

Politics and Urban Growth in Santiago, Chile, 1891–1941. By *Richard J. Walter*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005. xvii + 319 pp. Index, notes, bibliography, illustrations, photographs, tables. Cloth, \$65.00. ISBN: 0-804-74982-5.

Reviewed by J. Pablo Silva

Visitors to contemporary Santiago discover a city of contradictions. On the one hand, they encounter a spectacular natural setting, marred by dense smog and the aesthetic blight of unchecked urban sprawl. On the other hand, they may occasionally stumble into pockets of well-planned and harmonious neighborhoods, many of which are now connected by a comfortable and efficient metro system. In this book, Richard Walter unearths some of the historical roots of these contemporary contradictions. In his account of Santiago's urban politics in the first half of the twentieth century, he exposes both the ambitions and the pathologies of Santiago's government in that formative period. In the process, Walter offers ample evidence that the city's municipal administration could be "fractious and ineffective" and yet also "sincere and serious" (p. 271), a divisive state of affairs that goes a long way toward explaining Santiago's present dual nature. Walter also demonstrates that city politics "both reflected and contributed" to national politics (p. 182). In that sense, his account of Chilean politics and policymaking offers a level of detail that is largely missing from the Chilean historiography. Particularly illuminating is his unique examination of the poor relations between the municipal government and the private companies that provided critical key services.

Like Walter's earlier volume on Buenos Aires covering roughly the same period, this book is mainly a chronicle of the city's municipal council, covering the major issues debated by the council, its relations with other government entities, and its evolution from elected body to appointed committee and back again. The narrative is regularly punctuated with short descriptions of the highly partisan competition for municipal offices, thereby connecting events in the council with national party politics. Walter devotes separate chapters to the turn of each of four decades, offering descriptive snapshots of Santiago's social and physical development and revealing the impact of urban politics on the lives of ordinary people.

For the residents of Santiago, the principal issue was transportation. Walter shows that from one election cycle to the next nothing aroused political passions like the prospects of increased streetcar fares or cuts in service. The issue took on nationalist overtones because the streetcar company was owned by foreigners. Indeed, Walter makes a reasonable case that the long-running conflict over the streetcars contributed to the rise of economic nationalism that became a central ideological plank in Chilean politics, even for conservatives (p. 122). He also demonstrates that ideological differences were not always the main cause of the extraordinary divisiveness of Chilean politics in this period. Time and again, the city council reached a stalemate on basic administrative issues because the members were going at each other's throats over secondary concerns. Sometimes they would fight (in some cases literally) over the distribution of municipal jobs to party loyalists; at other times, shifts in political coalitions at the national level would have a disruptive effect on council proceedings. As a result, the council was often ineffective, and it became an object of popular derision. Nevertheless, Walter is at pains to argue that occasionally there were breakthroughs, leading to some legislative and administrative achievements.

This book has much to recommend it. One minor flaw is the lack of a downtown map of the principal streets, which would have made the discussions easier to follow, particularly for people unfamiliar with the city. Another complaint is that the author does not adequately explain how his findings on Santiago challenge earlier views on the Chilean politics of this period. In contrast to prevailing scholarly opinion, Walter maintains that the various political parties frequently held similar policy positions but were prevented from reaching agreements because the institutional structure forced politicians to put party interests ahead of legislative accomplishment. This is an important finding, and one that Walter could have emphasized more. Nevertheless, he has opened a new window onto Chilean political history, not least because of the unique parallels he has drawn with events in other Latin American cities. The book is also impressive for the sheer quantity of primary sources he has compressed into direct, readable prose. Scholars of international business will find it an incomparable resource for studying the origins of Chilean hostility to foreign-owned businesses.

J. Pablo Silva is assistant professor of history at Grinnell College. He is currently at work on a book about Chilean white-collar unions during the interwar period and has an article on the topic forthcoming in the journal Labor: Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas.