Domestic Workers’ Movements in Reform and Revolution, 1967–1973

The best time, if I’m really honest about it—I was not a fan of Salvador Allende, although I do have to recognize the good he did—but for the domestic worker, I would even say that this was the best time in history. Because, because, the employers suffered something that came upon them like a fright, like they realized “I have to treat her well.”

—Elba Bravo, August 27, 2004

In many ways, the politics of Cold War Chile aligned neatly with those throughout the region in the late 1960s: student, peasant, and union movements, sometimes in tandem with armed guerilla organizations, were empowered by a transformative momentum that launched both revolutionary and anti-communist agrarian reforms, as well as the rise of center and left parties seeking national power. Chile’s well-known achievement in this period was the election to the presidency in 1970—over escalating fear campaigns fueled by US diplomatic and covert intervention—of the Socialist Salvador Allende Gossens, the first democratically elected Marxist head of state in the Americas. Allende’s election, which ignited furious political clashes over the nationalization of industry, the structure of public education, and extensive land reform, represented the victory of an electoral coalition of left-wing parties over deeply anti-communist conservative and reformist Christian Democratic forces in the 1960s. With the inauguration of el compañero presidente, as Elba Bravo’s testimony indicates, even his critics recognized the transformative impact of the new regime on social and economic relations in industry, agriculture, and service.¹

What the numerous studies of Cold War Chile have not yet considered is how the political polarization and social mobilization that characterized the period,
in combination with the apogee of liberation theology in Catholic circles, created new opportunities for the visibility and empowerment of domestic workers, empleadas who had long operated on the margins of formal politics. Were it not for the explosion of Catholic campaigns to institutionalize the “preferential option for the poor” by targeting empleadas for salvation (both material and spiritual), and the broadening of leftist coalitions to include previously unrecognized sectors of the lower classes—landless peasants, shantytown dwellers, and women—empleadas and their associations might have just stayed there on the margin. But something did shift, and forces both internal and external to domestic workers’ organizations made empleadas newly visible as political actors, providing opportunities for expanded unionization and legislative action under reformist and revolutionary regimes.

As discussed in the previous chapter, by the mid-1960s the rise of Christian Democracy had begun to draw some domestic worker activists like Elba Bravo into politics; arguably, of course, SINTRACAP’s members had been oriented toward legislative and political power since the first secular union was founded in the 1920s. But the last years of President Frei’s government set the stage for the radicalization of empleadas’ politics, first by exposing them to the currents and provocations of liberation theology dominant in the Chilean Catholic Church, and then through unionization strategies that encouraged partnerships between domestic workers and other unions. As Bravo noted, under Popular Unity the question for empleada activists was not whether domestic service would be regulated and their unions recognized at the national level: the question was when and how. Through intensive grassroots organization that mixed evangelization with unionization, and legislative proposals composed and vetted by empleadas themselves, the domestic worker movements were poised by 1972 to transform the structure and status of their occupation through a new law on domestic service proposed by Carmen Lazo, a Socialist elected to the House of Representatives in 1969 after serving more than a decade in the Social Security Administration. Had this bill become law before September 1973, when a bloody military coup ended Allende’s socialist experiment and ushered in a seventeen-year dictatorship, Chile’s domestic workers might well have become the first in the region to enjoy a wide variety of labor rights that were already well-established for workers in other trades.

Given the emphasis on recent studies of global care movements that have (understandably) focused on contemporary factors—increased migration, the rise of global care workers’ movements, and the politics of the ILO—we might ask: how were Chile’s early efforts to regulate domestic service even possible?
That the Church’s liberationist discourse and associated pastoral plans, like the ill-fated legislation of Carmen Lazo, came to a dead stop in the short term is less surprising than the fact that these arguments about domestic service were made in the first place. In these efforts, we can see the distinctive institutional and partisan interest that made advocacy for domestic workers’ rights possible: for the Catholic Church, embracing a politics of the poor (and of poor women) was both a religious and institutional priority, making the Church more relevant in a time of greater competition with evangelical and Marxist challenges for Chilean “souls.”

For the Left—primarily the female leadership in the Socialist Party—cooperation with empleadas’ unions positioned the Popular Unity government to incorporate new voters into the revolutionary project, adapting the language of class exploitation (as had socialists before them) to the specific conditions and demands of domestic workers. By deftly cultivating these alliances, empleadas gained ground in their quest for dignity and protection, just as the Church and the Left gained greater access, respectively, to capturing their souls and votes.

ANECAP and the Theology of Liberation

In the history of Catholic domestic workers’ organization in Chile, the period 1967–1973 stands out for ANECAP’s increasing pace of organization and a noticeable increase in labor rights discourse among its activists. ANECAP’s increasing focus on unionization and legislative change was not just a response to the ascendant strength of Chilean unions in this period. The increasing radicalization of domestic workers’ movements was fostered—and vigorously, emphatically so—by the upper reaches of the Catholic hierarchy, already identified as leaders in the region’s movement for liberation theology in the 1960s, which in this period explicitly promoted unionization and labor legislation for empleadas. In fact, following two National Bishops’ Conference meetings held in 1967 that were deeply marked by liberation theology, Cardinal Silva Henríquez and other Church officials devoted considerable attention to the question of domestic workers’ legal rights, endorsing a shift within ANECAP toward a revolutionary vision of domestic service. In ways fully consistent with the base ecclesial community model endorsed by the Medellín conference and promulgated by the Chilean Diocesan Synod, the pastoral efforts directed toward empleadas after 1967 sought the Christianization of domestic service relations through consciousness-raising and structural change.

Encouraged by this support, and spurred on by a new spiritual adviser, Hugo Verdugo, over the next six years ANECAP hosted important workshops on
liberationist approaches to domestic service, worked with SINTRACAP to organize new union groups in Santiago and the provinces, and supported evangelization efforts focused on domestic workers, which fostered greater domestic worker militancy and enhanced the visibility of Church efforts to further enhance the dignity of domestic service. As ANECAP militants fanned out across the country in the late '60s, expanding the educational and legislative work of provincial hogares and promoting the creation of ANECAP unions, they carried this message of the empleada nueva throughout Chile, joining forces with the secular empleadas’ union and secular trade unions as they went. This expansion is of interest not only because it reflected growing active membership in the association but also because it relied on a rhetoric of transformation—of empleadas to trabajadoras—to strengthen empleadas’ integration into national politics. Relying heavily on Catholic liberationist rhetoric, the domestic workers’ movement succeeded, at least for a time, in erasing some of the differences that had marginalized empleadas from workers’ politics since the 1950s, and in so doing came closer than ever before—and closer than any other regional domestic workers’ movement—to laws that would regulate domestic service relations by treating empleadas as workers.

These changes really began in June 1967, when the ANECAP directorate convened its First National Conference for Leadership Training and Preparation in Santiago. This conference brought together ANECAP’s leaders for nine days to hear presentations, hold workshops, and plan the association’s future. Eager to respond to the country’s deepening political crisis and strengthen ANECAP’s presence in the provinces, meeting organizers called on attendees to reevaluate the organization’s existing goals and activities. Starting with presentations on topics ranging from “national reality” to “apostolic movements,” and lectures on the nature of voluntary and democratic organizations, Father Verdugo and ANECAP leaders debated the challenges facing domestic workers in a period of rapid political and social transformation of Cold War Chile. ANECAP leaders received lectures from scholars and other activists about the nature of Chile’s revolutionary moment and the possibilities for workers’ movements. The conference’s first two presenters emphasized the importance of the revolutionary moment, advocating the increased involvement of domestic workers in revolutionary politics. The presentations, which explained the state of Chile on the brink of socialist revolution, are less interesting than the general discussion that followed. In those sessions, organizers posed leading questions that pressed for domestic workers’ greater political involvement, such as “How can the empleada get more involved when faced with the changes happening in this
country?” According to the conference report, participants responded that “we must struggle for structural change and to bring an end to the class differences that exist today,” and that “ANECAP’s goals should be revolutionary so that change can happen”:

We must give some thought to what we mean by “revolutionary.” In today’s world, everyone—facing such misery—everyone, including the Church (and we, who are a Christian organization) is calling for us to get involved in the revolutionary process, not in a process of hate, but one of change. The world demands insistently that we struggle for these changes, it is the only way to end this situation of misery and marginality.

The question following the second presentation, “The reality of the domestic employee,” by Fernando Tapia A., was similarly rhetorical: “Do you see that it is necessary to achieve unity among all the empleadas, in order to create a revolutionary movement? If you understand this, how would you explain this to a fellow empleada so that she would feel the same way?”

By contrast, the remaining six presenters at the conference addressed historical and structural questions about the association, and most were delivered by domestic worker activists themselves. Emphasizing ANECAP’s traditional values of unity and dignity, these presenters reproduced some of the tensions between moral and political arguments for domestic workers’ activism. In “La Asociación Nacional de Empleadas de Casa Particular, ANECAP,” for example, the association secretary Rudy Urzúa asserted that, as a movement, ANECAP was neither political (nor evangelical) in orientation: “The association allows each person to have her own beliefs and militancies, but prevents anyone from using the Association to make propaganda or any kind of campaign; the association is only interested in the empleada as a person and as a group.” Like several other participants, Urzúa in her presentation emphasized the association’s representative, democratic structure, clarifying for her audience the group’s national organizational structure and suggesting changes to ANECAP statutes. Nevertheless, the lengthy summary conclusions recorded at the conference included several indications that organizers sought to strengthen the class and union identity of ANECAP, in keeping with the revolutionary flavor of the opening presentations.

Instrumental in this ongoing shift was the leadership of ANECAP by Father Hugo Verdugo, who served as asesor to the group from 1967 to 1979. As Aída Moreno later noted, ANECAP’s religious directors had always played an important role in shaping the political attitudes of empleada activists: “So I think
that there are times when the Church goes a certain way—depending on the priest who’s there—and this was the way ANECAP went. If there was a priest who was more socially involved, there were better relations between ANECAP and the unions. If there was a priest who was just pro-church, the union was more marginal.”6 In an article published in the Jesuit magazine Mensaje in late 1968, Verdugo and his coauthor, Fernando Tapia, took up Father Piñera’s vigorous defense of empleadas, reiterating arguments for their dignity and safety but also calling out the revolutionary state and organized labor for failing to address their exploitation:

At first glance, it seems like this large sector of society has been stalled, absent from the whole dynamic process of participation that other sectors have experienced. It seems as though the 385,000 empleadas are a social sector that is prolonging a certain mentality, that of servility and dependency, which really belonged to and upheld society at a different time. This mentality has nothing to do with the current situation in which we push for the liberation and self-determination of peoples, popular participation that will transform an underdeveloped and oligarchic society into a developed and democratic one, made up of new values and structures.7

Although the article presented fairly standard explanations for the problems faced by empleadas, Verdugo and Tapia were more explicit than their predecessors about what should be done to improve the situation of domestic workers in Chile: organization, education, self-representation, and unity with organized labor. But empleadas would also have to struggle to change the very “labor system” in which they worked:

This is not just about changing the occupation’s name, or passing laws about work hours, or even improving wages. You must understand that a whole process and a massive struggle are needed to establish a new work process (estilo de trabajo). The basic ideas for this new work process are the following: change the relationship between the patrón and the empleada. Put an end to the existing vertical relation and replace it with a horizontal one. . . . This new humanistic and Christian relation requires a change in perspective on the part of employers, which we know will not come about through spontaneous generation, but rather it is the empleadas who will have to win and establish this new work process.8

In addition to ascribing agency and power to empleadas, Verdugo and Tapia linked the permanent transformation of domestic service to the transformation
of Chile’s social and economic relations, including the elimination of the poverty and underemployment in the rural sector that pushed young women into urban domestic service. As ANECAP’s asesor in these critical years, Father Verdugo used the existing national presence of ANECAP to unionize the domestic workers’ movement, seeking to educate members about the advantages of union organization and, in 1970–1973, sponsoring the spread of union activity through ANECAP Centers in cities throughout Chile.9

ANECAP’s activities following the 1967 conference continued to blend outreach through Catholic parishes with the transmission of more militant messages for empleada liberation. In parishes throughout the country, priests continued to organize domestic workers for catechism classes and send them to the Hogar for services and skill training. But the organization’s leadership became increasingly radicalized through contact with pastoral efforts that criticized domestic workers’ marginality and patronas’ abuse, and stressed the need for pastoral responses that would advance the cause of social justice (and for some, socialism) in Chile. Again, ANECAP leaders relied on strong Church leadership to support their efforts. Following the December 1968 meeting of the Synod of the Church of Santiago, in which Church leaders affirmed a vision of the Church as leading the quest for social justice, a commission to draw up a pastoral plan for Santiago’s empleadas was created. The following year Monsignor José Ismael Errázuriz Gandarillas, Auxiliary Bishop of Santiago, appointed

\begin{figure}
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\caption{Directorate of ANECAP Concepción, circa 1970}
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fifteen “Christian empleadas” and four spiritual directors to the newly created “Pastoral Commission on Domestic Empleadas.” Even as ANECAP worked with Verdugo to expand ANECAP unions throughout Chile in this period, Errázuriz sought funding for a separate pastoral project for Santiago that “would make possible the Arrival of the Kingdom of God among the domestic empleadas of our Church.” Citing the 1968 meeting of the Synod, Errázuriz pointed to the clergy’s consensus that “we are facing a gravely unjust situation, perhaps the most alienating condition of our society.” In his proposal, Errázuriz went on to examine the multiple reasons for empleadas’ disaffection with the Catholic Church and propose a post-conciliar vision of how the Church might respond, based primarily on clergy’s engagement with empleadas’ particular material and spiritual reality.

The explicit charge of Bishop Errázuriz’ commission was to design and implement a new pastoral plan for 1970–1971 for Santiago that would do much more than reach empleadas with the catechism: “This Pastoral work should train Christian empleadas, not only so that they can carry out further evangelization but also so that they can act within worldly structures and struggle for a change to more human living and working conditions.” And in addition to developing “a specific kind of pastoral work . . . adapted to the mentality and conditions of domestic workers,” the pastoral plan included catechism toward employers, noting that “this is not easy, because this sector’s bourgeois and comfortable mentality usually presents an obstacle to this kind of work.” Like contemporaneous Catholic outreach efforts, this pastoral plan specifically required collaboration between Church leaders and domestic workers’ associations, “in order to achieve the goals of a changed labor system, professionalization of the domestic worker, and improvement of her economic status and dynamic integration into society.” Finally, Bishop Errázuriz’ pastoral plan for Santiago mandated the formation of seventeen base communities in the eastern sector of Santiago, to be supervised by three empleadas employed half-time by the Church. Although the pastoral proposal acknowledged the existing outreach and services provided by the Hogar, Errázuriz sought funding for salaries and operational expenses separate from that structure. However, ANECAP references to the project in June 1971 lamented its limited effect: “There is a Pastoral Commission that only partly functions. They formulate plans that aren’t executed, because they aren’t ‘realistic.’ Sometimes little things get done. There is a PASTORAL PLAN that doesn’t work, at least in terms of the creation of core teams.”

Meanwhile, ANECAP’s directorate held its own pastoral campaigns in 1969 and 1970 to convene and educate domestic workers, which successfully boosted
membership and increased local Church support for the association. These efforts, concentrated in eastern Santiago, Concepción, and Talca, expressed the liberationist wing of Chilean Catholicism, and sought to form permanent base ecclesial committees (comités eclesiales de base) among domestic workers that would address empleadas’ religious as well as trade-based needs. The Concepción pastoral campaign was typical of these efforts: ANECAP leaders arrived and divided the city into sectors, mobilizing domestic workers for gatherings of Christian reflection and discussion, and meeting as a team every eight days to coordinate efforts. In the end, these leaders managed to established six parish-level groups (including a basketball team and a chorus!), which became the basis for ANECAP Concepción.\textsuperscript{15}

The working document for the Concepción campaign explicitly referenced the Marxist foundations of liberation theology:

\textit{Every step towards integral development is a step towards God. Any class of men, a people, or a world that leads the way is seriously failing if it does
not answer God’s call, which posits that all of humanity must engage in
development. Man’s historic creations (slavery-servility-capitalism-un-
derdevelopment-misery-interests-oligarchy-structures-individualism,
etc.) unfairly inhibit development and create obstacles to millions of
men’s ability to respond to growth and progress, which we are destined
and obligated to pursue in life.  

The product of collaboration between ANECAP and the Concepción Pro-
fessional Union of Household Employees (Sindicato Profesional Empleada de
Casas Particulares or SIPECAP) founded in 1970, the Concepción pastoral lit-
terature included summaries of empleada working conditions, lack of legal pro-
tections, information about ANECAP unions, and instructions on theology, as
well as an extensive analysis of rural versus urban religious practices. By 1970,
as Allende’s election accelerated social transformation, economic crisis, and US
intervention in Chile, ANECAP and its priestly allies were also poised to enter a
new phase of mobilization, grounded in the apostolic mission of the association
but newly invigorated by the prospect of the growing unionization of domestic
workers across the country.
ANECAP Unionization and the “New Empleada”

ANECAP activists were key participants in the pastoral initiatives described above, but the Association had also generated its own more radical vision of domestic service by the early ‘70s. In June 1971, Verdugo and officers of the directorate reflected on their achievements to date: “We want to see the new empleada transformed into a new kind of domestic worker (trabajadora de hogar): with dignified, fair, and respectful relations between the empleada and her employer, with a fair economic situation in which the value of the empleada’s work is reflected in her personal well-being.” In this, perhaps the first reference to the title by which domestic workers would fight to be recognized in the 1980s—trabajadoras de casa particular or TCP—ANECAP militants argued that domestic workers needed more free time not only to enjoy personal lives, continuing education, and recreational activities, but also in order to participate more fully in Chile’s political transformation. As social workers researching ANECAP in this period, Cecilia Guiraldes, María del Pilar Ibieta, and Patricia Dávila opined that “the empleada nueva will be a person who . . . has consciousness of her membership in the working class.” Such invocations of the empleada nueva, however incipient, were directly tied to the association’s struggle to codify and implement empleadas’ legal rights as workers, which made the association amenable to new political alliances in the age of revolution, from the Central Labor Confederation (CUT) to the Socialist Party. Reflecting decades later on the changes in ANECAP in this period, Father Piñera offered that “in Chile in the time of the Popular Unity, but even earlier under Frei, then under Allende, then the workers’ whole world was politicized and even among the empleadas leaders appeared who were more political, that is to say they were more involved in the struggle, they wanted things to get better, and there came a time in which the Hogar de Empleadas became more a bit more belligerent in a political sense.”

Like other workers’ and popular groups, ANECAP in the 1960s responded to the structural reforms and political conflicts of the day, leading to dramatic national expansion and the political reorientation of domestic worker activism. As an agent of historical transformation, however, one of the most dramatic effects of the “revolution in socialism” was the attempt by ANECAP activists—here working closely with Santiago’s small, independent union SINTRACAP—to redefine domestic service as an occupation, and empleadas as “workers,” in ways consistent with the political incorporation of their unions into the revolutionary project. The national expansion of domestic workers’ unions via ANECAP
fostered the continuing reorientation of empleada identity from the rhetoric of proper service and human dignity to a union challenge to employers’ unchecked abuse.

According to interviews with ANECAP’s national directorate in 1970–1971, these activists were implementing a plan to transform the ANECAP centers and hogares into local union halls, then creating provincial and national union federations for domestic workers, and culminating in the incorporation of the domestic workers’ unions into the CUT. Although ANECAP’s institutional archive is weakest for the Popular Unity period, the 1971 social work thesis by Catholic University students Cecilia Guiraldes, María del Pilar Ibietta, and Patricia Dávila recounts the association’s legislative activities in detail. Their thesis, “The empleada de casa particular: realities and perspectives” was directed by none other than Hugo Verdugo and combines class analysis of contemporary Chile with feminist analysis of women’s exploitation and a familiar social work assessment of empleadas’ struggle against social anomie and psychological dependency. The authors trace the history of ANECAP from the early 1950s, focusing on the association’s efforts to “create trade consciousness, with the goal of unionizing the empleada.” More important than the authors’ analysis, however, is their account and transcription of a document produced by
ANECAP in 1972: “What we want.” This document, approved at ANECAP’s June 1971 national training, built on the conversations held with empleadas active in ANECAP throughout the country, and identified serious obstacles to expanding ANECAP membership and enhancing union activities: from domestic workers’ lack of interest and information to “the issue that was common to all problems and mentioned as the main problem was the lack of time.”

ANECAP leaders then laid out a five-part strategy to massively expand and strengthen empleadas’ unions:

**STAGE ONE**

1. Educate the centers’ boards of directors throughout the country.
2. Study unionization and the legalization of unions with experts.
3. Study the approval of legislation with experts.

**STAGE TWO**

Educate the members in the different centers.

**STAGE THREE**

Organize union trainings in different centers and districts.

**STAGE FOUR**

Constitute district unions with legal status.

**STAGE FIVE**

1. Establish the PROVINCIAL FEDERATIONS for the empleadas’ unions.
2. Establish the NATIONAL CONFEDERATION of empleadas’ unions.
3. Incorporate the unions into the CUT.

Building on the prior work of SINTRACAP activists outside of Santiago, as well as recent pastoral campaigns, ANECAP was very successful in building new union groups throughout the country in 1971–1972, creating three new ANECAP-sponsored unions in Santiago and a total of fifteen unions in provincial cities by 1973.

Among the significant accomplishments of this ANECAP-promoted union expansion was the founding of union locals in three wealthy eastern neighborhoods of Santiago (Nuñoa, Providencia, Las Condes) that were home to largely live-in domestic workers. According to Aída Moreno, this union expansion at
the local level was possible only because of significant cooperation between SINTRACAP and ANECAP that began in 1970, which encouraged many of the association’s members to work with the local unions, and union representatives were elected to official positions within ANECAP. Although membership numbers for ANECAP and SINTRACAP in this period vary considerably, the period 1970–1973 represented the period of most effective outreach and

### Table 4.1. ANECAP Chapters and Membership in 1976

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Unions</th>
<th>Founded</th>
<th>Membership</th>
<th>Active Members</th>
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<tr>
<td>Number 2, Santiago (later SINTRACAP)</td>
<td>1947</td>
<td>1,050</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viña del Mar</td>
<td>1964</td>
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<td>Copiapó</td>
<td>1969</td>
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<tr>
<td>Concepción</td>
<td>1970</td>
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<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Las Condes–Santiago</td>
<td>1971</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>35</td>
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<tr>
<td>Providencia–Santiago</td>
<td>1971</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ñuñoa–Santiago</td>
<td>1971</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>18</td>
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<tr>
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<td>1971</td>
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<td>Temuco</td>
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<td>La Serena</td>
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<td>Angol</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>2,675</strong></td>
<td><strong>515</strong></td>
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mobilization among domestic workers. The first issue of the Boletín published that year, for example, ran out after 1,000 copies were distributed; the second number was published in a run of 1,500. In the “Information” pages of those two issues, ANECAP leaders provided names, contact information, and membership numbers for the fledgling unions, emphasizing the communication among regional groups, leadership, and training provided by leaders from Santiago, and the success of several unions in joining the CUT and voting in their 1972 elections.

While the new provincial unions remained small, their activities and rhetoric of domestic workers’ rights as workers represented a significant turn from the social services, vocational training, and pastoral activities sponsored by ANECAP in provincial hogares in the past. Particularly in Santiago, the multiplication of ANECAP unions—including their location in the northeastern sector of the city, where the most privileged domestic workers were employed—favored the emergence of more militant discourse in support of domestic workers’ class identity. The 1972 ANECAP bulletin offered a report on the presentation of Antonio Camacho, professor of anthropology at the Universidad de Chile, to
Association members: after tracing the historical expansion of domestic service under industrial capitalism, Camacho vaunted the role of domestic workers—and the transformation of their occupational structure—in the coming revolution. Domestic workers would, according to Camacho, “help to build a new society, where this exploitation would not be possible. The woman and the Empleada must help to organize a new society, where she will have a just and humane labor system.” Domestic service would itself be collectivized in this new society:

The Empleada of a particular family should not exist. There should be people with professional skills who wash, watch children, clean, prepare meals, etc. and in this manner play a role in society. They should not work for a family, but rather for society. A society that does not allow for efficient empleadas, but rather efficient persons whose labor and freedoms should be respected.25

It was in this same issue of the bulletin that the president of the Providencia union Ivania Silva argued that ANECAP should seek affiliation with the CUT, writing, “Girls: we have to decide whether or not we are workers like all the rest of them, because we work with our hands. . . . If we do not take this step, our Union has no reason to exist, because we will not free ourselves on our own.”26 The radicalization of ANECAP union strategies opened spaces for greater discussion of the class relations of domestic service, as well as Camacho’s critical assessment of domestic service in relation to reproductive labor in the family.

The inauguration of Allende’s Popular Unity government in 1970 provided both ANECAP and SINTRACAP activists with their best hope of thoroughgoing legislative reform to redress empleadas’ historic exclusion from Chilean labor law and marginalization within its union movements. As the work of ANECAP at the national level came to focus more squarely on unionization and labor demands in the late 1960s, cooperation between Church and secular activists became more marked, in some cases embodied in the double militancy of activists like Aída Moreno. With Allende’s victory in the 1970s, SINTRACAP leaders moved quickly to demand that existing labor law be changed to better address the exploitation of empleadas, building as they did so important new linkages between the domestic workers’ movement and political leaders on the Left. In two letters sent to government leaders in 1970—the first to the Minister of Labor and the second to “the Popular Unity parties”—SINTRACAP leaders demanded the modification of Article 62 and
other sections of the Labor Code relevant to domestic workers. Couching their appeal in terms of the international defense of human rights, this proposal treated at great length the importance of changing the legal terminology of the occupation from that stated in the Labor Code—“empleados domésticos”—to “empleados de casa particular.” Citing the dictionary definition of “domestic” as those animals raised in a home or the “maid or servant” who serves there, the union proposal explained that:

Now from this lofty point of examination, and considering ourselves part of the world of today, we find that, as human beings who think and analyze, we are shocked to find that we live in the age of the cavemen, and that, those beings defended their right to survive with dignity, given their time and means. Because of this, we believe that respect for human rights, in which every person should be considered dignified no matter what his social condition, especially in reference to his labor activity, we ask you educated people to abrogate Article 62 of the Labor Code.

The SINTRACAP proposal demanded that Article 62 be repealed because employers regularly disregarded contracts and social security payments and because girls under age eighteen (a significant proportion of those employed in domestic service) were not allowed to sign contracts or make social security contributions in any case. In its place, the union proposal argued that the president of the Republic should institute a professional license (carnet profesional) for domestic workers, invoking a 1962 law (No. 14,890) that mandated the credentialing of workers in certain professions. This license would be of particular use in “our trade . . . made up of professionals who are intimately involved with people and children,” and would allow prospective employers to rely on bona fide certification rather than recommendations of previous employers. A tripartite commission—made up of representatives of the Ministry of Labor, employers, and the union—would oversee accreditation, wage levels, and working conditions appropriate to each domestic service occupation (cook, nanny, etc.). In addition to its insistence on what had likely become the longest-standing request of Chilean domestic workers in the twentieth century—the declaration of November 21 as domestic workers’ national day of rest—the proposal recommended that the workday be defined as 7 a.m. to 9 p.m., with two hours of rest from 2 to 4 p.m. Pointing out that this work schedule of 12 hours was modest—and in fact exceeded international norms for length of workday—the union proposal mandated time off of one half day per week and a Sunday rest every two weeks, with 50 percent overtime pay for hours worked above
the proposed schedule. The proposal also stipulated that employers should pay severance to any domestic worker employed for more than six months in the amount of one month’s pay per year served in the household. Finally, the proposal laid plans for a 2 percent tax on wages—paid by the employer—to fund education, social services, and vacation sites for domestic workers; these funds would be administered by Social Welfare Services and managed by a tripartite commission.29

Lobbying for Change: Deputy Lazo and the Empleadas

Even as ANECAP leaders moved to embrace more unionist strategies, the Sindicato No. 2 de Santiago was seeking closer integration into national union politics, seeking a short-lived membership in the Asociación Sindical Chilena (ASICH) in 1967, later with the Federación Gremial Chilena (FEGRECH) and, in 1970, in the Central Unitaria de Trabajadores (CUT).30 According to the history of the Santiago union produced by Aída Moreno in 1983, at this point “a new era began, of strengthening and active participation in other unions: protest marches with demands; a legislative proposal is drafted expressing the pressing needs of the trade, with demonstrations when the bill was discussed in the Chamber of Deputies.”31 Here Moreno was referring to a bill on domestic service proposed by Socialist deputy Carmen Lazo in August 1970, based explicitly on the plan proposed to the Popular Unity coalition by SINTRACAP in March 1970. Lazo brought a modified version of the SINTRACAP bill before the Chamber of Deputies, where her introductory remarks again foregrounded the question of terminology: “I consider this name [of domestic employee] humiliating for a trade that deserves our full consideration and respect.” Citing domestic workers’ long hours, random firings, and lack of free time, Lazo proposed a bill made up of nine articles:

1. Changed name;
2. Professional licensing;
3. Tripartite regulatory commission;
4. Eight-hour day, with twelve hours permissible only with overtime pay;
5. National day for empleadas (November 21);
6. Severance pay of one month’s salary for each year employed;
7. Weekly half day and two days per month off;
8. 2 percent tax on salaries, paid by employers, for domestic workers’ services;
9. Reglamento to enforce provisions.
The main innovation in Lazo’s proposal compared with that of SINTRA-CAP was the bill’s insistence on an eight-hour workday, which would bring regulation of domestic work into line with international and national labor norms. In every other respect, the Lazo bill reproduced the SINTRACAP proposal of March 1970.

According to the account of the legislative proposal and its reception among domestic workers by Guiraldes et al., ANECAP and SINTRACAP activists worked tirelessly to bring the proposed legislation before domestic workers’ groups throughout the country in the early months of 1971. This process resulted in a proposal for extensive modifications to the bill, which was brought to Deputy Lazo in a public meeting of more than 400 domestic workers on July 25, 1971. These “modifications” articulated a more radical vision of domestic workers as workers and as revolutionary citizens, and dramatically expanded the bill’s contents from nine to seventeen articles. In contrast with the more paternalistic framing of Lazo’s presentation, the revised text of the bill situated domestic workers’ exploitation within the larger frame of class struggle and
revolutionary transformation: “The situation of servitude in which the household employee now lives must not be prolonged: we must struggle to liberate all of the household employees, and to this end the empleados [sic] should use their strength and struggle to organize with government support to achieve their liberation as human beings and as workers.” The revolution in domestic service relations instituted by the bill would, its (activist) authors promised, bring about a “new type of household worker,” one who enjoyed dignified and fair employment as well as “a new personal situation,” with sufficient free time to improve professional skills, participate in trade associations, and lead a normal life.33

The text of the revised bill went on to explain the need for the “liberation” of domestic workers on multiple levels: in relation to their status as free human beings, “and as such they must be free”; as citizens of Chile, where “we have begun a process of revolutionary change”; and, finally, “because those household employees must stop acting as the men and women who serve only the fulfillment and liberation of other men and women, without reaching their own fulfillment, and they should become the men and women who are motors of change from within the very base of society.”34 In addition to granting domestic workers full status as workers and citizens, this third justification seems to refer to those domestic workers serving in the employ of other revolutionary citizens. Perhaps, as Bernardino Piñera recalled, the legal defense of domestic workers’ dignity was needed in the households of the revolutionary leadership as much as anywhere else in Chile: “There were even empleadas who worked in the homes of socialist and communist leaders, and these houses were the same: the señora might be very socialist or communist, but she didn’t want the empleada living under her roof to take on an attitude of resistance.”35

In the revised bill itself, the additional articles proposed by domestic worker activists, asesores, and legal advisers also increased domestic workers’ representation on commissions supervising professional credentialing and the distribution of the 2 percent tax (specifying, moreover, their democratic election by representative organizations) and eliminating employer representation. These revisions also clarified base salary and overtime pay, specifying that room and board should be included, as well as cash payments, in such calculations. The revised text of the bill expanded the services to be financed by the 2 percent tax—including both job placement services and “technical-professional training so that they can incorporate themselves into the process of Chilean industrial production”—and added domestic workers employed puertas afuera to the group eligible for subsidized housing. These revised articles reflect the complexity of
domestic employment and its regulation in ways not captured by Deputy Lazo’s proposed bill.

