidad de Chile, “Patrones socio-culturales del comportamiento económico: Propensión de la población a la sustitución de alimentos,” Santiago, 1966, Biblioteca Nacional de Chile, Santiago (hereafter cited as BNC), Sección Chilena (hereafter cited as SC), 10;(968-24).

68. Gamaliel Carrasco and Andrés Vergara, “Programa de fomento pecuario y desarrollo campesino de las colonias y asentamientos de la Corporación de la Reforma Agraria,” [1970?], BNC, Biblioteca Arguedas; “Decisivo aumento en producción de

“substitution economy” involved not the land but the nutrient-rich Pacific coast, a geographic area that a government agrarian bulletin had once referred to as an untapped nutritional “reserve.”<sup>69</sup> In January 1972, Allende himself traveled to the port of San Antonio to welcome a Soviet fishing fleet into Chilean waters and launch a state campaign aimed at elevating national fish production and consumption. The mission was expected to boost the annual production of *merluza* (hake) by about 30 percent in 1972, thus satisfying the nutritional needs of working- and middle-class consumers while simultaneously saving valuable foreign exchange and stanching social unrest.<sup>70</sup>

Popular consumers would play a key role in selling the socialist food economy. And no institution better represented citizens’ own views about where and how the line between state intervention and consumer preference should be drawn than the JAP network. Consumer committees were first promoted by the UP after a series of storms paralyzed agrarian distribution from Chile’s Central Valley in the winter of 1971; dozens of these committees were at work in the Chilean capital by the spring of that year. The JAPs restored a provision of DL 520 that allowed for the creation of consumer-led vigilance committees at the neighborhood level. In the context of the revolution, the JAPs’ initial objective was to collaborate with the state’s consumer protection agency, the National Bureau of Industry and Trade (DIRINCO), and the state-run distribution company, the National Distribution Company of Chile (DINAC), to sustain the unprecedented economic boom of the revolution’s early months. It also sought to make economic exchange more responsive to the demands of poor people by giving neighborhood collectives the power to buy directly from small agricultural producers and monitor consumer prices. In its early years, the JAP network even successfully united many small merchants with consumers against unscrupulous distribution monopolies by contending that organized neighborhood boards could achieve strict regulation of

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aves,” *Poder Campesino* (Santiago), 20 Jan. 1972, pp. 16–17; “El Plan Avícola 1972 prevé duplicar producción de pollos,” *El Siglo* (Santiago), 22 Feb. 1972; Armando Fuenzalida Bunster, “Requisita establecimiento industrial de alimentos para aves y cerdos,” 17 Feb. 1972, ARNAD, Fondo Servicio Nacional del Consumidor, vol. 878.

69. “Los pescadores y el desarrollo del país,” *Quiubo Compadre* (Santiago), Oct. 1965, p. 15.

70. “San Antonio de Fiesta: Hoy reciben barcos soviéticos,” *El Siglo* (Santiago), 26 Jan. 1972; “Faena de pesqueros soviéticos aumenta 30% producción de merluza,” *El Siglo* (Santiago), 11 Feb. 1972. The Chilean folk band Quilapayún immortalized the UP’s fishing efforts in their 1972 single “A comer merluza” (Let’s eat hake).

consumer exchange while also providing the public a hands-on tutorial in food distribution and commercialization.<sup>71</sup>

Just as the UP's efforts to stimulate agricultural production drew on the planning of prior governments, consumer mobilization during the revolution also reflected a reencounter with the past—specifically, the Popular Front's pursuit of economic justice through disciplined grassroots political action. The PCCh's role in promoting many of the first JAPs established in 1971 and 1972 spoke directly to this history. Consider the case of PCCh member and JAP activist Eduardo Flores Flores. Born in 1906, Flores Flores was active in anti-fascist movements and pro-Soviet solidarity work in the 1930s. In response to the shortages of World War II, however, his militancy became more grounded in local politics. In 1942 he served as president of his neighborhood's cost-of-living committee, and that same year Flores Flores's neighborhood organizing funneled him into the ranks of the PCCh. Having escaped the worst of the anticommunist repression that followed the war, Flores Flores soon became a local leader of Chile's national labor federation. When Allende was elected, Flores Flores, then in his mid-60s, doubled down on his political work, recommitting himself to the sorts of local struggles for economic democracy that had first brought him to the PCCh. In 1972, in the middle-class neighborhood of La Reina where Flores Flores now lived, he set out to form one of that community's first JAPs. The results, Flores Flores told a Chilean newspaper that year, were immediate as meat supplies at the neighborhood butcher shop were normalized through direct coordination with national meat distributors at SOCOAGRO. The success soon inspired other activists in the *comuna* (parish) to form similar committees.<sup>72</sup>

Throughout late 1971 and 1972, much of Chile's urban revolution was made by those like Flores Flores who gathered in the assembly halls of community boards or at local women's centers to participate in JAP-facilitated forums on everything from how to effectively balance the concept of a just price

71. Although the JAP network appears in nearly every history of the UP, remarkably few histories have been written about JAPs specifically. A few of the more thorough accounts include Pastrana and Threlfall, *Pan*, 88–105; Melo Contreras, “Las Juntas”; Birchmeier Salgado, “Habr  carne.” See also an interview with Patricio Palma, DIRINCO's head for much of the revolution, in Gaudichaud, *Poder popular*, 399–425. Articles in the left-wing press contextualize the JAPs' historical origins: for example, see “Antecedentes de la JAP,” *Chile Hoy* (Santiago), 30 June–6 July 1972.

72. “Las JAP: Arma mort fera contra el desabastecimiento y especulaci n,” *El Siglo* (Santiago), 21 Mar. 1972. On SOCOAGRO and the JAPs, see “SOCOAGRO en la batalla de la producci n,” 3 Nov. 1972, ARNAD, Archivo CORFO, Empresas CORFO, Fondo SOCOAGRO, vol. 342.

with a merchant's need for a minimal profit to the question of when state regulation of commercial exchange turned into unwarranted harassment of small-business owners by state inspectors.<sup>73</sup> On the pages of left-wing newspapers, meanwhile, adherents to the revolution demanded public accountability and spatial equality within the city by pressuring the UP state to publicize their plans for food distribution, coordinate with community-based price monitors, and promote cooperative purchasing arrangements between small merchants in peripheral neighborhoods to keep prices down.<sup>74</sup> For those who backed the revolution, engagement with the consumer economy fast became an arena of radical consciousness raising rather than a quiet refuge from politics.

Although an ideal of collective equality defined state-community collaboration within the JAPs, the bedrock of the UP's consumer efforts remained riven by inequities, especially pertaining to gender. Asked to describe what motivated him to keep organizing his local community after 30 years of militancy, Flores Flores revealed where a commitment to revolutionary equality often stopped. "As a working-class activist, I'm conscious of the needs of the urban poor, who've struggled for so many years against scarcity, against low wages, against food shortages, and against the lack of the basic necessities of life," Flores Flores said; "I think that the largest burden in all of this has fallen on our women, who must confront speculation, hoarding, [and] long lines to buy just a bit of meat. . . . This is the primary reason to keep fighting . . . aiding our women is of utmost importance."<sup>75</sup>

Flores Flores's suggestion that male UP militants had a political duty to lessen the economic burden thrust on female consumers by food shortages points to women's paradoxical relationship to the revolution, which the JAPs both embodied and reproduced. The fact that the home, a traditionally female-dominated space, and food provisioning, a traditionally female-dominated activity, had become so critical to sustaining the UP's political project meant that the household economy was often the revolution's frontline. As one left-leaning Chilean publication would write in late 1972, urban women had "the

73. Gustavo González and Jorge Modinger, "Las JAP: Poder de la dueña de casa," *Chile Hoy* (Santiago), 30 June–6 July 1972.

74. Accounts of the JAPs' formation filled the PCCh press in late 1971 and 1972. For example, "Comenzó control de precios en poblaciones," *El Siglo* (Santiago), 4 Aug. 1971; "Pobladores, autoridades y comerciantes luchan unidos por el control de precios," *El Siglo* (Santiago), 9 Aug. 1971; "Comerciantes y pobladores crean Junta de Abastecimiento," *El Siglo* (Santiago), 29 Oct. 1971; "Las JAP contra la especulación," *El Siglo* (Santiago), 14 Jan. 1972.

