Workers Like All the Rest of Them

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CHAPTER 5

Women’s Rights, Workers’ Rights

Military Rule and Domestic Worker Activism

The military intervention of September 11, 1973, not only violently truncated the Chilean road to socialism, beginning one of the longest periods of state violence in Chile’s history, but also transformed the landscape of political mobilization, especially for those who participated in unions and other forms of collective organization. Compared with those workers whose labor rights had been violently suspended by the military junta, however, Chile’s domestic workers experienced not so much the reversal of their political and legal status—which they had not yet obtained—as they did the frustration of their most recent efforts to pass new protective legislation for their trade under the Popular Unity regime. In this respect, the military’s abrogation of the Labor Code in 1973 had little direct impact on how employers hired and fired, compensated, and treated their domestic workers. Like workers in other sectors, over the next seventeen years empleadas suffered the shocks of the military’s neoliberal economic turn, as well as the furious violence of a civil-military regime bent on the destruction of the political Left and all mobilized resistance to authoritarian rule.¹

However, in the midst of the military’s campaign of systematic violence against workers and their organizations—which accounts for a high proportion of the many thousands tortured, killed, and/or “disappeared” by the military government—Chilean domestic workers’ organizations actually flourished under military rule. After a hiatus of several months imposed by the most severe violence following the coup, in January 1974 ANECAP members got back to work, continuing to provide support, legal services, employment training, and pastoral services to domestic workers throughout Chile. Making only occasional reference in meeting minutes to the ongoing state of siege and military decree-laws on censorship and association, leaders in ANECAP organized with care, always aware that they were subject to military surveillance and possible...
arrest. Over the course of the 1970s, however, and with support from Chilean university students and international aid organizations, ANECAP was able to significantly expand its services and increase the participation of domestic workers. And unlike other unions that were crushed and disbanded in the months following the coup, SINTRACAP’s leaders were also able to offer services through ANECAP, whose affiliation with the Church offered them greater legitimacy and protection under the new regime.

ANECAP proved an especially enduring site for mobilizing domestic workers in spite of the dictatorship for two key reasons, the first of which was their status as an association founded by and enjoying the protection of the Catholic Church. The Archbishopric of Santiago, after all, held the title to the Hogar de la Empleada; appointed ANECAP’s spiritual director from among its clergy; and within months of the coup had helped to form the Committee for Peace (Comité Pro-Paz), an ecumenical group of religious leaders who intervened on behalf of those persecuted by the military regime that laid the foundation for the Catholic Church’s creation of its own enduring human rights organization, the Vicariate of Solidarity (Vicaría de la Solidaridad). But under military rule domestic worker activists finally reaped a certain benefit from their relative invisibility as workers: unlike the male mining, factory, and rural workers who bore the brunt of the military’s campaign of state violence and surveillance, Chile’s predominantly female domestic service workforce had little in the way of labor rights to lose, and in a perverse way benefitted from the persistent invisibility of their work as “labor.” Carefully curating their status as an association “of Christian inspiration,” ANECAP’s leaders continued their legal, housing, educational, and religious services for domestic workers throughout Chile, a project that attracted significant grant funding from foreign churches and aid organizations as the dictatorship (and the deepening inequality its policies fostered) wore on. In this way, and in a fashion reminiscent of contemporaneous mothers’ movements for human rights in Argentina and Guatemala, domestic workers remained strategically illegible as workers and activists to a military regime committed to the suppression (or elimination) of both.

Significantly, ANECAP then emerged as a prominent national organization in the wake of the regime’s consolidation—enacted through the 1978 referendum on Pinochet and the 1980 Constitution—offering important support to the emerging, broad-based mobilization of women against the dictatorship. As public opposition to the regime grew in the 1980s, the domestic workers’ movement expanded and fostered greater politicization, advancing members’ concerns in tandem with Catholic, feminist and democratic protests against the
seventeen-year Pinochet regime. At this juncture, the regime’s patriarchal, traditionalist propaganda also inspired collaboration between feminists and domestic workers in the 1980s, not only popularizing a feminist critique of domestic service, but also spurring the creation of financial and technical networks that would transform the outreach and ideology of domestic workers’ movements. Despite this new alliance, the older strand of empleada activist discourse—e.g., the social Catholicism of the JOC and early ANECAP—remained foundational for the movement in the 1980s, as Catholic leaders continued to play an active and prophetic role in protesting the regime’s anti-democratic and repressive practices. As political opposition to the regime gained momentum after 1983, domestic workers frequently combined feminist and progressive Catholic arguments and alliances, joining the broad politics of conciertación that animated Chile’s return to democracy via plebiscite in 1989. Along with the human rights, anti-poverty, student and religious organizations that had emerged under military rule, under the aegis of ANECAP domestic worker activists advanced their agenda of service and unionization, building a movement for empleadas’ rights—as workers and women—that would long outlast the dictatorship and survive to the present day.

Finally, through the lens of the domestic workers movement, we can see how the violently anti-political regime actually provided new opportunities for political alliance, and for collaboration across class and political lines, networks that would install domestic workers’ rights as an irrefutable aspiration of the emerging democratic regime. Theirs is a story of resilience and persistence in the face of repression, as well as one of continuity and adaptation: by continuing to participate in religious, social, and trade union activities, and cultivating new international donors and domestic allies, empleadas built a sustainable national movement that would in time contribute leadership and symbolic resources to the broad-based movements that ultimately toppled the regime. This complex web of alliances is not unique to domestic workers, but rather representative of the broader processes shaping human rights, labor, feminist, party, indigenous and religious activism in the same period. Though scholars have tended to emphasize how ideological differences have historically divided Chilean activists on the Center-Left and within the Left, an analysis attentive to a wider range of social movement actors (such as the Church and women’s movements) provides important context for how political alliances and movements were reconstituted in the transition to civilian democracy in the 1990s. Only by understanding the diverse identities and intersections at the heart of the domestic workers’ movement under dictatorship can we appreciate the success of resulting labor rights legislation for domestic workers passed in the 1990s.
Beyond Survival: Empleada Activism after the Coup

Like other mass movements and union organizations, domestic workers’ associations were immediately impacted by the military intervention of 1973. In their early morning coup against the elected socialist government of Salvador Allende, the Chilean Armed Forces stunned the world by bringing Allende’s government to a violent end and installing a national security regime, much like those recently imposed elsewhere in Latin America. In the first three months of military rule, tens of thousands of civilians were detained and tortured, several thousand “disappeared,” and many others driven into exile. The military junta (including Gen. Augusto Pinochet) declared a state of siege, imposing a curfew and press censorship, closing schools and universities, suspending the Congress and banning Left political parties. Although widespread evidence of human rights abuses prompted protest from within and without the country—inspiring one of the Cold War’s most powerful human rights movements—military leaders and their civilian allies nevertheless succeeded in violently overcoming their political opposition, crushing vibrant unions and political parties, jailing, torturing, and exiling political opponents, and consolidating rule by force and military decree. The “culture of fear” imposed through force and threats, later supplemented by Pinochet’s legal and political maneuvers to consolidate military rule, provides the context in which domestic workers continued to associate and struggle for labor rights under military rule.

In the upheaval following the September 11 coup, SINTRACAP lost its rented union hall, asked to leave because the owners feared reprisals from security forces. Rather than sharing offices with a national federation (FEGRECH, Chilean Workers’ Federation), SINTRACAP moved on after a year with no offices to share space with the Construction Workers’ Union, where their meetings were monitored by police. Subjected occasionally to police raids, the union nevertheless continued, receiving authorization from the government to run an employment bureau, organizing a cultural collective, publishing the bulletin SINCOOP (Sindicato y Cooperativa), and maintaining contact with the weakened provincial unions. The biggest challenge to the union’s continuing work was the generalized fear of repression leveled by the military regime against any form of organization: Aída Moreno was arrested twice, once when she went to City Hall to register her status as an officer of ANECAP, and again during a speech to women assembled on International Women’s Day. Union leaders recognized the impact of these fears when they tried, in 1975, to convene domestic workers for the National Day of the Empleada, when the union only filled ten of
the twenty busses contracted for the event, signaling what would become a long
period of decline and dormancy for the secular union: “Over time, we lost this
tradition and the right we had already won: the right of thousands of workers to
enjoy a single day of relaxation and sociability.”

Activists affiliated with the Catholic Church, on the other hand, were bet-
ter positioned to continue their work, almost uninterrupted, and some union
activists became prominent leaders within ANECAP in this period. Within
four months of the coup, domestic workers had resumed their yearly National
Assembly and monthly Board meetings, declaring the following goal for 1974:
“To build the brotherhood of Christ (fraternidad en Cristo) among domestic
workers in Chile, in order to strengthen the trade and contribute to national
reconciliation.” Within the first year of military rule, ANECAP not only re-
ceived authorization from the military junta to publish the monthly Boletín de
la Empleada (financed by the Catholic Church, and subject to military review),
but also held their annual cultural celebration—complete with presentations
on the group’s trade and religious activities—in the Don Bosco auditorium. In
what would later become a sustained effort, the earliest meetings of the board
after the coup included plans to survey their membership about “the reality of
the domestic servant,” information activists considered vital to their efforts to
secure funds, work with employers, and continue to press for labor legislation
for their trade.

ANECAP’s historic affiliation with the Catholic Church provided not only
relative protection from direct repression, but also access to a network of Catho-
lie professionals and institutions that advocated for empleadas’ basic legal rights:
in some ways the military regime and its policies increased public attention to
those hardest hit by military repression and economic policies, strengthening
ties between ANECAP on the one hand, and universities, NGOs, and churches
on the other. As agreed the year before the coup, the ANECAP Board started
working with faculty and students at the Catholic University in early 1974, first
by inviting the Catholic University Law School’s Department of Legal Practice
and Assistance (Departamento de Práctica y Asistencia Legal or DEPAL) to
provide courses orienting members to empleadas’ legal rights, and later through
sustained internships of law and social work students with the Association.
These were not casual arrangements, but rather formal relationships established
between the two institutions: law interns offered classes for domestic work-
ers in Santiago and provincial centers, while two students helped the Hogar
staff to provide childcare, job placement, and professionalization workshops to
empleadas.
With its continuing close ties to the Catholic Church, ANECAP also benefited from the relative protection offered by its religious directors and legal counsel provided by the Workers’ Pastoral Office housed in the Vicariate of Solidarity. This collaboration was expressed through ANECAP’s partnership with DEPAL, which allowed attorneys and law students to provide legal advice and collect data for their 1976 study, “The Reality of Chile’s Domestic Workers.” This study, which included empleadas’ working and living conditions, attitudes of employers, and a proposal for new legislation, would serve the board as important evidence for their work with employers, empleadas, and government officials in the years ahead.

Even under the constraints of military rule in the 1970s, domestic worker activists and their allies returned to the question of empleadas’ exclusion from basic labor protections as a starting point for improving their trade. Out of ANECAP’s collaboration with university law programs came a succession of interns and tesistas who supported the group’s continued attempts to introduce new labor legislation. Humberto Bravo Navarette, for example, in 1976 wrote his law thesis for the University of Concepción, an exhaustive review of the legal status of domestic workers in Chile that drew on ANECAP as well as state records. According to Bravo Navarette, ANECAP leaders worked with union leaders and representatives from DEPAL to draft materials relative to domestic work contracts, and together presented them to officials at the Ministry of Labor—with a particular emphasis on the need for minimum wage regulations—in June 1975. In a proposal subsequently drafted in September 1975, “Project for a Legislative Statute for Domestic Workers,” activists drew on both DEPAL and Bravo Navarette’s work in their appeal to military leaders for better regulation of their trade: “we hope our petition will be well-received by the Government both because it asks for a just recognition for this group of long-suffering workers, and because it will allow for their more effective integration into the process of our country’s development.”

Significantly, ANECAP’s proposal differed in tone and substance from the legislative proposals of earlier decades: stressing ANECAP’s ties to the Church and its fundamentally associative (versus syndicalist) nature, and eschewing demands for labor rights per se, the proposal suggested measures through which the military regime could assist empleadas: by helping ANECAP to promote trade certification, self-help organizations, and a national registry of empleadas. Shying away from any details for any change to existing law, the document went on to elaborate the limited scope of ANECAP’s request, stipulating that “the change that we hope the Project will produce will in no way be forced,
but rather we will allow this to be slowly produced over time.” Moreover, the costs of these changes would be assumed only by the workers themselves, so that “the State and employers remain free of any burden.” Finally, the document also stipulated that the “pleasure, well-being, and privacy of the family” would continue to be respected, allowing for example an employer of a pregnant domestic worker to choose between granting her maternity leave (and reserving her position) and ending her contract (with an unspecified severance package that would help her survive until she found new work after the birth of the child). The plan for professional certification—in stark contrast with the 1970–1972 proposals—watered down this provision to the point of insignificance; any person seeking employment as a domestic worker might carry a carnet (license), but would not need prior experience or training to obtain it. Instead, the carnet signified the worker’s commitment to continuing her professional training after obtaining work: in this fashion, “the Professional License that would be granted does not interfere directly or indirectly with the freedom of labor.” In their proposal to implement a system of professional certification, but establishing a loophole through which employers and employees could operate without it, activists showed caution and restraint, fitting their request for rights within the parameters of the free market relations favored by the neoliberal regime.

On the other hand, even as activists approached military officials with evident caution, the principles of ANECAP remained very similar to those guiding the association throughout its history: in its internal report of activities for 1976, ANECAP leaders called for “the liberation of the empleada as a woman and as a worker [and recognition] of her active and free participation in the development of our country.” As an association, they wrote, ANECAP responded to the needs of empleadas as women—essentially, the need to affirm their humanity and rights to marriage and family—as Christians, and as workers. Significantly, empleadas’ labor rights were based here in a familiar trope of their importance to the function and happiness of families, but also went on to state that ANECAP sought to advance their rights to association and protection as workers:

- the Empleadas can, through unity and organization, build a new labor structure or system, where there is no dependency or disrespect, but rather competent, respectable and free work.
- they can organize in unions, so that through consciousness and unity, along with the other women workers, they contribute to the social and economic transformation of our country.
• they make employers obey social laws, paying a just wage and corresponding benefits, and fundamentally improve current domestic service and welfare laws.21

Echoing familiar union themes of solidarity and rights, as well as the importance of pastoral work with empleadas, the report went on to detail the range of activities supported by ANECAP in 1976, from training classes in professional skills and outreach to needy empleadas to trade mobilization and campaigns to change labor regulations.22

Several years after the coup, and under the new leadership of the former SINTRACAP president Aída Moreno, ANECAP’s records attest to an developing relationship between ANECAP and other empleadas’ associations, such as SINTRACAP and the Housing Cooperative, which ANECAP leaders repeatedly noted “are failing . . . we have to support them so that they become active again.”23 President Aída Moreno and Secretary Ana Colluquín reported meetings with the union and the cooperative, where they discussed “whether we can work together.”24 The following month, ANECAP hosted a May Day event featuring a panel of workers’ and religious organizations, attended by about fifty empleadas.25 Moreno also represented ANECAP, along with representatives from the retirees’ and textile workers’ unions, in their attempts to build a “women’s department” within the Coordinadora Nacional Sindical. When this group celebrated International Women’s Day in 1976, Moreno and the SINTRACAP sought permission for a mass gathering of women at the Caupolicán Theater, one of the first mass meetings held under military rule that was later known as the “Gran Caupolicánazo.” Though Moreno was almost arrested during her speech—and was later warned to stay out of politics—the event steeled Moreno’s resolve to continue her activism and marked a new phase in the development of the Chilean women’s movement.26

The year 1976 was also a watershed year for ANECAP with respect to the extent and permanence of its presence as a national association. Responding to new requirements by local military commanders that all associations “normalize” their statutes, membership, and elected leadership, the ANECAP Board inaugurated a registry with twenty-five dues-paying members in June 1976, and began to report its leadership and statutes to the Municipality.27 In Santiago, a Dutch-funded initiative allowed activists to inaugurate new buildings for the Hogar de la Empleada, a ceremony attended by the Dutch ambassador and the Chilean archbishop. In July, the National Directorate signed several agreements with Chilean service NGOs, in particular with CEDAP (Permanent Council of
Institutions for Private Adult Education), which provided training workshops in archives and human resources for ANECAP leadership. And with support from Father Cornelio Wolff, ANECAP leaders organized outreach to multiple provincial organizations, offering leadership training, pastoral activities, and other services regularly available to empleadas in Santiago. All of these efforts, together with a greater degree of planning and assessment visible in the 1976 report, constituted a high-water mark for the organization under military rule, suggesting that the protection and support of the Catholic Church, resources provided by foreign churches and governments, and constant effort by paid leadership and a strong network of volunteers, had placed the organization on excellent footing by 1976.

Three years after ANECAP sent its recommendations to the Ministry of Labor, the articles regarding domestic service contracts contained in the 1978 Labor Code (Decree-Law 2,200) were innovative—establishing for the first time a legal obligation for written contracts for empleadas—but were very limited insofar as they regulated domestic work as a kind of “special contract.” Building on a more ample definition of domestic workers than previous legislation—including, for example, part-time workers as well as those engaged in cleaning or caretaking activities in charitable institutions—the “domestic workers’ contract” established minimal protections to domestic workers, reaffirming some of the more paternalistic articles of the 1931 labor code (and the Civil Code before that). In the case of the death of an employer, for example, the domestic worker’s contract passed to the control of the remaining family, “who will in solidarity be responsible for fulfilling the obligations established by the contract.” The law also reversed past progress toward limiting domestic workers’ hours, establishing only an absolute minimum rest of ten hours daily, and one day off per week. Gone were the concerns about carnets, education, organization embedded in Popular Unity-era proposals and alluded to in ANECAP’s request to the Ministry of Labor in 1975. Once again, the contract of the domestic worker constituted the bare minimum of state regulation but was defined in such a way as to preserve employers’ mandate to set wages, determine working conditions, and terminate employment.28

Domestic workers’ aspiration to a more robust recognition of their labor rights clearly suffered a setback in the military’s 1978 Labor Code, as did the rights of all workers in this and subsequent decree laws on labor.29 However, a significant contribution of this legislation was that it legalized the terminology “trabajadoras de casa particular” (“workers in private homes” or domestic workers) for the first time. It was the Popular Unity law of November 1972 that had first changed
the terminology of the Labor Code, transforming “empleados domésticos” into “empleados de casas particulares.” But, as Bravo Navarette pointed out, the Labor Code of 1978 went further, eliminating the longstanding distinction in Chilean labor law between categories of white- and blue-collar workers (empleados and obreros, respectively), using “trabajador” to refer exclusively to workers engaged in any form of paid work. Thus, although the critical transition away from the demeaning term “domésticos” had been codified by the socialist government, it was the military government that renamed domestic workers, eliminating the long-standing contradiction in the 1931 labor code by which “domestic employees” were denied rights ascribed to salaried “empleados.” Of course, in the context of the violent marginalization of organized labor and national economic development that deepened income inequality for workers, domestic workers’ semantic victory—known at last as “workers”—provided little cause for celebration. 


Regardless of the military government’s failure to protect domestic workers in the new Labor Code, 1978 also marked the beginning of an expansion and increasing complexity of both the Catholic and the secular wings of the domestic workers’ movement. First, as summer waned in Chile, members of the ANECAP National Board fanned out throughout the country, meeting with activists and former leaders in Valdivia, Puerto Montt, Talca, and Concepción, garnering support for the board’s plan to stimulate Christian base communities among empleadas in the year ahead. The National Directorate minutes record a period of intensified work, including a revision of the association’s statutes, scheduling extra national assembly meetings, and board members’ work to found new chapters of ANECAP in provincial cities like Coyaique. The question of activists’ political engagement—submerged since the Popular Unity period in the organization’s survival strategies—also reemerged that year, as the board reaffirmed the authority and independence of the ANECAP president, a move that may explain the resignation of spiritual director Father Cornelio Lemers in August, which the board secretary asserts was because “he wasn’t clear on pastoral work with empleadas. And he was not comfortable with the the [illeg] of the Board.” The following year, politics was also the focus on one funding agency’s caveat about its grants for empleadas to study at ANECAP: board minutes record that “The agreement we have stipulates that the grants will end if any political activity is detected.”

Also in 1978, with support from Bernardino Piñera, activists in the secular union managed to reorganize Santiago and provincial unions into a national
union, the National Commission of Domestic Workers’ Unions (Comisión Nacional de Sindicatos de Trabajadoras de Casa Particular or CONSTRACAP). Also known as the Coordinating Commission of the Organizations of the Domestic Worker Trade, the organization responded to the regime’s efforts to limit union activities through minimum membership requirements. Monthly meetings of the executive committee of CONSTRACAP convened delegates from SINTRACAP, ANECAP, and the savings and housing cooperatives. The commission was established to coordinate these organizations’ efforts to promote the common cause of domestic workers, while at the same time clarifying distinctions among participant organizations: “We will elaborate a common pamphlet in which the importance of each organization is clarified, making the specific function of each organization very clear, to avoid any confusion.” At the first meeting of the commission, in July 1979, representatives of ANECAP (i), the union (4), the savings cooperative (3) and housing cooperative (2), expressed high hopes that the leaders could find common ground, not only advancing their cause but also “that we come to be a real team, we should define who will participate in this meeting regularly. . . . Go over the diverse points of view, to avoid any prejudices or misunderstandings that might exist among the organizations’ leaders, in order to clarify and eliminate them.” In this group, at least, various appeals to their unity as “real Christian militants” indicated the common roots of this leadership in the jocist era of ANECAP. As the mimeographed bulletin Caminando published by CONSTRACAP in the 1980s demonstrated, the commission functioned essentially as a clearinghouse for information on the various organizations, disseminating information on their various anniversaries, planned events, and proposed changes to labor legislation.

The burst of independent activity by the Executive Board in 1978 led to further changes in ANECAP the following year: members elected a new directorate and the Church appointed the organization’s first lay asesor, Fernando Orchard, who proved to be very effective at mobilizing international religious support for the association via specific proposals for ANECAP projects. These projects foregrounded catechism and vocational as well as leadership training, taking explicit distance from the more syndicalist stance of the 1969–1973 period and reviving the Catholic worker agenda of the 1950s. According to a 1983 internal account of the domestic workers’ movement, the period after 1979 represented a

. . . return to origins. The association seeks to generate a group of militants who, in the spirit of social Catholicism (jocismo), will pursue the revival of the trade; that is, the association seeks to recover the feeling of a specialized
movement within Catholic Action. Catechetical activity increases. The services provided to the trade are reorganized and strengthened . . . the relationship to the unions is redefined: we combine mutual autonomy with plans for collaboration.39

The Santiago pastoral campaign of 1979 articulated a very different vision of ANECAP objectives than the efforts of the ANECAP Board and union activists the year before, directing pastoral efforts through parish structures and avoiding links to union organizations and activities that had developed under Father Verdugo’s leadership prior to 1973.40

In 1979, SINTRACAP and the remaining unions organized by ANECAP faced a common institutional crisis: the military decree-law 2,756 demanded that unions show significant active membership to remain legal. In a petition to the Ministry of Labor dated June 1981, SINTRACAP’s president Aída Moreno pled the domestic workers’ special case:

As you surely understand, Mr. Minister, our occupation presents such special characteristics that it is extremely difficult to unionize, since the workers exercise their trade very spread out and normally live in their employers’ homes; the worker who is puertas afuera works more occasionally. . . . we ask your grace (usía) to consider our special circumstances and modify the law that demands such a high number of members, and consider lowering this to the same number that was demanded before, that is, 25 members.41

The petition went on to request greater ministerial oversight of domestic service labor relations (including contracts stipulated by the 1978 labor code), and asked again for recognition of November 21 as a National Day of the Domestic worker.

Like many other trades and social movements, the period following the approval of the 1980 Constitution, and on the eve of the impending financial crisis that would spark bank intervention and street protests in 1983, domestic worker activists experienced another movement revival. In June of 1982, for example, SINTRACAP joined with other unions in printing, construction, and mining to rent a shared meeting space in Santiago, which allowed them greater stability. At the same time, SINTRACAP leaders also published a new bulletin that offers a glimpse into the activities sponsored by the union in their new downtown office: the group held multiple talks (on economy, union organizing, and social legislation), as well as workshops on personal development and basic education classes. While the union could in no way compete with the range of
basic services offered by ANECAP at the Hogar de la Empleada (offering only a lunch service for members), the bulletin documents the spirit of working-class alliance that infused the group in the early 1980s, which included a round-table event with other workers; discussions of the effects of economic crisis on workers’ wages and employment; and promoting their members’ participation in the Savings Cooperatives and ANECAP.

The close relationship between SINTRACAP and ANECAP leaders in the early 1980s is reflected in an anonymous “testimony” published in SINTRACAP’s first bulletin in 1982, which recounted a domestic worker’s journey through the trade’s associations: after celebrating the Day of the Empleada (to which she was invited by a nun), this “worker” found her way to the Hogar, where she got help from the ANECAP President and the group’s spiritual advisor, joined the group, and took courses on cooking. Once in ANECAP, the worker learned about and joined the union: “I became a member of the Union, and I continue as a member today, because I believe this is something valuable for the woman worker to do. I participate on a committee and I am glad to be able to help my working-class compañeras.”

In fact, SINTRACAP and ANECAP worked so closely together at this point that much of their correspondence was signed jointly, and several key activists rotated through leadership roles in both groups.
For its part, in this period ANECAP experienced its own revival, publicized in a twenty-page bulletin called *Amistad y Esperanza* (Friendship and Hope), which was distributed to members bimonthly well into the 1990s. *Amistad y Esperanza* disseminated information about the Institute housed at the Hogar, which in 1984 boasted twenty-three teachers and five hundred students, as well as a library, kitchen, and cultural-recreational programs. In addition to short histories of ANECAP, religious reflections, and reports on celebrity, religious, and literary figures, *Amistad y Esperanza* published domestic workers’ own poetry, testimony, and interviews. In 1984, María Castillo, talked about the terms used to refer to women in her trade, in a poem entitled “Neither slaves nor managers!:

“Twentieth-century slaves”
Some luminaries call us;
Others call us “managers”
Have you ever seen anything so absurd?
Neither slaves nor managers,
I assure you,
Just a woman who works
Taking care of a home
My god! Why can’t you agree
When you want to call us something,
Yes, we are workers
Like all the rest of them.⁴³

Nestled in the bulletin’s twelve mimeographed pages, amid news from the provinces, an interview with a soap opera star, an advice column, and a page of cartoons and puzzles, readers also found another poem, this time several modified stanzas drawn from “The Pleasure of Serving,” by the Chilean Nobel laureate Gabriela Mistral:

There is joy in being healthy and righteous.
But above all, there is the
beautiful and immense task of serving.

... Great works are not all that matter;
There are small services:
Setting the table, organizing books ... 
Serving is not the chore of inferior people.
God, who gives both fruit and light, serves.
And he has his eyes fixed on our hands
and he asks us each day:
Did you serve today?²⁴

Particularly in reports and editorials about contemporary events, ANECAP leaders also connected domestic workers’ continuing struggle for labor rights with the economic hardships and political authoritarianism affecting all Chileans, evidenced by articles protesting the expulsion of three foreign priests, supporting street protests against the regime, critiquing political leaders’ efforts to dialogue with military leaders, and promoting domestic workers’ participation in the 1988 plebiscite on Pinochet’s continued rule.⁴⁵ In a pointed editorial at the height of the 1983 street protests that damaged the regime, organizers took aim at the violent and anti-democratic nature of the Pinochet regime:

We all know that Chile is in a bad way. We know it and we feel it. It’s too much: the unemployment, the economic insecurity, the anxiety of not having enough to live with dignity and tranquility. Ten years is too much for those Chileans who love their homeland, they are afraid to speak out or they do it anyway at great risk. It has been too long that only one group makes decisions for all Chileans. They can give us lots of explanations for these things; they can blame the recession or the communists. But what is certain is that Chileans want this to change. And at last we dare to say so. We say it with peace with order, and with firmness.⁴⁶

Perhaps more significant than this explicit political expression, in 1984 ANECAP also distributed a pamphlet on domestic workers’ rights, “We invite you to learn your labor rights,” complete with drawings of a kindly empleada and succinct explanations of the requirements (and limitations) of the labor code and social security. Asserting that “We propose that all of us together can turn our trade into work like that of everyone else,” organizers provided a menu of their continuing demands: “Work schedules, freedom to go out when daily work is finished, our own space, private and family life, to be treated as equals at work, and time to exercise our rights as citizens.” The theme of labor rights, ever present in the multiple organizations formed by domestic workers in previous decades, remained key to ANECAP’s activities in this period as well.⁴⁷

The first ten years of military rule restricted the arena for activities of domestic worker activists as they retreated from the political and union allies that had radicalized their struggles for dignity under Popular Unity, causing them to rely once again on the movement’s historic links to the Catholic Church.
And though their efforts bore little fruit, activists were able to maintain their organizations under the repressive and anti-union policies of the military regime, even appealing at times to officials’ paternalism to address the continuing marginalization of domestic workers. Rather than complete demobilization, however, the anti-political regime pressed this movement to seek new kinds of allies to support the expansion and reinvigoration of domestic workers’ politics in the 1980s.

Democracy in the Home? Empleadas and Patronas Unite

Having survived some of the worst years of state violence, by 1980 the domestic workers’ associations were well positioned—like other popular women’s organizations—to attract the attention of leaders in Chile’s middle-class feminist movement. Within the now familiar story of Chilean women’s vigorous mobilization...
against military rule is a lesser known chapter that highlights middle-class feminists’ confrontation with the politics of class privilege, as a handful of patronas and empeadas forged common cause in defense of the rights of domestic workers. This alliance can be explained through local factors, such as the solidarities forged across class and political party lines in the furnace of violent military rule, but it also reflects common tendencies among feminist movements during Latin America’s Cold War period. In addition to synergies and conflicts generated over questions of race, ethnicity, sexuality, and politics, feminists also turned their attention to global debates on reproduction, labor, and family, debates that not infrequently centered the problems of domestic service and unpaid domestic labor.48

This cross-class experiment between domestic worker and feminist activists in 1980s Chile had little precedent in over a century of women’s mobilization. While studies of Chilean feminism—like much of Latin America and indeed the world—have privileged the emergence of middle-class and liberal sectors in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, women also formed associations, unions, and other movements as part of the labor and revolutionary movements, as well as ancillary to the Catholic Church.49 If women’s alliance across class has any clear precedent in Chile, it would be the MEMCH or Chilean Women’s Movement of the Popular Front era (discussed in Chapter 3), which actively sought to bring women together to champion issues of working-class women and families.50

Cold War Chile, as elsewhere in Latin America, saw women’s increasing engagement in both partisan and movement politics: women were instrumental in mobilizations to bring an end to both the Allende presidency in 1973 and the Pinochet dictatorship in 1989.51 The installation of violent military rule and a neoliberal economic project provided a backdrop and stimulus for the expansion of a diverse array of women’s movements—from neighborhood soup kitchens and health education projects to women’s Left, indigenous, and feminist organizations—which pursued radically different agendas for “women’s rights” but also converged in public demonstrations and coordinated efforts to challenge the authority of the military regime.52 In the midst of the ever-shifting politics of the women’s movement, therefore, two groups—the empleadas’ movements and the Women’s Study Circle (Círculo de Estudios de la Mujer)—pursued a radical project of consciousness-raising and collaboration across the divide that had historically separated empleadas and patronas.

Since its founding in a crowded women’s meeting in 1979, the Women’s Study Circle had over several years sought to convene larger, more diverse representation
of women in Chilean society, and in 1981 the group turned its attention to domestic service as an arena of feminist concern. Originally founded under the aegis of the Catholic research center known as the Academy for Christian Humanism, the Circle became a primary locus of middle-class women’s organizing against gender inequality, “in the country and in the home,” by convening working groups, promoting feminist research, and sponsoring public protests in alliance with a range of women’s organizations. The Circle—later separated from the Church because of its vocal engagement with questions of sexuality and women’s rights—served as a space and a springboard for a variety of research and political initiatives for Chilean feminists, thereby strengthening the web of women’s NGOs and women’s public protest that would later contribute to the downfall of the military regime.

In August 1981, representatives of the Circle met with leaders from ANE-CAP and SINTRACAP out of what feminist participants later described as “each group’s spontaneous desire to discuss the topic of paid domestic work.” One of the key organizers of the event, the feminist economist Thelma Gálvez, explained her group’s interest in working with the empleada activists:

We women of the Circle were speaking up for THE WOMEN of 1980s Chile, we discussed various topics related to how we could discover and understand women’s lives from perspectives. We were (and we continue to be) women who were bourgeois and petit bourgeois, middle class and even some elites, Catholics and former Catholics, atheists, women of Santiago and from the Provinces. We were all probably raised at home by “nanas” (empleadas, nannies, servers, and what we now call “domestic workers”—TCP—a term we learned at that conference) and we were not very adept at domestic tasks, sometimes hating them, fleeing them for the university, paid work, political work, feminism, etc.

Gálvez, who with fellow economist Rosalba Todaro would go on to spearhead the Circle’s research and collaboration with the empleadas, continued reflecting on the feminist motivations:

In that context we set up the conference. . . . The visions that we, the hosts, presented on the theme [of domestic service] were diverse, but we wanted to be good feminists and stand alongside of, and not in charge of, the TCP. Certainly at the conference our ideas were out there, but they were diverse and anecdotal. As for the rest—there were about twenty-five or thirty-five of us—everyone relied on TCP to meet their own family obligations, and
Rosalba and I were really interested in this subject, from the perspective of considering them working women and understanding their working (and other) lives.\textsuperscript{54}

For their part, union and ANECAP activists contributed their own insights to the conference, where they discussed the conditions of domestic service work in Chile, the history of domestic worker organizing, and activists’ specific demands (enforcement of contracts, employer respect for work hours, proper use of Social Security booklets, etc.). A month later, the presidents of ANECAP and SINTRACAP signed off on a joint letter of support to commission an external consultancy, and by September, Gálvez and Todaro initiated their first study of Chilean domestic service.\textsuperscript{55} They would go on to employ sociological surveys, feminist economic analysis, and ethnographic research and publication in their effort to raise feminist awareness of the condition of domestic workers in Chile.\textsuperscript{56}

A clear expression of Gálvez and Todaro’s approach to domestic service—one fairly common in the debates on housework and inequality underway in global feminist circles in the 1970s—can be found in Todaro’s presentation at the conference, titled “Domestic work: women’s work?” After describing the nature of domestic service, its status as “female occupation,” and the role of domestic workers in the reproductive and affective life of the families they served, Todaro expressed some of the questions that had motivated women of the Circle to examine the phenomenon of domestic service in Chile:

To what degree does [professional women’s reliance on paid domestic labor] imply the liberation of women? In the first place, what women are we talking about? Could this be the liberation of some women at the price of the greater oppression of others? And in the second place, to what degree does the reliance on domestic workers limit and retard women’s consciousness, allowing them to believe the fiction of a liberated couple, free of family confrontations and maintaining untouched the sexual division of labor? Does this not lead to a society polarized into two spheres, the public sphere with visible work monopolized by men and a few women and the private sphere with invisible work completely occupied by unpaid housewives or salaried domestic workers?\textsuperscript{57}

Todaro’s presentation reflects how the encounter with domestic workers challenged these feminist intellectuals to reflect on how their own professional lives, and relative freedom from reproductive labor, depended on the availability of
other women to work for them. Circle participants readily confessed their mixed feelings about their reliance on domestic workers: “There’s a feeling of guilt for paying someone else to do [the housework], but there’s also a certain relief: it’s not just that society doesn’t value domestic work, but also that we women also do not value it.” In addition to learning more about the discrimination and marginalization experienced by domestic workers, feminist professionals began to incorporate domestic service (even in their own homes) into their feminist analysis of women’s choices with respect to reproductive labor. These revelations were highly personal, revealing feminists’ own choices about family, work, and politics:

In the end, the conference was also an encounter about individual choices, about personal experiences with domestic labor. These experiences included everything from sharing housework among family members, hiring a worker puertas afuera to complete certain tasks and limited hours, the desire to hire impersonal [cleaning] services, the nanny hired by the hour to watch the children when the adults are not at home, to the worker-cook-nanny-manager who assumes responsibility for our entire domestic role.58

Feminist professionals not only made domestic service a focus of scientific research, but also confronted (as they had at other moments) the class and ethnic tensions that shaped women’s mobilization in this period. A few of these feminists embraced collaboration with domestic workers as a new arena for feminist activism, as well as an opportunity to engage in theoretical and political discussions about the relationship between paying other women to work in their homes, on the one hand, and maintaining their feminist commitments to equality and sisterhood, on the other. Again, according to Thelma Gálvez:

I don’t remember a lot of details about the conference, but I do remember that [the TCP] told their stories, made their proposals to these women who looked like patronas but were not playing that role in that moment. There was dialogue, there were speeches, there were questions, there were promises. For us, at least for myself and Rosalba, it was a real encounter, since after that we later developed the project [of the cleaning business] and we began to understand some things. And above all it allowed us to make contact [with the TCP].59

According to a later report, the conference ended with mutual pledges of future collaboration: “We said good-bye with the promise to dedicate this issue of the bulletin to the topic, to investigate further the reality of salaried domestic
work in Chile, to support the idea of organizing a cleaning service business. Bit by bit, all of this will be come to be.\textsuperscript{60}

For domestic worker activists of ANECAP and SINTRACAP, the sustained encounter with the Women’s Study Circle influenced the movement’s rights-based discourse, providing as it did training and tools for addressing domestic service as a “women’s issue.” While the heterogeneous domestic workers’ movement did not embrace a feminist label, these experiences, resources, and opportunities did add the powerful critique of gender inequality to the potent mix of class and religious discourse that had sustained the movement since the 1950s. As early as December 1981, the framing of domestic workers’ demands began to reflect a greater interest in and reflection on their status as women, and the desire to participate in broader women’s pro-democracy movements. In “Problems of the trade,” for example, a piece authored by domestic worker activists and published in the Circle’s special issue on the domestic worker conference, the description of domestic workers’ struggles included typical demands for greater labor protections and unionization, but also described domestic workers’ struggles as part of broader agendas of women’s rights and democratization: empleadas, it said, should “make an effort to form a women’s organization that is broad and democratic, that brings together large numbers of women whether or not they are organized, where the struggle for our rights as women is active and in solidarity, and serves to bring about change in our society so that it is more just and democratic.”\textsuperscript{61} Another concrete outcome of this encounter between domestic workers and their feminist middle-class allies was the creation of an industrial cleaning company, Quillay: with Gálvez and Todaro as consultants, Quillay obtained contracts primarily with nongovernmental organizations (including feminist ones). Collaboration with women of the Circle provided new opportunities for empleadas to press their case—among other workers as well as journalists, professionals, and political leaders—about the working conditions, poor labor protections, and the movement of domestic workers.

The collaboration of feminists—particularly the feminist economists at the Circle—and domestic workers extended beyond the leaders of their principal associations. From the numerous ephemeral publications circulating in the mid-1980s, the impact of this collaboration is evident in the double seal of CEM and SINTRACAP or ANECAP on these publications as well as their content. CEM and SINTRACAP together produced, for example, a series of ten pamphlets for educating groups of domestic workers, “Guide for group learning,” through which facilitators would address topics ranging from the identity of empleadas as workers and women to exercises for learning their legal rights and
developing critical awareness about their relationship with employers. In “Our Legal Rights,” for example, a group facilitator would display posters outlining domestic workers’ rights to a labor contract and other rights, then lead the group in a card game designed to help workers’ share their experiences, clarify their rights, and explain how to access the union and/or the ministry of labor when those rights were violated. Through playing cards that quizzed participants about their legal rights, the game sought to provoke the workers’ critical reflection on their own experience of the gap between law and regulation, as well as critical evaluation of the adequacy of labor legislation.

From the start, therefore, the alliance of domestic workers and feminist activists not only served their organizations’ respective interests, but also generated significant effects on both movements. Working closely with key domestic worker activists, Círculo feminists generated new research on domestic service relations, turning the international feminist agenda on domestic labor of the 1970s to the critical study of reproductive labor with respect to class, gender, and ethnic inequality in Chile. In addition to the ways it informed women’s movements within Chile, this research produced a raft of important publications in testimony, sociology, and economics that quickly reached an international
activist and scholarly audience, particularly through Chaney and Castro’s edited collection, *Muchachas No More*.63

Cooperation between empleadas and patronas in the early 1980s also provided an opportunity for some feminists to simultaneously reflect on the deeper limitations and meanings of cross-class collaboration or “sisterhood.” One poem published in the Circle’s special *Boletín* four months after the conference provides some critical insight into tensions underlying this new alliance. In “Auto-pregunta,” a title with the double-meaning of “self-questioning” and “questions about cars,” Circle member Patricia Crispi assessed the conference:

> How did I like the encounter?  
> It was more like a mis-encounter.  
> A kind of highway that had  
> Faster and slower cars running  
> On different levels and directions  
> Over here, the “scientific” car.  
> Talking about the cultural construction of  
> Domestic service as women’s work  
> Going back to gendered roots.  
> Poking around in role assignments.

Crispi’s poem went on to describe the “encounters” over Chile’s long history between domestic workers and others, including employers, the Church, Marxists, and foreigners: as previous chapters have noted, domestic service has regularly provoked public scrutiny of the working conditions, labor market, and moral effects of such employment on working-class women. In a verse
dedicated to the domestic workers participating in the conference, however, Crispi added:

At last, we have the domestic employee’s own car.
It’s on a suspension bridge.
Flying and passing over this whole ocean
Of ideas and contradictions.
Being expressed and expressing herself
through her condition.
Explaining her oppression.

