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Margaret Power. "The Engendering of Anticommunism and Fear in Chile's 1964 Presidential Election." *Diplomatic History* 32:5 (November 2008): 931-953. DOI: 10.1111/j.1467-7709.2008.00735.x. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7709.2008.00735.x> .

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/reviews/PDF/Ball-Immerman.pdf>

Reviewed by **Stephen G. Rabe**, University of Texas at Dallas

This is a terrific article. Professor Margaret Power of the Illinois Institute of Technology has expanded on a small section of her book, *Right Wing Women in Chile* (2002). In her insightful book, Power had shown how conservative and upper-class elite groups had organized women to oppose leftist political movements. Conservatives warned that leftist change would undermine the family structure and the unique role of women as mothers and wives. Conservatives used gendered arguments to protect their socioeconomic privileges. As Powers observed, "in societies that conflate womanhood with motherhood, women respond decisively to what they perceive to be a threat to their children and their families."¹ Such warnings seemed to strike a special resonance in Chile. As late as the 1960s, about 70 percent of adult Chilean women were housewives, with only 22 percent working outside the home. Chile has been one of Latin America's more socially conservative, religiously oriented (Catholic) nations. In 2004 the Chilean legislature finally reformed the family code of the 1880s and established a legal path to divorce. These views on the role of Chilean women were reflected in voting patterns. In the 1958 election, Salvador Allende won only 22 percent of the women's vote. Winning 34 percent of the women's vote, the conservative Jorge Alessandri squeaked out an electoral victory, triumphing over Allende, the third major candidate, Eduardo Frei of the Christian Democrats, and two other candidates. Alessandri's support from women was critical, for he actually won only 31.6 percent of the vote. The Chilean legislature customarily ratified the election of the presidential candidate who secured a plurality of votes.

¹ Margaret Power, *Right-Wing Women in Chile: Feminine Power and the Struggle against Allende, 1964-1973* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002), 90.

In this article, Power demonstrates how the John Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson administrations latched on to Chilean ideas and practices about gender to foment anticommunism among Chilean women. From the U.S. perspective, the 1958 election had been a near disaster. Salvador Allende had come within 3 percent of becoming president of Chile. The upcoming 1964 presidential election presented a new challenge. President Kennedy made it clear to Chilean politicians that the United States wanted to support a reform-minded politician, like Eduardo Frei, who would carry out the promises of the Alliance for Progress and thereby defeat radical nationalism with evolutionary reform. Indeed, during the 1960s, the United States showered Chile with economic aid, trying to make it the “showcase” for its “Marshall Plan for Latin America.”² Chilean conservatives similarly feared that a multi-candidate presidential election risked presenting Allende with a way to power. They reluctantly decided to support Frei, as the lesser of two evils. The Christian Democrat handily won the 1964 election, winning 56 percent of the vote to Allende’s 39 percent.

The United States intervened in the Chilean electoral process, pouring millions of dollars into Frei’s campaign coffers. As Power reveals, U.S. officials in the State Department, National Security Council, and Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) grasped the dynamics of Chilean politics. They targeted the covert spending at women. Officials determined that housewives were more likely to listen to the radio than to read newspapers and spent campaign funds accordingly. The “gendered propaganda” of the “Scare Campaign” focused on how Allende and his Communist fellow travelers would undermine the traditional family, forcing women into heavy labor. Any U.S. citizen of a certain age can recall being shown those images of beefy Soviet women in ragged overcoats and babushkas filling up the potholes on Moscow’s streets. (As a ten-year-old attending parochial school, I vowed that I would never let this happen to my mom!). The Communists, as revealed in radio broadcasts by Juana Castro, the estranged sister of the Cuban dictator, would also send children to communal camps in Eastern European countries.³ So intent were U.S. officials at insuring that Chilean women voted that the U.S. embassy in Santiago recommended establishing “baby-sitting pools” on election day. Although difficult to measure precisely, the U.S. effort produced solid electoral results. The women’s vote rose from the previous high of 35 percent to 46.5 percent of the total vote. Candidate Frei garnered the support of 62.8 percent of women voters.