75. "Las JAP: Arma mortífera."

most important role to play” in turning citizens into active JAP members. “It’s the *probladora* [urban poor woman] who has on her shoulders the weight of feeding her family, it’s the female laborer who must watch over the health of her children, and it’s the housewife who must wake up early to obtain bread for her family,” the newspaper *El Rebelde* wrote in making the case for the JAPs’ centrality to Chile’s revolutionary project; “If she does not organize, there will be hunger, if she does not join [the JAP], there will be speculation, if she does not monitor prices, there will be nothing.”<sup>76</sup> But the fact that the UP’s male-dominated leadership talked about women as subjects who needed to be defended suggested that the UP’s political discourse remained embedded in patriarchal structures of power.<sup>77</sup> While the JAPs politicized many women, the network also reinscribed traditional notions of feminine political action, thus fracturing female support for the UP.

The UP’s equation of women’s political militancy with the task of altering consumption habits and promoting consumer discipline—what Michelle Chase, in the context of the Cuban Revolution, has called revolutionary “austerity”—was evidence of this gendered inequality.<sup>78</sup> And starting in 1972, community fish fries became key sites of revolutionary praxis that reproduced this inequity. At such gatherings, female *japistas* used Chile’s growing domestic supply of seafood to meet consumer needs. More importantly, they attempted to convince Chilean families that to eat from the sea was a revolutionary act.<sup>79</sup> One of the largest such efforts in popular fish promotion occurred in late April 1972 when a cluster of communities north of downtown Santiago hosted an event known as Operación Merluza (Operation Hake). After the weeklong cooking expo, state consumer officials sent female participants back to their communities with 30 “easy and economical recipes” for preparing frozen merluza harvested from Chile’s Pacific waters and encouraged the women to share them with their neighbors.<sup>80</sup> “We are helping the Government in its task of teaching people that fish, one of our most important riches, is the best substitute for beef,” Eloisa Díaz, a female community leader, told a Chilean newspaper in March 1972. “Eating fish,” she continued, “is ten times cheaper

76. “JAP para avanzar,” *El Rebelde* (Santiago), 30 Oct.–4 Nov. 1972.

77. See Heidi Tinsman’s work on the persistence of patriarchy during the UP revolution. Tinsman, *Partners in Conflict*, esp. 209–87.

78. Chase, *Revolution*, 142–63.

79. “Día del Pescado,” *El Siglo* (Santiago), 21 Feb. 1972; “Santiago se cuadra con el consumo masivo de merluza,” *El Siglo* (Santiago), 10 Apr. 1972. See also Gaudichaud, *Poder popular*, 406.

80. “Operación Merluza en área norte de Santiago,” *El Siglo* (Santiago), 2 May 1972.

than beef, and by increasing familiarity with fish, we'll be helping the country save foreign exchange."<sup>81</sup>

But the JAPs' attempt to forge a new economic and culinary culture generated growing disenchantment with the UP. What's more, it rarely won JAP activists new allies in the neighborhoods in which they operated. As a late 1960s study on consumers' willingness to embrace alternative foods suggested, nearly two-thirds of Chileans gladly accepted fresh fish as a substitute for scarce beef. However, less than a third said that they would accept frozen fish.<sup>82</sup> Nevertheless, in its attempt to reduce the problem of spoilage and provide Santiago butchers with a new product to sell, the UP pushed forward all the same with a plan to promote the sale of frozen merluza in 1972—a decision that sparked forceful pushback from both consumers and the opposition.<sup>83</sup> The country's main opposition paper, *El Mercurio*, denounced the frozen fish in no uncertain terms, calling it "pesca soviética" (Soviet fish). The freezing process, the paper contended, turned hake to mush upon thawing.<sup>84</sup> In other communities, active JAP members were accused of dietary policing and partisan distribution tactics. As one resident of a peripheral neighborhood northwest of Santiago told historian Margaret Power, the JAPs were perceived by her community as little more than an instrument of party favoritism.<sup>85</sup> Carmen García, a working-class mother of four children from Santiago's Lo Prado neighborhood, cried at the memory of having to "stand all night in the cold" to obtain milk for her infant child, and she blamed the PCCh's role in food distribution for her situation. Others recalled the "sense of deprivation" and "feeling of uncertainty," to quote one woman interviewed by scholars Pamela Constable and Arturo Valenzuela in the late 1980s, that marked the final months of the Allende government.<sup>86</sup> Similarly, Heidi Tinsman has noted that in Chile's Aconcagua Valley the JAPs provoked irresolvable tension between women of different political persuasions, with some japistas later recounting a sense of bitterness because their sacrifice rarely generated social recognition.<sup>87</sup> "Working in the JAP was terrible," one

81. "Gran fiesta de la merluza ayer en el barrio Chacabuco," *El Siglo* (Santiago), 17 Mar. 1972. See also Gloria Alarcón, "Una solución alimenticia específicamente nacional," *El Siglo* (Santiago), 3 Mar. 1972.

82. Centro de Estudios Socioeconómicos, Universidad de Chile, "Patrones socio-culturales del comportamiento económico," Santiago, 1966, BNC, SC, 10;(968-24).

83. "Merluza congelada es el mejor sustituto de carne de vacuno," *El Siglo* (Santiago), 14 Mar. 1972.

84. "Pesca soviética en Chile," *El Mercurio* (Santiago), 2 Feb. 1972. See also "Escasez de merluza fresca," *El Mercurio* (Santiago), 21 Feb. 1972.

85. Power, *Right-Wing Women*, 194–95.

86. Constable and Valenzuela, *Nation of Enemies*, 27.

87. Tinsman, *Partners in Conflict*, 267–69.

Santiago japista remembered more than three decades after the revolution; “I’d get up and leave the house in the morning and not return home until the evening, but people were never appreciative of our work.”<sup>88</sup>

### From Revolutionary Rations to Market Democracy

The problem of shortages and inflation peaked during Chile’s winter and spring of 1972. A late July confrontation at Chile’s fish terminal in Santiago was emblematic of the rising discontent among small merchants in particular, a key middling constituency for the UP but one that was fast becoming disillusioned with the revolution. Santiago fishmongers blamed scarcity on price controls and greater state control over the distribution of fish products. Fish sellers also argued that the proliferation of the JAP-sponsored fish fries, which the state supplied with free merluza, cut into their supply and profit margin.<sup>89</sup> A distinct disillusionment also took hold on the UP’s left flank, where many political movements demanded more radical community-led rationing policies. One of the first such calls came in mid-July 1972, when sympathizers of the Chilean Revolutionary Left Movement (MIR) occupied a state-controlled distribution warehouse in the Greater Santiago población of La Granja and demanded UP support for the construction of *almacenes populares* (popular markets) in communities where the JAPs had little impact.<sup>90</sup> The UP’s reproduction of a gendered division of labor at JAP outposts led others who identified with the Chilean New Left to question the UP’s commitment to a notion of equality that went beyond rigid classifications of class and party. In a thinly veiled critique of PCCh economic thought, one female activist told *El Rebelde*, a paper affiliated with the MIR, that truly revolutionary women had an obligation to “shake off the bourgeois lies and myths” that suggested that women’s place was “in the home, caring for children and preparing food.”<sup>91</sup>

These tensions were on full public display during the October 1972 bosses’ strike. For opponents of the UP, the event consolidated the sort of broad-based, anti-Allende political coalition that right-wing activists had sought for nearly a year. However, by directly assailing the distribution of basic goods, the strike only deepened the country’s consumer crisis. According to a government analysis of the strike, more than 10 million liters of milk were destroyed because of the work stoppage, while an incalculable amount of agricultural seed and

88. Murphy, *Historias poblacionales*, 35.

89. “Violentos incidentes en terminal pesquero,” *La Tercera* (Santiago), 29 July 1972.