For Crispi, then, the Círculo’s feminist “encounter” at the 1981 conference was neither entirely new or unproblematic: rather, it was just one of the many perspectives that Chileans had brought to the subject of “la empleada doméstica,” in representations ranging from paternalistic and social Catholic to legal, charitable, and revolutionary. Asked to comment on Crispi’s poem twenty-five years later, Thelma Gálvez offered the following context:

Reading it today, it is a good description of the different visions at the conference—I won’t say “could be found” (“se encontraban”). Maybe [Crispi] . . . captured best what others preferred to overlook in order to “encounter each other.” . . . In the background for all of us well-intentioned women who convened the conference were the multiple motives and choices that Crispi described, maybe by listening carefully to what was said. Maybe we were a bunch of women’s stories facing the reality of other women who had been near us our whole lives, but whom we had not seen as women.

Conclusion: *Limpieza en sus derechos* (cleaning house)

In the political effervescence of the 1980s, but particularly in the years leading up to the 1988 plebiscite on Pinochet, domestic workers’ activism converged around the multiple alliances fortified since 1967. Building on a decade of enhanced funding from foreign religious groups, research and outreach with feminists, as well as the coordinated efforts among domestic workers’ multiple associations, activists engaged in direct challenges to the regime and the public’s view of domestic service, launching a petition drive to demand greater labor protections and—in a letter signed by fifteen ANECAP groups, twenty parish-level groups,
the Housing Cooperative, and SINTRACAP—protesting the national TV station’s recent portrayal of domestic workers. Emboldened by the promise of an electoral path to democracy, domestic worker advocates struggled to establish the legitimacy of their long-postponed claims to legal protection and social standing.

In the months following the victory of the “No”—the national plebiscite that ended Pinochet’s bid for “reelection” for another eight-year term in 1988—SINTRACAP presented the empleadas’ demand for basic labor protections to the Ministry of Labor. In contrast to earlier petitions submitted to military officials, the 1988 document listed fourteen demands for the regulation of domestic workers, without apology, religious references, or deference to military authority. In addition to the basic demand for limited work hours, regulation of contracts, vacation pay, health care (specifically for the “professional diseases” like neurosis, varicose veins, early arthritis, and back problems), and official recognition of November 21, the petitioners demanded maternity leave and union representation in the face of employer noncompliance. Unlike earlier petitions, the 1988 demands were announced in a public press conference and widely reported.
When the labor ministry failed to respond to the petition, six months later activists re-submitted their appeal, adding eight additional demands to the original fourteen, insisting among other things that they be referred to as “trabajadoras de hogar.” This time leaders from SINTRACAP, CONSTRACAP, ANECAP (National and Regional-Santiago) presented their petition in a meeting with a labor ministry official, Ernesto Deval, who informed them that not only had their petition arrived too late to be included in an ongoing labor reform but also that the labor ministry would not recognize their specific demands, largely because of the informal nature of domestic service labor. In their August 1989 report on their interactions with labor ministry officials, domestic worker activists summed up the minister’s position as

in order for our working conditions to improve, they must be regulated by the Free Market system, that is, by the law of supply and demand. This means that under the current political and economic system, we cannot have laws that regulate working conditions. All that is left is to hope that, when we return to Democracy, our demands will be considered, and to this end we must strengthen our organizations to keep demanding our rights as women and as workers.

The leaders of Chile’s major domestic worker associations together issued a press release denouncing the military regime for its failure to address their concerns, taking advantage of the space for public dissent opened by the transition to democracy then underway in Chile. While the domestic workers’ movement had matured and expanded politically under dictatorship, both the ministry officials and some press coverage continued to treat their labor, and demands for protection, as outside the legitimate boundaries of labor politics and state regulation. Not only did association and union leaders work closely together to bind both groups into pro-democracy movements but this activism also reflected a synergy of religious, women’s, and union objectives. In March 1989, for example, the ANECAP directorate sent a letter to the association’s membership, noting the group’s recent participation in International Women’s Day celebrations in the Santa Laura stadium, the CUT Congress, and national Church meetings. Collaboration between feminists and domestic workers in the 1980s produced a critical vision of class politics among middle-class feminists as well as providing the financial and technical networks that would transform the outreach and ideological structures of domestic workers’ movements. During the transition to democracy in 1990, these collaborations would also bear fruit in the form of laws for maternity leave and other benefits for domestic workers, which relied
equally on the legacy of empleadas’ struggles for labor rights and the newfound discourse of women’s rights and solidarity. Together with SINTRACAP, the association continued to work on a proposal for domestic worker legislation, which would be addressed by the incoming democratic Congress in 1990.73

The development of domestic workers’ alliance with the women’s movement did not, however, signify the eclipse of Catholic influence on the empleadas’ movement. Not only did ANECAP remain highly relevant as a service provider for empleadas, but the prophetic stand of Catholic leadership against the neoliberal Pinochet regime in the late 1980s continued to draw attention to the plight of domestic workers. For example, the 1989 pastoral letter by Bishop of Copiapó Fernando Ariztía Ruiz, “Pastoral Letter to Domestic Workers,” detailed the need for religious, legislative, and union activism to address the continuing injustices of Chilean domestic service relations.74 This attention from the Church hierarchy formed the basis for the ANECAP leaders’ affirmation that “Anecap will always be distinct from the union, but its members may belong to the unions, while Anecap remains faithful to its own charisma.”75

Despite the military regime’s attempt to reinscribe domestic service within paternalist labor relations, domestic worker activists kept their movement alive through innovative strategies to protect their associations and form new alliances in the struggle against dictatorship. As the activist Aída Moreno wrote in 1989:

In our trade, the greatest success has come from continuing training that raises the level of consciousness; so that the workers value themselves as people, and in addition to having duties, they have inalienable rights; they understand their responsibility as workers and as citizens to participate in the destiny of their country. We have not grown much in number, but we believe that the quality of the movement is far superior to that of 1973.”76

Like the broader women’s movement, Chile’s transition to democracy in 1990 resulted in part from the success of grassroots mobilization and new political alliances in Chile. Drawing on old and new paradigms, Church and feminist allies made the super-exploitation of empleadas a prime example of Chile’s oligarchic, patriarchal, and anti-democratic past and dictatorial present. But it would take more than political transition to obtain labor rights “like all the rest of them” for domestic workers the. The project of fully recognizing empleadas’ labor rights, advanced in fits and starts over the last thirty years, remains a challenge for the movement’s current and future activists.