

Part 7

The Interview

The aim of the following interview with Carlos is to delve further into many of the themes set out in “El Barrio”. I conducted this interview with Carlos during the year 2002 and it consisted of three very long sessions. The interview took place in his flat in Edinburgh, surrounded by a large amount of written material such as books, newspapers, letters, magazines, documents etc. He also showed me an impressive collection of audio-visual material, such as videos recorded from the BBC and other European television stations and, very importantly, from Chilean National Television. He had also a very important collection of relevant photographs.

There are specific topics that I will explore in some depth. The theme of the treatment of Chilean history is one of those.

I feel that this interview is very useful because it helped to clarify and validate Carlos’s own story in the context of his barrio and the recent history of Chile.

The reader should know two things: that I have powerful tools to assist me in my enquiries and to know that Carlos has powerful tools to support his answers.

I must warn the reader that my own role as the interviewer had been put to the test. It is not easy to ask relevant questions because you must know the topic reasonably well, have a good feel for it and work hard to get the best answers from the person in front of you. (I learn this at the School of Scottish Studies at the Edinburgh University)

Finally, I would like to ask the reader to trust both the interviewer and the interviewee in this frank and passionate interview.

The first thing I wanted was to ask Carlos the motivations which led him to write the story.

First of all, why did you want to write down the history of your barrio?

I thought that it was very important to do it. First of all, I was in a good position to recreate my own story and the best thing was to recreate it in the context of my barrio, which is the place where I could best relate myself to Chile.

Did you have any idea about the methodology you were going to use to develop the story of your barrio? *Yes. The story was going to consist of my experiences as an ordinary citizen, who lived in an ordinary barrio of Santiago and who used to mingle every day with ordinary people who were, in my view, very interesting people. I was clear that I was going to write from the social position I used to have in society. That is from the perspective of an urban manual worker employed in a very well known guitar factory in Esperanza street, the place I called ‘my barrio’.*

Was it important to write from this position of class? *Yes. Very important because I could argue from a position of strength what were Allende’s intentions with his socialist reforms and what were going to be the effects for million of people like me. My social position in society was working class - that means, in short, someone with very little chance to achieve important things in life and a shorter life expectancy compared with those people from the middle upper classes.*

Is that simply an assumption? *No at all. This was an objective reality, based on the history of the Chilean working class... but let me finish saying why I thought it was important to write the story of my barrio.*

Why?

I felt that this idea of writing about oneself was very appealing, since my experiences of life coincided with an extraordinary moment in Chilean history, where the centre of gravity was for the first time revolving around the social class I belonged to. This means that there was an objective reason for me, as a member of the working class, to be very hopeful of social policies benefiting me and my social group.

I also felt that it was a real privilege and a real pleasure to be able to give in writing my own personalised account and views of some aspects of Chilean culture, history and politics, which were the things which provided the background for my personal story and that of my barrio. I would add that I could not accept the idea that the privilege of writing about Chile should be reserved only for a restricted group of people: the famous, the important and the influential ones in society.

Who are these people?

Well, they are writers, journalists, diplomats, academic people such as historians, sociologists, political and social scientists, religious people, along with politicians and political analysts, who perhaps never

underwent a type of experience like mine, yet they scan Chilean history, draw their own conclusions and even justify, with the passing of time, all the Pinochet atrocities and the ideology he represented. The Chilean Armed Forces' own historians, too, will glorify Pinochet and justify everything that this Army General did to the Chilean people.

But you may have more motivations to write your own story?

Yes. It is more personal in nature. I wanted to leave something important to my family - my wife and my children, who are not Chileans but are entitled to know my story and that of my country of origin as I have experienced and studied it. It is a humble effort that I have been very pleased to do.

Reading "The Barrio", one is left with the feeling that what you have done, really, is take a nostalgic trip to a place which you regret being unable to see anymore. It is not as simple as that. But I would accept that, in a way, it is a nostalgic trip into the past. I was conscious, however, that, by looking into the past I was in a very good position to understand the present and have a little clue as to what will be the future for Chile.

What are the main gains in a writing experience of this nature?

This exercise has helped me to interpret my own personal history in the context of the place where I grew up, in the context of a vast place called Chile and in the context of a very important political and social event in the history of that country. I could explain nothing about myself and my country if I did not refer to my experiences in my barrio and ignored Chilean history.

What processes did you have to undertake before you decided to write?

Firstly, I had to decide which language I was going to use, English or Spanish. I decided to write in English, which, in itself it was a great challenge. I decided to write in English because I live in an English speaking country and because I think that there are few works in this language that I know of, which focus on the experiences of an ordinary Chilean during Salvador Allende's time and before. Secondly, I had to go through the interesting mental process of trying to remember important details about my barrio and my experiences in it. From this process I was committed to remembering as much as I could about my experiences in Chile. I wanted to contradict those millions of new generation Chileans who grew up under the dictatorship of Pinochet and have been persuaded by his regime to think that it was not worthwhile to look into the immediate past.

What conclusion did you manage to draw after writing the barrio?

I was sad to see that, in my story, I came across as a chap who had some important setbacks in life, like many of my neighbours in the barrio. On the other hand, I was happy to see that on the whole I was a happy fellow, with a family that gave me a lot of love and important values. From a social point of view, I could also see that I interacted normally with people and I grew up with boys and girls, engaging in many social activities which enriched me as a person. This was important because this range of experiences taught me many useful things necessary to face adulthood with a certain confidence, which I found very useful in starting a new life in Scotland.

I was glad to see that my barrio was a very interesting place, with very interesting people. I felt that the people of my barrio, however, were exposed to many dangers as a result of economic and social exclusion.

I was very disappointed to see that the class I belonged was always suppressed by a very tough ruling class which seemed to be completely disassociated from the rest of Chilean society.

