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***Chile in my Heart: A memoir of love and revolution*, by Kate Clark, Bannister Publications, Chesterfield, 2013, x + 213 pp., 85 illustrations, £11.99, ISBN 978-1-909813-02-1 (pbk).**

Just over a year after the military coup overthrew the Popular Unity government in Chile (and ended the life of President Salvador Allende, among many thousands of others), I moved to Edinburgh. With a grant of £880 p.a. from the Social Science Research Council, I began work on a PhD in Sociology, but in practice – if memory serves me – the main beneficiaries were various political causes of the Left. These were heady times. Six months earlier the miners had ‘overthrown’ the Conservative government. Just weeks after I arrived, Harold Wilson became prime minister for the fourth time – with a narrow majority. It was only two years since the ‘Pentonville Five’, with the support of the Liaison Committee for the Defence of Trade Unions, had effectively nullified the National Industrial Relations Court. In Scotland, in particular, memories of the UCS work-in – reversing Heath’s industrial policy – were fresh. ‘History’, as Fidel Castro announced on a Communist Party poster of the time, ‘is on our side.’

Unfortunately, History had been busy elsewhere on when Pinochet struck. One of the causes which caught my attention – the most time-consuming and most worthwhile – was the Chile Solidarity Campaign, then just a year old. As a result, I came to know several members of the Edinburgh’s Chilean refugee community quite well: Britain had become a country of refuge for many of Popular Unity’s supporters. Whilst rebuilding their own individual and family lives, they debated the fallout of the Chilean defeat, trying to understand (and bring down) the military junta which now ruled their country. Their analyses were reflected, albeit in a distorting mirror, when the British Left debated the ‘lessons of Chile’.

I no longer recall exactly how many Chilean refugees had ‘settled’ in Edinburgh by then – several dozen at least. Among them, one man seemed *primus inter pares*. Then in his early forties Ricardo Figueroa was, I suppose, older than many of his exiled compatriots. He was more fluent in English than most – he had been a university lecturer in English literature. But he stood out for much more than that. Amid a group of politically committed, intelligent – and vastly experienced – men and women, his political insight seemed the deepest. He combined this with personal charm and magnetism. He was, in short, charismatic. Part of this charisma, I suspect, lay in stories which circulated of his imprisonment and torture in 1973. (It’s worth adding that I don’t recall *him* telling them: his friends and comrades had suffered the same, or worse.)

In some ways, *Chile in my Heart* is Ricardo's 'backstory'. Kate Clark met Ricardo in 1967. Both had gone to Moscow to take a Russian language course: he from Chile, she from Chesterfield. Both were Communists. They fell in love. Kate followed him to Chile. She found work teaching English at the Chillán campus of the University of Chile, where Ricardo was also a lecturer. (Chillán, then a town with a population around 85,000, is some 250 miles south of Santiago.) So, in her mid-twenties, she knuckled down to a new life: she worked hard at her job, she learned Spanish, she socialised (though she comments that socialising is hard work when you're struggling with the language), she made friends, she overcame what today would be called 'culture shock'. But she also had fun. She got to know and love Chile and its people, and – though perhaps a little more slowly – Ricardo's family. And as a Communist militant, she immersed herself in the politics of her adopted country.

Chile in my Heart is largely about the turbulent years from Kate's arrival at Santiago airport, alone, in March 1969 to her departure for Britain, with Ricardo, five years later to the day. Turbulent years, but – the final six months apart – for both Kate and Ricardo exciting and full of hope. We see Ricardo moving forward professionally, becoming Secretary General (roughly pro-vice-chancellor) and then Vice-Rector (principal) of the campus. (It's clear that, to coin a phrase, the professional was then the political: these senior academic roles were secured by election, and Ricardo was the candidate of the Left.) Kate rose to head the languages department and language centre. Politics was their vocation. He negotiated with a local landowner, securing land – at a knock-down price – for a new university campus. She transferred from the British to the Chilean Communist Party, and wrote a book (*Chile: Reality and Prospects for Popular Unity*, Lawrence & Wishart 1972), at the request of Jack Woddis, international secretary of the British Party. She squeezed writing it into her busy life; the pace of change was such that when her author's copies arrived, she knew 'parts of it were already out of date' (p. 73).

Chile in my Heart is rich in insight into the Popular Unity period: the intertwining of social, political and working lives; the disruption orchestrated by the right. The succession of failed coups, beginning even before the Popular Unity government took power. The women's demonstrations, noisy with saucepans and spoons over food shortages – largely upper- and middle-class women, who 'never shopped or cooked in their kitchens, as they had maids who did that work for them' (p. 116). The 19-day transport strike – not so much a drivers' strike as a lorry owners' boycott, Kate stresses – 'like a declaration of war on the government'. Railways and transmitting towers were blown up, factories burned. The 'atmosphere of constant attacks and terrorist acts by *Patria y Libertad*' (a far-right terrorist group) took its toll: 'many non-political people' wanted 'order' restored (p. 124). Military 'raids on the *poblaciones* began, ostensibly to search for arms among Popular Unity supporters' (p. 133).

These were not just things Kate and Ricardo read or heard about: they were part of daily life. On one occasion, *en route* to Santiago, the train she and Ricardo were travelling on was stopped and burned by *Patria y Libertad*: they scrambled out. They were 'in a field, in the middle of nowhere'; the passengers were running away from the train 'when shots rang out': 'I flung myself to the ground instinctively, shaking uncontrollably' (p. 101). Daily life continued. 'Classes were held, students' work got marked, seminars and tutorials went on as normal' (p. 133). But as Kate wrote to her family in England shortly before the coup, it was 'a very tense and nerve-racking period ... I've got lots of academic work to do, marking, etc., which I haven't got down to ... I'm not sleeping well, again I put it down to the situation, because I have the most horrible dreams, with war scenes and me alone looking for someone I know ...' (p. 133).

Kate had an at 8 a.m. class on 11th September 1973. On her journey to work, she passed military personnel and armoured vehicles; but it 'was a time of repeated states of emergency' and she 'did not think much of it and simply drove past'. In the department, she learned of the coup. 'There would be no classes that day,' she writes, 'nor ever again, for me or Ricardo, at the University of Chile in Chillán' (p. 136). The final two chapters cover the coup and its aftermath. Ricardo was 'worried sick for his children', who lived with their mother in another town. The university was closed; a military director would 'reorganise' it. How would they live? – their only income was their academic salaries. But worse was to come: a friend (the Socialist mayor of Chillán) was shot dead, along with his pregnant wife and son. Then on the evening of 17th September, after answering a knock on the front door, Ricardo was 'frogmarched off to a waiting lorry'. Kate got to the door 'just in time' to see him being 'shoved up into the back of the truck We didn't manage to exchange even a good-bye, nothing. It was over in a flash, and the lorry had driven off, who knows where' (p. 141).

Much of these final two chapters are devoted to what Kate did next, and what happened to Ricardo. It is a tale of considerable heroism and initiative – by both of them, and by others. Ricardo was imprisoned, first in Chillán, then on Quiricina Island. The torture and murder which followed the coup is well-documented; this book brings home how it hit friends and family. It also conveys the atmosphere of the times. 'One of the most unsettling things ... immediately after the coup was the way fear made people change. Some people on the left ... started to say things like: "Ah well, it's not surprising so-and-so's been detained – he was very involved!".' These people, Kate writes, rather than being proud of the Popular Unity project, 'seemed to be judging their erstwhile friends and comrades by the sinister yardstick of the military' (p. 148). And of course, it divided families: two of Ricardo's brothers, policemen, carried on working 'as normal, which meant they were now part of the new regime' (p. 168); for his stepmother, only criminals and delinquents went to prison – Ricardo, she said, should 'ask for forgiveness' (p. 190).

Kate allowed none of this to sap her determination. She worked tirelessly for Ricardo's release: taking advantage of her British citizenship, but at considerable personal risk, she called on military commanders, a local landowner from whom Ricardo had negotiated the purchase of the land for the new university campus, priests, a bishop. What eventually did the trick, it seems, was a bourgeois institution they had previously eschewed. Kate managed to arrange for Ricardo and herself to be married – on 19th December 1973 in Chillán prison. As a result, she was able to persuade the British embassy to intercede, and Ricardo was eventually released at the end of February 1974. They sold up as best they could – in itself a risky business – and left, to settle later that year in Scotland's capital.

Though they have long since left my ken, I once knew and admired this book's main protagonists, Kate Clark and Ricardo Figueroa. They and I did not see eye to eye on key aspects of the Communist politics of the 1970s – I recall, if rather dimly, one or two robust *contretemps* with Kate at branch meetings. My admiration, however, is increased by this book, which is at the same time personal, political, committed and reflective. As one would expect of an experienced journalist, Kate also tells – and illustrates – the story very well. To be sure, *Chile in my Heart* could be read as a Cold War love story: just occasionally my mind slipped to *The Spy who Came in from the Cold* – her road to Moscow, and her British Council sponsored meeting with Graham Greene, for instance – though her perspective is very much Le Carré 'through the looking glass'. But it is far more than a personal story: it provides deep insight into Chilean society and life during the revolutionary years of Popular Unity, from the perspective of a young English Communist, the Chilean she loved, his family and their friends. It says a lot about the lived experiences, commitments and beliefs of that time and place. For a British readership, it transforms the Popular Unity story from one principally of defeat to one in which hope, creativity, achievement, and struggle play their rightful parts. It deserves a wide readership.

John Holford

University of Nottingham

john.holford@nottingham.ac.uk