90. “Control popular sobre los precios,” *El Rebelde* (Santiago), 18 July 1972.

91. “Liberación de la mujer,” *El Rebelde* (Santiago), 2 May 1972.

fertilizers never arrived to the Chilean countryside.<sup>92</sup> Given this crisis, Allende felt that he had little choice but to make concessions to the opposition to restore order. In November 1972, he brought three moderate military officials into his cabinet, named a fourth retired military official to head national food distribution efforts, and removed a major private distribution firm from the government's list of enterprises to be brought into Chile's social property area.<sup>93</sup> Shortly thereafter, the state also revoked the honorary price inspector status of dozens of local consumer price control activists.<sup>94</sup>

But within the revolution's popular base, the October strike produced an unprecedented wave of popular mobilization. Patricio Palma, a PCCh member and Chile's top price official at the time, later noted that on the political left "nobody rested" during October 1972. Students, UP militants, and japistas seized delivery trucks that had been abandoned by their drivers and delivered goods that went undistributed to JAP sites and newly christened popular grocery stores, such as the one established in Santa Julia. "Keeping the supply chain running is an economic game," Palma later observed. But what the capital strike demonstrated to Palma was that distribution had "clearly become political as well."<sup>95</sup>

In the wake of the government's decision to reestablish social peace through conciliation, the sort of direct action that left-wing groups had taken to resist the strike became the basis of new modes of community regulation that ran parallel to the state. The events that unfolded at Santa Julia represented just one attempt by the radical Left to use local control of consumer exchange to appeal to those who still demanded that the domestic food supply be protected

92. Rojas Sandford, *Murder of Allende*, 123–24.

93. "Allende Names 3 Military Men to Cabinet in a Move for Order," *New York Times* (New York), 3 Nov. 1972, p. 3; "Los militares y la distribución," *Chile Hoy* (Santiago), 26 Jan.–1 Feb. 1973.

94. Salvador Allende, "Palabras del presidente de la república, compañero Salvador Allende Gossens, refiriéndose a las Juntas de Abastecimiento y Control de Precios," Santiago, 19 Feb. 1973, BNC, SC, 11;(1026-2); "Allende: Los inspectores ad honores," *Chile Hoy* (Santiago), 16–22 Feb. 1973.

95. Patricio Palma, presentation at "Seminario Chile 1972," Universidad Alberto Hurtado, Santiago, 6 Dec. 2012. See also Gaudichaud, *Poder popular*, 408–10. For more on the role of the JAPs and DIRINCO in resisting the October strike, see "Convenio CUT-DIRINCO: Arma para derrotar la especulación," *El Siglo* (Santiago), 12 Oct. 1972; "SOPROLE: Trabajadores distribuirán hoy 70 mil litros de leche," *El Siglo* (Santiago), 14 Oct. 1972; "Trabajadores aseguraron transporte y abastecimiento de alimentos," *El Siglo* (Santiago), 15 Oct. 1972; "La fuerza del pueblo debe decidir y resolver," *El Rebelde* (Santiago), 23–29 Oct. 1972.

but were concerned with the state's role in dictating dietary options.<sup>96</sup> In early 1973 *Punto Final*, another publication affiliated with the MIR, recounted one experiment in popular consumer democracy that emerged after the October strike in what the paper referred to as the “belly of the beast”: the upscale Santiago neighborhood of Las Condes. According to *Punto Final*, the basic supply and distribution network that militants on the left had organized within a small working-class section of the wealthy parish had seized temporary control of a DINAC supply warehouse in the second week of January 1973 and therein created Chile's “first soviet for basic consumer provisioning.” On the day of the popular takeover, a secret-ballot election was also held to expand the administrative purview of the committee to the provincial level. A resident of the community, rather than a state-appointed official, was selected to head the organization, and alongside a council of 24 other individuals, the new Provincial Committee for Direct Provisioning was reportedly servicing some 136,000 families with household necessities by May 1973. “We're not scared of rationing because we've always lived rationed by our lack of money,” Luis Cáceres, the newly elected leader of the consumer committee, told *Punto Final*. “If capitalism can be used in such a way that it benefits us, we'll use it. If not, we'll take another route.”<sup>97</sup>