Now, it has been extremely interesting for me to look at the experiences of many foreign travellers who have been to Chile at different periods. These travellers provided me with insights and interesting details, at times naive but important ones, about the reality of Chilean society in a not very distant past. Finally, it has been, for me, an excellent opportunity to look at Chilean history from the perspective of foreign historians and see what they have to say about Chile. Their perspective is very important to me because their interpretations of events in Chile are studied from a certain cultural and political distance. This fact may take away the passion and the bias so evident in the work of Chilean historians.

Here Carlos touches on Chilean history which is, in today's Chile, a very sensitive issue and it will be discussed with Carlos now. The theme of the history of the country, and especially that part that deals with the Allende and the Pinochet era, is a source of heated debate among Chilean historians.

Do you distrust traditional Chilean historians? I distrust them deeply and I think that the Chilean working class and their children should read Chilean texts related to history with a critical eye. They will discover that history has more to do with those influential people whose role has been to support, in our country, an unjustified regime based on inequalities. We must not forget that our history has been written by very conservative elements, known in Chile as *historiadores oligárquicos* and by liberal historians. These establishment historians have been, in the words of some Chilean intellectuals, the great manipulators of our history. In my work about my barrio, I explained how a specific history text book, written by a historian from the University of Chile and used today in the year 2002 by Chilean secondary school students, omitted very relevant and important details of past Governments in Chile - for example, how the Eduardo Frei Christian

Democrat Government was helped by the CIA to beat Salvador Allende in the 1964 elections and the atrocities carried out by the Pinochet regime.

One can see clearly that the writer of the student text shows a very favourable attitude to the Pinochet regime and a very negative one towards the Government of Salvador Allende. There is also the case of the conservative historian Gonzalo Vial who, not long ago, published in an English newspaper an article defending the figure of General Pinochet. This person is, at least, criticised by a more liberal Chilean historian called Jocelyn-Holt, who thinks that Vial is an ambivalent and unethical historian because he has admitted, 25 years later, having written the famous "White Book", which served to justify tortures and killings during the Pinochet regime. However, and here is the important thing, Gonzalo Vial was also a member of the famous Rettig Commission which helped Chileans to learn more adequately what had happened to thousand of Chileans under the Pinochet dictatorship, but his role in the commission was, according to the right-wing Chilean tabloid La Tercera, to re-assure the Chilean right, by including in the final draft of the Rettig report, a statement that the responsibility of the coup had to be shared between the right and the left. Vial's conclusions are not mine and my understanding is that many Chilean historians are increasingly preoccupied with the tendency of some of their colleagues to manipulate and adapt to their liking what they called 'the public truth' about the last fifty years of the history of Chile. (From the document entitled "Manifiesto de historiadores")*

For Jocelyn-Holt, history in Chile, as a subject of study, is controversial because it is about ideology. You do not think that this is a true statement from the point of view of left-wing historians? *The cases I have mentioned before clearly showed, in my view, contempt for history and a true willingness to put ideology first, before history. My view is that the so called left-wing historians will put the emphasis on that part of our history which has been neglected by right-wing historians, because of their ideology. I am, however, optimistic because I am certain that the history of Chile of the last 40 years is a tough test for everyone concerned.*

The right-wing historians of today will now have powerful opponents, able to articulate and contest their views in the public arena.

There is also the important detail that, these days, every researcher can be assisted by powerful, persuasive communicative media such as radio, television and the cinema which have recorded many important moments of our most recent political and social history.

There are also, already at work, many Chilean historians interested in writing a more critical history of Chile in order to contest what has been written before. Gabriel Salazar (University of Chile) and Julio Pinto (University of Santiago) are two of a group associated with this idea. They both claim to write what they call 'the memoirs of those without history' (La Memoria de los sin historia). They have said, in an interview in March, 1999, that there were no texts available that could provide Chileans with a different and renovated view of past Chilean history.

** (The Rettig Report, 1991, documented thousands of deaths and strongly criticised the judiciary for its acquiescence during the Pinochet Regime. The Rettig commission did not have the power to put blame on any individual or any state organisation, such as the army.)*

What period were they talking about? *I think they were talking about the XIX and XX century and they intend to do that in four volumes.*

But do they have any specific plan underlying their approach which will differ from the work of other historians? *Of course! Their plan is to examine and discuss, from the point of view of the society, unresolved historical problems. Their idea is to present the results of their own investigations and contrast their findings with those already published. If they find that there are discrepancies, then they will establish a debate. These historians will focus their work from 'the point of view' of the citizens and above all the poor.*

Why? *Because, according to Gabriel Salazar and Julio Pinto, a lot has been written from the point of view of Governments, political parties, the markets and the bourgeoisie.*

But your own little contribution, in your "El Barrio", underlined the works of Pinto and Salazar because you wrote from the citizen's point of view, isn't that so? *Yes. It is very important that the citizens, and especially the poor who had an experience less similar to mine, should put an effort into writing and documenting, as much as possible, their own experiences. My generation is full of very interesting stories. Perhaps the works of Pinto and Salazar will provide them with the tools to do this.*

But surely many Chilean and foreign historians have already published balanced and critical accounts of Chilean history? *I believe so. But there is still a lot of work to do. We also need to ask ourselves why some historians in Chile are not happy with what has been done so far.*

Just as a matter of interest, if you were to write the history of Chile how would you do it? *I have a vision and this is that the History of Chile must be written by all those people and institutions representing the vast cultural spectrum found in our society. What we want is 'their' perspective and 'their' critical analysis of history. We are also in real need of a history written by those who have shaped our 'national character' and who have been at the centre of our common history and culture and who also happened to be the ancestors of the great majority of Chileans.*

Who are these people? *The original people of Chile like the Mapuches. We know little about these people and what we know is based on a romantic idea about them. We know very little about their outlook and their views of Chile. I am in a position to say to you that the country has a very poor record when it comes to its dealing with its ethnic minorities. Chile, as a country, has shown very little understanding towards them.*

Strange as it may seem, in my view, the impact of the conquest is still felt today in our society. We just have to look today at their life in Santiago and in the south of Chile, where their own land was occupied by first and second generation Chileans, whose parents came as immigrants to Chile from Germany at the end of the 19th century and who were the recipients, from the generous Chilean Government, of vast and fertile tracts of land belonging to the Mapuche and other peoples. The Germans have made their contribution to Chile but, more importantly, the Mapuches contributed to the make-up of our nationhood.