Power emphasizes that the U.S. intervention should be analyzed within a Chilean context. Salvador Allende and his supporters responded to the propaganda by assuring Chilean women that socialism would protect and nurture women. They held “Women’s Teas” to recruit women to their causes. The Allende campaign did not challenge existing conceptions of masculinity and femininity and “shared many of the same ideas about men

² Stephen G. Rabe, *The Most Dangerous Area in the World: John F. Kennedy Confronts Communist Revolution in Latin America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 109-16.

³ The portrayal of the Communist desire to destroy the family structure played also in the United States, as revealed, for example, in the film *Red Nightmare* (1962) narrated by Jack Webb of *Dragnet* fame.

and women's roles in society that underpinned the Scare Campaign" (p. 946). To his credit, Salvador Allende addressed these issues in a humane way, noting that women in Chile faced discrimination in fields like the medical profession and that domestic service was often the only employment opportunity open to Chilean women. Allende's arguments apparently won over few Chilean women. He ran poorly among women again in 1970. And Chilean women became the public face of his political opposition from 1970-73 in demonstrations such as the "March of the Empty Pots and Pans" and organizations such as *Poder Femenino* (Feminine Power).

Professor Power has opened new fields of inquiry for historians of U.S. relations with Latin America. In her book, Power sketched out how the CIA mobilized Brazilian women in its successful campaign to destabilize the government of João Goulart (1961-64).⁴ In an imaginative article, Victoria Langland took the Brazilian story a step further, outlining how in 1968 the Brazilian military and police savagely attacked university students, equating the growing feminist consciousness and sexual liberation of young, white women in Brazil with social disorder and communism.⁵ Power also cites the work of Yvonne M. Conde, who wrote about Operation Pedro Pan (1960-62), the clandestine effort to secret children out of Cuba. The children were supposedly in imminent danger of being taken away from parents and shipped to Communist countries.⁶ In my study, I found that U.S. officials considered the Jagan family of British Guiana (Guyana) to be dangerous, dysfunctional, and determined to lead the British colony into the Communist orbit. The "aggressive" Janet Jagan allegedly both "dominated" her husband Prime Minister Cheddi Jagan and yearned for "splendid, virile" Cuban revolutionaries.⁷ Scholars might want to investigate whether U.S. officials employed gendered propaganda in their massive covert campaign to elect Joaquín Balaguer and defeat Juan Bosch in 1966 in the Dominican Republic.

As she continues her fine work, Professor Power may want to extend her research in the U.S. documentary record by looking at the *Foreign Relations* series and the records of the CIA and the Department of State. Chileans, including women that Power interviewed, deny that they had any connection with the covert U.S. intervention. Published memorandums of conversation between U.S. officials and Chileans, including Eduardo Frei, prove, however, that anti-Allende Chileans cooperated with the U.S. embassy and the CIA.⁸

⁴ Power, *Right-Wing Women in Chile*, 86-90.

⁵ Virginia Langland, "Birth Control Pills and Molotov Cocktails: Reading Sex Revolution in 1968 Brazil," in *In from the Cold: Latin America's New Encounter with the Cold War*, edited by Gilbert M. Joseph and Daniela Spenser (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 308-49.

⁶ Yvonne M. Conde, *Operation Pedro Pan: The Untold Exodus of 14,048 Cuban Children* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

⁷ Stephen G. Rabe, *U.S. Intervention in British Guiana: A Cold War Story* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

⁸ Joseph John Jova of U.S. Embassy in Santiago to Assistant Secretary of State Thomas Mann on conversations with Eduardo Frei, 5 May 1964, U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United*

Stephen G. Rabe holds the Arts and Humanities Chair at the University of Texas at Dallas. He has previously written or edited eight books. His forthcoming study with Potomac Press is *John F. Kennedy: World Leader* (2009). He is writing a study of the United States, Latin America, and the Cold War for Oxford University Press. Rabe has taught or lectured in fifteen countries, including leading seminars in Argentina, Brazil, and Ecuador. He has also served as the Mary Ball Washington Professor of American History at University College, Dublin in Ireland and as the Fulbright Bicentennial Chair in American Studies at the University of Helsinki in Finland.

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