An alternative to the JAPs and their more top-down structure, autonomous supply committees that emerged in 1973 were seen by their participants not as in opposition to the UP but rather as an alternative mechanism for balancing popular choice and regulation in the consumer marketplace.<sup>98</sup> This was certainly the case in Nueva La Habana, a resident-constructed neighborhood that had formed just prior to the revolution in the parish of La Florida.<sup>99</sup> In late 1972 and into 1973, food provisioning became the cutting edge of revolutionary action in Nueva La Habana. MIR leader Alejandro Villalobos, a vocal promoter of community-controlled food markets in early 1973, was one of the grassroots activists who demanded that all private producers of basic foodstuffs be socialized and that food distribution be handed over to locally run communal councils.<sup>100</sup> After the October strike, Villalobos and other residents of Nueva

96. “El Almac Santa Julia en manos del pueblo: Ahora se trata de asegurar el control popular directo,” *El Rebelde* (Santiago), 9–15 Jan. 1973.

97. “La relación del dirigente con la base,” supplement, *Punto Final* (Santiago), 8 May 1973.

98. “Mejorar la acción de las JAP,” *El Rebelde* (Santiago), 16–22 Jan. 1973; “Distribución: Tarea del pueblo,” *El Rebelde* (Santiago), 23–29 Jan. 1973.

99. See Cofré Schmeisser, “Historia.”

100. *Ibid.*, 211.

La Habana got to work building an economic architecture that did just that, cutting out private distributors and, to a large degree, the state itself. In January 1973, a delegate from each block in Nueva La Habana was selected to identify the basic needs of every household in the community. Each family was then issued one of three ration cards—yellow, red, or white, depending on family size. The presentation of that card at the community's local grocery store entitled a family to a set number of weekly goods, established by the neighborhood and at a fixed price.<sup>101</sup>

While the impact of October 1972 was met head-on by grassroots organizations on the radical left that pushed beyond the state's formal limits, an equally novel discourse about consumption took hold among those who had become disenchanted with the revolution. For arguably the first time in twentieth-century Chile, a sizable number of Chileans presented regulation not as a requisite for democratic life but rather as its antithesis. But notably, they did so using many of the terms that the UP itself had popularized. Proclaiming eating as a "right" ("comer es un derecho"), Chile's Christian Democrats held a series of rallies in 1973 denouncing the "arbitrary" and "discriminatory" distribution of scarce foodstuffs through pro-UP channels.<sup>102</sup> On the pages of Chile's oppositional press, a group of Chilean economists, many of them influenced by the ideas of the University of Chicago's economics department, also used the dire condition of the consumer marketplace to argue against state economic intervention in all its forms. For instance, in an article entitled "The Just Price," a group of economists at the Catholic University's business school in Valparaíso argued that socialism had destroyed the consumer's true power: the ability to express her or his voice through purchasing. "The consumer," the economists claimed, "is a vital element in price setting because everything depends on her/his needs. If a person needs something, she/he will pay more for it. But socialism, with rationing, eliminates this process, making it [choice] impossible."<sup>103</sup>

An article published in the conservative women's magazine *Eva* shortly after the October strike underscored even more clearly the conservative argument linking consumption to democracy. Under the headline "Will Our

101. "Distribución: Tarea del pueblo." In the Santiago parish of San Miguel, community-led reorganization of the JAPs after October 1972 included consultations with a resident dietician about basic consumer health needs. Marta Harnecker, "La distribución en el banquillo," *Chile Hoy* (Santiago), 12–18 Jan. 1973, pp. 14–15.

102. "Comer es un derecho," *La Tercera* (Santiago), 8 June 1973. See also "Protesta contra abastecimiento discriminado," *La Tercera* (Santiago), 8 June 1973; "Concentración contra el hambre hicieron vecinos," *La Tercera* (Santiago), 11 June 1973.

103. "El precio justo," *La Tercera* (Santiago), 20 May 1973.