*Coming back to the original question, I also think that we need to find out more about the social-cultural history and the path followed by the Spanish conquistadors to become, from being a nobody in Spain, an **encomendero** in Chile first of all, then a landowner, then a conservative, a liberal, a radical, a catholic a bourgeois. We also need to know about the path that the 19th and 20th century immigrants took from being destitute in their own European country to be, at first, a nobody in Chile, then a landowner, an opportunist, an exploiter, an entrepreneur, a politician, a writer, a trade unionist, a soldier, a policeman, a worker etc.*

Why is it important to do all these things? *Firstly, because many in Chile, especially those who lived in the middle class and upper class barrios, think that their ancestors were born with a silver spoon in their mouths. Secondly, sadly, many of these people, children and grandchildren of these immigrants, tend to behave towards the more indigenous population with disdain and contempt.*

All of them?

Not all of them, but the ones who become affluent, yes.

Thirdly, here in Europe many believe that their countries were always affluent, forgetting that the older generations were also very poor, to the extent that millions of people had to emigrate to our lands: Chilean land, Argentinean land.

Finally, because we need to know our roots to help to build a country based on respect for individuals. The Pinochet era can rightly be accused of having built a country where respect for individuals was ignored.

In all these processes, as we know, there has been a very high cultural, social, economic and human cost to pay and the question here is, precisely, in what manner this cost had been paid and who paid for it.

Your answers? *Those who have paid a very high price have been the indigenous people who have lost a great deal : their land, their dignity etc. - the **mestizo** peasantry, the working classes of the big cities, especially factory workers, the miners and the fishermen etc.*

The high price consisted of loss of life in tragic consequences, de-culturization, alienation, loss of valuable land, lack of respect from the Chilean state, racism, lack of opportunities, in other words : discrimination,

centuries of neglect, hardship, and lack of recognition of their contribution to the development of their country.

Carlos, Jocelyn-Holt proposes the thesis that history is made by the ruling classes. *Many historians in Chile disagree completely. Pinto and Salazar are two of those. For my part, I believe that the history of Chile is a long process which has involved the lives of all Chileans without distinction. I think that it is true to say that the destiny of Chile has been guided and manipulated by the upper classes. This is why I felt tempted to write about the upper classes in my "Barrio". I have to say to you that Jocelyn-Holt also said that the anonymous masses are not a subject of history. The elite, he said, are historical by nature. They are, he said, very conscious of history, which is not the case with the **mundo popular**. (La Tercera 15th of March, 1999, La historia de Chile en el ojo del huracán)*

Who are the anonymous masses and what is the 'mundo popular' in the language of Jocelyn-Holt?

*I take it to mean the working class, the people who have never been at the helm, running the country. It may also mean workers of all sort: factory workers, peasants state employees, miners, office workers, shop assistants, primary and secondary teachers, fishermen, artists, artisans, nurses etc. He may also refer to all those people who do not have education, the ones who like 'popular music' such as **tangos, rancheras, cumbias** etc. He may refer to those people who swear all the time or the millions who lives in **comventillos** or housing-schemes called **poblaciones**, or the ones that live in shanty towns known as **poblaciones callampas**.*

Can that be those referred to in the barrios as "Los Rotos"?

Yes... los Rotos, rotas y rotosos.

*The people, however, who perhaps may symbolised most clearly the **mundo popular's** artistic sensitivity in our culture, are two great poets and winners of the only Nobel prizes won by Chile: Gabriela Mistral, a primary school teacher, and Pablo Neruda, the son of a train driver.*

*The great musical phenomena of the Pinochet era also belong to that **mundo popular**. A young band from **San Miguel**, a very popular barrio of Santiago, called **Los Prisioneros** (The Prisoners). Andrés Pèrez the most successful theatre director in Chile also comes from this **mundo popular** and did Violeta Parra and Victor Jara, the most influential people in Chilean music.*

*The opposite to this so-called **mundo popular** might be the industrialists, bankers, Right-wing politicians, high middle classes politicians and University professors, brokers, lawyers, doctors, economists, speculators, Army Generals, Police Generals, the type of people living in the upper class barrios such as **La Dehesa** in Santiago. In short, all the type of people who did not suffer the horrible repression of 17 years of dictatorship.*

Jocelyn-Holt also said that the populist leftist criticisms tended to attack the use of force without recognising its own brutality. Do you agree with this? (La Tercera 15 of March, 1999 , La historia de Chile en el ojo del huracán)

*Not at all. I never saw the social force called the working class to be a brutal force in Chilean society and never regarded it as preoccupied with violence. A left-wing Government came into being in the 1970s by the use of the vote. I always saw the **mundo popular**, throughout its own important history, as preoccupied with a permanent struggle to survive in a very hostile environment. Is he accusing this **mundo popular** of resisting the dictatorship of Pinochet? Were they not entitled to resist a brutal dictator?*

We have to define Pinochet's brutality because I recently read the following from someone who had been to Chile. I will read it you: " I was recently in Chile and I met Chilean historians, all of them very anti-Pinochet. I asked them how many people were murdered in Chile and they said about three thousand, but the number of victims killed by the army in Perú is at least 30,000 but no one talks about that. Chile didn't have that many victims but have become very well known because they were mostly intellectuals, from the middle class. In Perú the vast majority of the victims were peasants."

If you allow me, I want to finish with Jocelyn-Holt because I still have something else to say about him. Is he suggesting that the working class is a brutal force in Chilean Society? I find that very offensive. The evidence shows that the real brutality has always been on the side of those holding power in Chile. That is what one learns when reading our history from proper historians. Does he want to diminish or compare the brutality of the social forces that have excluded millions of Chileans from progress? You see, the Pinochet factor is the culmination of a social process that has cost many lives - at the hands of the Spaniards first, and then at the hands of those who have controlled, at a later, stage the destiny of Chile.

I am very sad for what happened in Perú and other parts of Latin America such as Argentina, Guatemala, Colombia etc. The number of dead may have been greater than in Chile but comparisons can be misleading. My view is that everything is relative. In the case of Perú , Argentina and Colombia, we are talking of countries with a much larger population than Chile. These are countries with different social, political and cultural backgrounds. What I do not understand is why numbers are important in your questions. Are you

suggesting that the Chilean 'lefties' have been privileged by the international community? I do not understand in what way we Chileans have been more privileged than others.

The thing was that the international community took notice of the 'Chilean lefties' because they worked very hard to win a presidential election by democratic means. This event, and the subsequent experiments to begin to build socialism by democratic means in our country, was unique in the world. It had a tremendous impact, especially in the so-called developing world. There was so much expectation. These countries were waiting for positive signals and perhaps ready to follow the Chilean path, if everything was OK. In this context, the Chilean experiment was very important, as it represented so much for millions and millions of people.

We must not forget that Pinochet for a long time represented terror and this terror, supported by the United States, was transmitted all over in order to scare not only the Chileans but the millions around the world who were looking at Chile as a solution to their underdevelopment.

What do you mean?

Any country trying to experiment with socialism could eventually end up with a Pinochet on their doorsteps. The General was used by the United States as a terror activist. The more terror he brought to his people, the more reluctant were the poor of the world going to be to follow the Chilean road to Socialism. Pinochet was a really savage individual and that explains the sympathy for the Chilean Left, which, after all, grew as a social force in more or less democratic conditions.

As simple as that?

Of course not. Many hard struggles took place in Chile before the left became, in the 1970s, a force to be reckoned with.

But why did the capitalist world receive so many Chilean refugees into their territories?

Well...the capitalist world was very surprised of the ferocity of the coup in a country which used to live in peace and under a certain democratic tradition. My view is that the people of these countries gave prominence to the Chilean cause because we represented something special even for them. Countries like Italy and France were interested in the social and political developments in Chile because the socialist experiments in Chile were of great interest to the internal politics of these two countries.

I would also like to say that I reject the idea that the vast majority of people killed were middle class. But even if they were, didn't they have the right to live like everyone else?

For your interest I can tell you the following. Why were 3,000 of us Chilean 'lefties' allowed into Britain by the Wilson Government? Why were many of these Chilean allowed communists, socialists and even members of the far left, like the MIR? Were they terrorists? Were we brutal activists and terrorists?. Certainly not! This is why, in a gesture of political understanding, European Governments allowed thousands of Chileans to take refuge in their countries. Where the European fools? My answer is, no. They knew perfectly well what Pinochet was all about and they were horrified as many of its own citizens were tortured and killed by his regime. They also knew well that, in Chile, being on the left was not synonymous with terrorism, as some people would like to think.

The so-called 'lefties' who came to Britain, of whom I am one, were working people of all social background and among them many workers, professionals and students. None of Allende's supporters were 'brutal' individuals. Some of these supporters become, you may wish to say, 'brutal' during the dictatorship, and before, because brutality was imposed on the majority of Chileans by the right-wingers in Chile. It was part of their tradition. Have you read about the episode of **Santa Maria de Iquique**? Or do you know about the assassination of the Army General in Chief René Schneider by the right-wingers in Chile?

The alternatives for the Chilean left in the Pinochet years were two: to receive and not to hit back or to receive and give something in return. The majority took the first view because people, I believe, were not accustomed to react to political and military violence - it was just not part of the working class tradition. The second road was dramatic and was taken by some courageous people in extreme circumstances: it involved reacting, with very little means, against a multi-million dollar military machine with thousands of men armed to the teeth and prepared professionally for a war situation. In these circumstances, some right-wing politicians and ideologists, people from the Armed Forces and the police, perceived as assassins by a great majority of the Chilean people, were killed by those who were at the receiving end. Pinochet himself was the target of an assassination attempt or, if you wish, a terrorist attack.

But who were the true terrorists? I will never forget the terror I felt seeing, on the 11th of September, 1973, the bombardment of the Presidential Palace with many people inside that we, the people, had democratically elected in 1970. The attack was carried out by British-made warplanes belonging to the Chilean Air force and I can tell you that the bombs they used were not toys and they were falling not far from where I lived.

Why not to react as people have done in other part of Latin America ?The answer is complex but one answer may be that many so-called "lefties" are Christians too and, as such, they also had to respond to their own Catholic tradition which dictated a passive reaction. Another answer could be that perhaps you

need to have a certain mentality to react to violence. I am not saying that Chileans are cowards - on the contrary, I feel they are the opposite.

As you are interested in numbers, I am prepared to say that the people killed from the armed forces and the police were very few. We also can say for the record that most of their bodies were available to their relatives – and we can compare that with the 3,000 ‘leftists’ never found - and let me finish by saying that the 3,000 Chileans who came to Britain were part of a big family which included many old people and many children and youngsters who were very reluctant to leave their country. The exodus from Pinochet’s Chile numbers hundreds of thousands. As the Pinochetists enjoyed their country and the pleasures of the Pinochet regime, millions of us could not. The only thing that most Chileans in Chile, and in opposition to Pinochet, were able to do was to build barricades and to fight in the streets with stones.

When Pinochet was detained in London by the police on charges relating to crimes against humanity he sent, in December, 1998, from his ‘detention’ mansion, a letter to the Chilean people and this letter produced strong reactions from many people in Chile, among them many historians. A month later, a group of them published an answer to Pinochet’s letter. This letter, known as the “Historians’ Manifesto”, refutes completely, from an historical point of view, Pinochet’s and Gonzalo Vial’s version of the most recent history of Chile. Did you know about this manifesto?

*Yes! The Manifesto was written by prominent Chilean historians from the most important Chilean Universities and, supporting them, a number of prominent foreign specialists, including some from universities in the United States. We should also note that, among the signatories, we find the **Premio Nacional de Historia**, Armando de Ramon Folch (a recipient of the main Chilean award for History) (**Carlos showed me a copy of the manifesto which he took from the internet, and he read aloud the first lines of this document**)*

“Recently we have noted a notorious intensification in the tendency to manipulate and accommodate the truth on public matters pertaining to the last fifty years of Chile’s history. The purpose of this manipulation has been to exaggerate some actions and to silence others in order to justify certain deeds. Nearly always, there is a tendency among some groups to lend legitimacy to the impermissible, and to present as true and objective what cannot be so, in an effort to give substance to their desired self-image. This tendency is facilitated by the almost exclusive access to the mass media that these sectors and groups possess. By means of extensive and all-powerful media control, they have managed to give an appearance of public truth to what are in reality only the historically distorted expression of private partisan interests.”

In my opinion this is a very important document which induces us all to reflect on the role of historians in our society and to think about the very unprofessional practices of certain intellectuals who are dealing with the history of all the Chileans. This document also serves to encourage us to make a serious attempt to write the real history of the people of Chile. Decent Chileans must combat the campaign of deformations of our most recent history, imposed on Chileans by historians politically linked to the Pinochet regime. The Manifesto dismantled, with sound arguments and point by point, every single thing that Pinochet says to the Chilean people in his letter.

You may also notice the dissatisfaction of the writers of the manifesto when they refer to the ‘exclusive access to the mass media’ by the historians associated with the dictatorship. And not only this, but Pinochet used in his letter a lot of terms designed to elevate the bloody coup to the status of a real feat in our history. Well... according to the historians of the manifesto, each of these terms is used wrongly by Pinochet. For him the military coup was a ‘heroic deed, a Homeric feat, an epic achievement’ of national character. For the signatories of the manifesto, all these expressions can be used when a whole nation or a country or national community has joined forces, taken decisions and carried out actions as a whole, in the exercise of their sovereignty. This is the case, they said, when for centuries the Mapuche people fought against the Spanish invaders or when the Chilean people mobilised themselves after 1879 in the Pacific War.

I think this is very interesting.

Yeah! By March, 1973 (the coup was in September of that year), 43.3% were part of the electorate supporting the policies of Allende and, irrespective of this popular support, Pinochet and the Right decided to take power in Chile by force. I do not see any “epic achievement” in imposing by force the will of one part of the population on the other.

“Those who control the present control the past and those who control the past control the future”, said George Orwell in his work “1984”. Do you really think that in Chile there is, at the moment, a struggle going concerning recent history? Not only this, but many will argue that the winners of a conflict write History. What is going on can be expressed by what an Argentinean newspaper said about the present situation. ‘A cultural and political battle to interpret reality’

What I think is that the Right are trying their best to manipulate and to have control of our history, especially that of the last fifty or so years. On the other hand, historians who are not on the right of the political spectrum, who are either from the centre or the left or others are trying hard to expose, with clarity

and with evidence, what the pro- Pinochet camp is trying to do and why. Right-wing historians have almost always tried to build a history of a country which, from an institutional point of view, seems to look smooth and impeccable, with few civil wars, or coups. This, however, forgets the real history of Chile, which has never been free of pain, conflicts and sacrifices.

But by Latin American standards, Chile has always looked to be a more stable country? Which in turn means that the Chileans thought they had a wonderful country? I soon discovered, through my own story and that of my Barrio and by studying and reading, that this was not true from the point of view of the working class, the peasantry, the mestizos, the poor and the 'Indian' population. For some historians, this institutional stability was often accompanied, until the middle of the 20th century, by manipulation and corruption in electoral campaigns and repression of the working class.

But working class dissatisfaction with the established order did not materialise in a significant popular uprising, as some historians will suggest?

But I will put to them that the poor and the working class were, by 1964, expressing a lot of uneasiness - so much so that Allende might already have come to power then, rather than in 1970. The Christian Democrat, Eduardo Frei Montalva came to power in 1964 (my father voted for him), promising the Chilean people a 'Revolution in Freedom' because Chile was in great need of a social revolution and people were demanding it. The Chilean poor, therefore, were getting ready for a major social revolution, if their demands were not met. We know that the CIA helped this political Party to get power and Allende was defeated. The Christian Democrats, however, did not deliver what the People were waiting for and, by 1970; they decided to try a Socialist Government. This led to a bloody coup and 17 years of Dictatorship and many consequences still felt today.

But there was a revolution of some kind during the Frei Administration?

No. Instead of Revolution there were some reforms: agrarian reforms through the exploitation of under-used land and more control over Chilean copper in the hands of American companies, education reforms etc.

So, for you, some historians have created in Chile an illusion instead of reality in their dealings with the history of their own country and another illusion by writing a romantic history of General Pinochet's regime.

Yes... And this has created conflict among Chilean historians and educationalists that see with horror their students' history texts full of lies and containing a distorted view of history. The Pinochet experience has shown that many of his supporters have done a great deal to cover up many horrific episodes of his regime, with the aim of embellishing his dictatorship. Some major protagonists of our history have been killed or driven into exile. I cannot imagine how many documents have been burned, but I know that a big smoke screen was put in place by the military to cover the atrocities of the Chilean Army in 1973.

Finally, what we are also beginning to understand is that, in Chile, there are many histories and the one type of history that I am interested in, as an ordinary citizen, is something that resembled reality.

You know that the Manifesto finished by saying that:

History is not only the past but also and principally the present and the future. History is projection. It is the social construction of future reality. The most important of human rights consist of the respect for the ability of the people themselves to forge the future reality that they need. Not to recognise that right, to usurp or to falsify that right, is to impose, above all, not the truth, but a historic lie. It is to negate the very moral reserves of humankind. (I can feel Carlos's emotion and appreciate his effort to try to explain to me what perhaps he was not prepared for.)

Are you tired? How do you feel? *I feel OK... but happy as I know that, in Chile, there are articulate people taking good care of a fascinating part of our history, which, in fact, is my history and that of many million of working people.*

There is a writer called Roberto Ampuero who wrote a book called "Our Olive-Green Years". (Nuestros Años Verde Olivo). This book is a harsh criticism of socialist Cuba and the Chilean left which, in his view, as well as the right-wing have done their best to conceal, that part of the history of Chile which deals with their own mistakes and which cost many Chileans their lives. It deals with the irresponsibility, in his view, of the Communist Party which tried to encourage Chileans to train in Cuba to combat Pinochet's Army. In this quest, these Chileans were trained for an almost impossible mission and many ended up as Army Volunteers of the Cuban Armed Forces and were sent to fight in Central America and in Africa, where some were, according to Ampuero, killed.

Did you know the book? *Yes. But I have not had the opportunity to read it. I know that it was serialised in a right-wing Chilean tabloid called **La Tercera** and that the book and Mr Ampuero's views have been very well received in right-wing circles. These facts and knowing that he became a columnist for this tabloid*

linked to Pinochet and was a well known name among the forces in opposition to Fidel in Miami, made me feel uneasy about him. I have read "Persona Non Grata" by the Chilean writer Jorge Edwards, a friend of Pablo Neruda, which is also a critical account of Cuba under Fidel Castro.

But he made the fair criticism that the Left, especially the faction in favour of an armed struggle against Pinochet, is also manipulating the history of the most recent past by not condemning what, to Ampuero, is reprehensible.

And what is that?

Well... for Ampuero this silence on the Left about the idea of creating in Cuba a new Chilean Army to fight the forces of Pinochet and as a result of this, many Chileans were killed. He did not participate in this adventure because he realised in time that the whole thing was not practicable. Not only this, but the Left has also tried to keep silent about it. I will read to you what Ampuero says in an interview with La Tercera, dated the 7th of January, 2002.

"In 1975, on a humid afternoon in Havana, I was asked to go to a meeting in a mansion in Vedado to recruit me as a cadet for the Cuban Revolutionary Army's School. Allegedly, we would have been the officers of a future Popular Chilean Army of a socialist Chile. That day I lost, definitively, all confidence in the wisdom of the Party leaders."

You see, for him, it was crazy to organise something of this nature at a time when repression in Chile was terrible.

Yes...Of course, and Pinochet had the military backing of the United States.

Exactly. But what Ampuero is saying is that the same Communist Party, when they were in power had resisted the armed struggle in Chile, but then, in Cuba, they were not only proposing to overcome the multi-million dollar Pinochet Army but to install in Chile a socialist regime. Well... this was not acceptable for Ampuero, as he felt that there was no subjective rationale in all of this. He was not convinced of this policy. Not only this, but he was not convinced that Fidel's Cuba was the democratic and economic model for Chile.

I believe that Mr Ampuero was a Communist militant in Chile and, after the coup, ended up in Germany, where he met the daughter of a high official of the Cuban Government, then went to Cuba and got married. He studied in Cuba, was a member of the exile Chilean community in Cuba, become a future cadet and his marriage failed. But I also believe that he met Cuban dissidents and, bit by bit, he began to change his political views and principles to become a critic of Cuba and its Government. The book he wrote, I think, narrates the story of a Chilean exile in Cuba who began to feel the contradictions of Cuban society. I believe he is a very good writer and that he may be right when he expresses the view that, for whatever reasons, many on the left are trying to deny their own responsibilities in the pursuit of policies which were to affect adversely its militants and the people of Chile as a whole.

But we do not need to have a bad experience in Cuba or be a former Communist Party member to be critical of the Left. Of course they are not immune to criticism and they too, and before it is too late, should tell us all what they think were their responsibilities in the tragedy which began to unfold as soon as Allende was elected in 1970. After all, his former party played a mayor role in the Government I supported. I put faith in his party and in the others which were part of Popular Unity, such as the Socialists, etc. Without myself being a communist, a socialist or a MIR sympathiser, I put faith, like millions of others, in political militants like him. I feel, in a way, betrayed by people like him, not because of his criticisms of Cuba but because he ended up writing for a tabloid belonging to a pro-Pinochet media conglomerate, which does not represents the interests of the poor of Chile. In my view, this fact diminished everything he had to say about the Left.

But what about the fact that Ampuero was not convinced that Fidel's Cuba was the democratic and economic model for Chile.

I have never been in Cuba but I am not ignorant of the position that Fidel and the Cuban people hold in relation to the world at large. I have a lot of sympathy for the Cuban people, which include those who are in Miami and Fidel. My background in Chile, my knowledge of the world and of Latin America, my knowledge of the social forces that control the destiny of the Latin American people, my knowledge of the very unsympathetic international policy of the United States towards Latin America and the hatred of that country for socialist ideas and values developed in Latin America helped me to understand what it is all about and to make me feel positively towards what Fidel has, or has not, achieved in Cuba, with the natural and human resources available.