Supermarkets Survive?," Carmen Puelma, a journalist who had chronicled women's anti-UP protests since 1971, suggested that the supermarket was a sacred economic space whose autonomy needed to be protected from political excess. In briefly citing the showdown between the community and the privately owned Almac supermarket in the población of Santa Julia, Puelma insisted that all over the world "the supermarket has been received with excitement by rich and poor alike." Drawing on popular angst over consumer insecurity while simultaneously defusing the classed experience of consumption that had taken hold on Santiago's periphery, Puelma's writing pointed toward a redefinition of citizens' relation to the state to resolve consumer discontent. The supermarket "embodies democracy," Puelma declared, since there "everyone can buy, everyone waits in the same line to pay, without special privileges." Unlike the butcher shop or corner market, where a salesperson "directed, and sometimes even decided, what a given consumer could and could not buy," in the supermarket it was the female consumer herself who, in Puelma's words, "walked up and down the aisles, freely and comfortably, with the sensation of being in her own home pantry, reviewing and selecting the exact products that she needs."<sup>104</sup> In short, the supermarket was commensurate with the promise of equality because neither the state nor the organized community inhibited individual consumer desires.

Ultimately, it was this vision of consumer democracy that Chile's 17-year military government would embrace. Twelve years after the September 1973 coup, Chile's *Revista del Consumidor*, the publication of the dictatorship's consumer agency, poignantly described the change in consumer ideology that had occurred after a decade of sweeping consumer deregulation. "For the first time in history," the military government insisted, Chileans had realized that, in acting as consumers, they could act as the "guardians and defenders of their own interests" and assume a responsibility that "until present times had been held by the state."<sup>105</sup>

## Conclusions

By tracing the history of consumer politics during Chile's Popular Unity revolution from the perspective of the social and political movements that actively took part in that revolution, this article has argued that the politicization of

104. Carmen Puelma, "¿Sobrevivirán los supermercados?," *Eva* (Santiago), 20–26 Oct. 1972, pp. 18–21.

105. "Chile: Doce millones de consumidores," *Revista del Consumidor* (Santiago) 2, no. 7 (1985): 2.

food played a vital role in creating and sustaining the country's socialist experiment, before consumer politics became central to the revolution's unraveling. Under the UP, intervention in the consumer economy channeled the militancy of new social movements as they brought demands for economic justice and economic democracy to the forefront of political life. For a short time, food policy also became a way of enlisting Chile's consuming public in the making of a new revolutionary economic culture, oriented around consuming nationally produced foodstuffs to bring nutritional bounty to the poor while also saving valuable foreign exchange. Importantly, the revolutionary years of 1970–73 were only one moment in a much longer history of consumer mobilization. Starting under Chile's Popular Front, demands for equitable and guaranteed consumption became embedded in how the Chilean social welfare state functioned and how citizens interpreted the capacity and obligations of the state to produce economic justice. As the state opened new avenues for citizen participation, those who remained on the margins of formal political life used consumer institutions and the marketplace itself to clear and build the Chilean road to socialism from the bottom up.

However, when the state proved incapable of fulfilling consumer expectations, new movements emerged with divergent notions of how market regulation and choice should be balanced. From all sides of the political spectrum, food struggles challenged the boundaries that existing state institutions had set. One of the ways that this struggle manifested itself was in the production of two competing alternatives to the sort of consumer architecture that the state had built over four decades. The first alternative, voiced by movements on the left, critiqued the state's ineffectiveness in organizing the marketplace and instead advocated that material inequalities could only be tempered by giving local communities the planning functions that the state had long assumed. By embracing the UP's discourse of economic justice but rejecting planning and regulation in all its forms, the second alternative, supported by an ever more reactionary Chilean Right, helped to produce a new notion of market democracy that eschewed concerns with material inequality in favor of individualized consumer desires. In this latter analysis lay open terrain for a new state, grounded in deregulation and liberalization, to put down its roots. To quote one female anti-Allende activist who was interviewed after the overthrow of the UP, "The field has now been fertilized; all that is left is a new seed."<sup>106</sup>

106. Gloria Urgelles, "De las cacerolas a la reconstrucción," *Eva* (Santiago), second half of Oct. 1973, p. 13.

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