It may be that Cuba is not paradise but I know that, as I speak to you, there is a bloody hell for millions and millions of Latin Americans in their own countries, including Chileans. Look, for example, at what is taking place in Argentina. Here we have one of the richest countries in the world, in terms of natural and human resources, and a country which is almost free from natural disasters, economically ruined and humiliated morally in the eyes of the international community by non-communist politicians. I challenge anybody to

compare the political behaviour of Fidel in Cuba with the political behaviour of Pinochet in Chile, Fujimori in Peru and the Argentinean political class with its armed forces which not only ruined the country but caused the disappearances of about 30 thousand people in the terrible military repression of the 1970s.

It is Interesting to notice that, as I am talking to you, the populist leader of the Right in Chile, Mr Joaquin Lavin, is visiting Cuba because, he said, he is interested in the Cuban National Health Service as a system which could be implemented with value in his own country. (Carlos showed me a video from Chilean Television, showing Fidel and Lavin together.)

We need to end our discussion of the role of the historian but, before we do that, while you were talking I was looking to an essay you have here about Oswald Spengler and about his well-known work, “The Decline of the West”. Can I ask you why you are interested in Spengler.

*It happened that a friend of mine sent me an article from Chile called **Historiografía conservadora chilena: La influencia de Oswald Spengler** because I wanted to know a bit about who had been the influences on Chilean historians. The article is dated 10/01/02 and was written by Cristian Gasmuri the director of the History Institute of the **Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile**. This is a very short article in which Mr Gasmuri says that Oswald Spengler’s “The Decline of the West” had had an enormous influence on conservative historians who also happened to be admirers of authoritarian regimes. Francisco de Encina, Alberto Edwards Vives, Jaime Eyzaguirre, Mario Góngora, Gonzalo Vial, the Pinochetist historian, are all singled out as historians influenced by Spengler. What is disturbing is to know that Spengler is seen as an intellectual who provided inspiration to Nazism, in the words of Gasmuri, until, more or less, the middle of the 1920s.*

Carlos would you like to end this first part of the interview with a conclusion?

*Yes. More than a conclusion - I would like to finish by criticising the centre left coalition known as the **Concertación** which has governed Chile, more or less under democratic conditions, since Pinochet left power in 1990.*

Many of these former ‘lefties’ and Christian Democrats, now in Government, did, in my opinion, very little to rectify our most recent history. It seems to me that these people were not interested in basic things such as the idea of justice and the truth about our most recent past.

But in an article in the Mostrador (5/3/02) Aylwin, the Christian Democrat leader, defended the transition period toward democracy.

(Aylwin was the elected president of Chile after Pinochet left power in 1990. Notice that Pinochet, however, continued to be the Commander in Chief of the Chilean Army until 1998).

First of all, millions of Chileans like me wants to know why Aylwin and his party, the Christian Democrats, and the right-wing parties supported the coup. We want to know why they helped to develop in our country a campaign of terror and hysteria against Salvador Allende and his millions of supporters like me. We want to know their historical responsibilities in many events which took place during the 1960s and 1970s.

We also want to know why Mr Aylwin’s Christian Democrats, once again in power during the 1990s, allow the Chilean State to pursue a policy of silence and oblivion.

*(**política de olvido y silencio**) Under his Government, Pinochet and many torturers were able to walk freely while million of Chileans, including the families of the disappeared were looking for their relatives and demanding justice. People like Aylwin continued to do everything in their power to put a smoke screen over our recent past.*

But Mr Aylwin said that the transition was a very difficult period. He developed, you must understand, the policy of consent and the permanent search for accords with the Chilean Armed Forces, who were the real masters in Chile.

But his party also seems to have had a difficult period back in 1964, when his party, the PDC Christian Democratic Party, in order to overcome Salvador Allende and his coalition, FRAP, had to resort to dirty tricks. Do you see this book here?

(Carlos shows me a book – “Modern Latin America” (third edition) by Thomas E. Skidmore and Peter H. Smith, published by Oxford University Press) He read from this book - page 130:

‘Frei and the PDC wasted no time in branding FRAP as an extension of Moscow. Cleverly written campaign cartoons and radio jingles played on fears of ‘another Cuba’ in Chile, fears known to be highly exploitable. The U. S. government, as well as the West European Christian Democrats, also took a strong interest in this contest between reformism and Marxism. The Central Intelligence Agency would later admit to contributing more than 50 percent of Frei’s campaign expenses. In this and other ways, probably including money and support from U. S. business firms, the Chilean voters felt the effects of strong North American interests.

“You see how this respectable gentleman speaks of “difficulties”, when, in fact, what we want is a historical critical analysis of his party’s role in Chilean politics in order to clarify our history”.

But The Rettig Commission was established under his Government, wasn’t it?

They produced a very important document, which showed, in an official manner, the atrocities of the military regime. Nothing was done, however, to remove and bring to justice many of the military involved in the atrocities during the Pinochet years.

But Chile was economically growing at a very steady pace and gaining a lot of international recognition for its economic policies and for the manner in which the country was conducting the transition from dictatorship to democracy.

I recognise that these were very difficult times, as the Concertación had to deal with very delicate matters, including its dealings with the Armed Forces. But we must be careful here. The so called successful economic policies were the ones put in place by the Pinochet regime, as I pointed out in my “Barrio”. Remember that I am still talking in terms of the working class.

From this perspective they, as usual, never got a good deal. Remember that, while Aylwin defended the transition period, he also criticised the market economy for the social inequality that it generates (El Mostrador, 5/3/02).

Can you see the Concertación’s point of view? Here we have a situation in which they choose to have economic development as opposed to human rights developments. Which of these two things were more important for the country?

Before anything else we must call for a constitution that guarantees democracy. As we speak, we still have a constitution written in Pinochet’s time. A country also must guarantee to all its citizens that their human rights are respected by law. I believe that this is not the case. The Armed Forces must be accountable to the Chilean people. I believe this is not the case. Chileans know of the Armed Forces’ but little about their privileges in society.

The social impact of this economic boom, as a product of our most recent history, is the subject that interests me. For me, the most important thing after the ending of the dictatorship was to resolve, in my country, the issue of human rights and to bring to account the military men who tortured and killed Chileans. Somebody, somewhere, had to show Chileans that justice and fairness are important matters in Chile. This is not the case in the Chile of today.

One of these Governments of the transition was led by another Christian Democrat, Eduardo Frei Ruiz-Tagle, who is the son of Eduardo Frei Montalva, who beat Salvador Allende in 1964. It was during his Government that Pinochet was detained in London. His Government as well as that of Aylwin, in my view, is guilty of pursuing a policy of economic growth over the pain of so many people. Here we had a ‘democratic’ Government perceived by many in Chile as doing nothing on behalf of the victims of Pinochet. This is reprehensible in my view.

What we, Chileans, must know and never forget is that it was the work of the exile community in London, Baltazar Garzón a Spanish judge, Scotland Yard, the House of Lords in London, some Government ministers of Tony Blair’s Government, many Liberal Democrat and Labour MPs and many international bodies such as human rights organisations, Amnesty International and the solidarity work of so many individuals of different backgrounds and nationalities that made it possible to detain and hold Pinochet in London for a year. This event had a tremendous impact in our country because it allowed Chileans to know the real Pinochet and to get to know something more about their most recent past history.

This will be part of the real history of your country?

*Yes!. In addition, the judiciary, the right-wing parties, such as **Renovación Nacional (RN)** and **La Unión Democrática Independiente (UDI)**, the Armed Forces, sectors of the Catholic Church and millions of Chilean supporters of Pinochet are all guilty of permitting, and supporting, the pursuit, in their country, of a policy of silence about what really happened in 17 years of Dictatorship. All these will also be part of our history.*

What do you mean?

They kept quiet about the miseries that the dictatorship brought into the homes of millions of other Chileans. Not only this, but these sectors were happy to have a policy of “forgiveness” in their country. The victims, on the other hand, can easily argue that it is very easy to say “forget” when the families of Pinochet’s supporters escaped the full force of the atrocities carried out by the dictatorship.

Are you sure about that?

About what?

About people in Chile who did not want to know anything about what had happened during the dictatorship?

Positive. I remember an aunt of mine, the half- sister of my father, who said to me over the phone that I should forget about the past and look to the future. This is exactly what the Armed Forces and many people in Chile were trying to do in order to avoid their own responsibilities and the horrible reality experienced by millions of people. I see in this action a tragedy of modern Chile in which, with the help of the executive, the

legislature, and many state institutions, the Police and the media, the country's Armed Forces wanted, at all costs, to erase our collective historical memory and replace it with our supposed economic successes. But, as happens sometimes in life, the policy of silence collapsed as my 'compatriots' in Chile one day woke up to face reality with the news of Pinochet's detention in London - and this happened just when the **Concertación** government were contentedly and quietly working away under the slogan of the "transition period". In my view, the **Concertación** governments of Christian Democrats Patricio Aylwin and Eduardo Frei Ruiz-Tagle and the **Concertación** governments led by the English-speaking 'socialist' Ricardo Lagos did almost nothing to rectify the notion of Chilean justice.

Are you sure? What about "La mesa de diálogo"?

I invite you to talk to the relatives of the disappeared in Chile and ask them if this "dialogue table", shared by different representatives of the disappeared, the government, the churches and the Armed Forces has given them any satisfaction. My understanding is that this is not the case.

I can assure you that this "dialogue table" has been another meaningless exercise created by the **Concertación** government to create an illusion in the mind of many. You see, after the detention of Pinochet in London, the **Concertación** wished to be seen as doing something.

But this was a very good initiative, wasn't it?

It looks like that, but in reality the initiative proved to be a trick to keep the international and the national public happy.

The **Concertación** has acted with a lot cynicism in relation to human rights, the economy and in its relationship with the Armed Forces.

Did you know that, in the last presidential elections, million of youngsters did not bother to vote?.

Why? They are cynical about a flawed political system.

To vote is very important?

This fundamental civic right is not appreciated by them. The right-wingers, as a result, are the real winners in this situation because they prey on the ignorance of the people.

How can you summarise the performances of the Concertación's Governments?

The **Concertación** Governments can claim economic successes for the middle and upper classes but few successes for the many social layers of the lower classes and the poor.

They cannot claim successes in terms of justice and human rights either. What they have managed to do has been a cosmetic arrangement only (The Rettig Report, for example) and a pact with the Right and the military establishment to allow them to Govern. That's all.

More annoying for many of us is the fact that the **Concertación** tried very hard to bring Pinochet back to Chile from London. The **Concertación** assured us that the conditions for a trial in Chile were in place, when in fact they were not. Today, as I speak, Pinochet is enjoying freedom in Chile, despite the fact that there is plenty of evidence available to suggest that he is personally guilty of horrific violations of human rights against his own people. The **Concertación** knew, as many of us knew, that, once in Chile, Pinochet was going to come under the protection of the all-powerful Chilean Army.

What is also reprehensible is the fact that the Government of Chile of Ricardo Lagos have done everything in their power to restrict the investigation of violations of human rights. A member of the Chilean Airforce, by the name of Hernan Gabrielli, was accused directly by his victims of torturing them and was also accused of torturing, personally, a little boy of fourteen. Jose Miguel Insulza, an interior minister in Lagos's government and a former **UPeliento***, said that it was not conducive to social peace and to the well being of the country to bring this array of denunciations before a tribunal. **Why?** For Insulza, this could have led to investigations into so many other violations of human rights during the Pinochet Dictatorship.

Upeliento* a contemptuous name given by the Right to the supporters of the Popular Unity. The opposite is **Momio