Another outcome of the July 1971 meeting between Deputy Lazo and the domestic workers’ associations was that it pushed Church leaders to openly support the proposed legislation. At that meeting, Father Verdugo promised to carry the group’s concerns to Archbishop Raúl Silva Henríquez, one of Chile’s most important architects of liberation theology and human rights in the region. The resulting September 1971 pastoral letter, signed not only by the Archbishop but also by Auxiliary Bishop Errázuriz and Rafael Maroto Pérez, Episcopal Vicar of Santiago’s Central zone, gave the Church hierarchy’s explicit support to the union and legislative projects pursued by the empleadas. In an opening statement, the authors affirmed a resolution passed with near unanimity at the 1967–68 Synod: “Since the Church serves the world. . . . It should remind all Christians, and the entire society, that it is extremely urgent and necessary to change the structures of the empleadas’ life and work so that they may mature as people, as women, and as Christians; and so that they can be allowed full liberation.”36 Referencing the liberationist goals inherent in the Medellín documents, the 1967–1968 Synod, and recent Temuco meetings, the letter reminded both empleadas and their employers about the grave injustices pertaining to domestic service in Chile, including the low marriage and high single-motherhood and abortion rates among domestic workers. Lamenting the absence of adequate social legislation, the letter even alluded to Marxian notions of economic backwardness in domestic service: “Relations between the empleada and the housewife are more typical of a feudalistic society than a capitalist industrial society, and resemble even less what one would find in a socialist society.” Describing the “absolute dependency” of empleadas’ relationship with their employers, the authors drew a stark contrast with the factory worker, who could mix with other workers and form associations: “in the case of the Empleada who works as a live-in, this situation is fundamentally different: she has no real liberty.”37

The most radical aspect of the 1971 pastoral letter, however, was the full expression given to the liberationist argument in the final section on “The LIBERATION OF THE EMPLEADA, as a WOMAN and as a WORKER.” In promoting Church support for associations and stronger labor laws, the authors articulated a vision of the new labor relations of domestic service with the empleada nueva as the key protagonist: “the Empleadas who, through the force of their solidarity and organization, can create a new structure and system of work, in which there will be no dependency or scorn, but only competent work,
which is respected and carried out in liberty.” The authors were careful to clarify, however, that they were not competing with union or party efforts to work with empleadas: “Our contribution does not aim to compete with the attempts to reach a solution currently underway, and much less do we reject or ignore these attempts.” In this respect, whether it referred to the activism of ANECAP militants or the broader revolutionary project of the UP regime, the pastoral letter clarified the Christian mission as complimentary to, but still distinct from, revolutionary objectives.38

The pastoral letter of 1971 concluded with an emphatic assertion of the need for labor legislation, supporting by inference the bill for domestic service protection proposed by Deputy Lazo in August 1970. In arguing concretely for the eight-hour day, the authors commiserated with empleadas’ fears that this goal would be unattainable and costly, but nevertheless insisted that such legislation would force positive changes in the organization of many Chilean households:

Difficulties will arise IN THOUSANDS OF HOMES where Empleadas work, where life’s rhythms are organized in a traditional fashion, dependent on the permanent availability and continuous work, at any hour, of the Empleadas. When this situation ends because an eight-hour workday is established, the homes, the family, and especially the housewives will have to imagine and create a new regime for family life that will certainly affect the family’s customs, conveniences, schedules, etc. This is a sad situation, but one that’s necessary to make possible the liberty of thousands of women, women who deserve our respect in their struggle to achieve their personhood. It’s a situation that will provide an opportunity for Christian families to update their values and actions in relation to family collaboration, children’s responsibilities, and the role of men in the home, which for the sake of convenience have been lost.39

In taking this position the Church leaders also acknowledged, if only in passing, how recognition of empleadas’ labor rights would present challenges, such as the reorganization of household labor and greater unemployment for empleadas. The pastoral letter of 1971 made its call not only to empleadas and señoras but also to organized labor and legislators, to support the creation of the NUEVA EMPLEADA: “a free person, competent because of her education and professional training, organized and unified among themselves and with the rest of the country’s workers; who has a normal life; who has a just salary and real benefits.”40 In addressing a key constituency of the Church—including both
empleadas and their employers—Silva Henríquez and his coauthors significantly altered in the Church’s historic discourse on domestic service in Chile.

Despite empleada mobilization and visible support from Church leaders in 1971, Deputy Lazo’s bill failed to advance quickly through the legislative process. Though the Congressional record reveals little about the bill’s fate, ANECAP representatives who met with Aída Figueroa, deputy director of the Labor Ministry in early 1972, reported that, although Figueroa encouraged the empleadas’ continuing struggle, Lazo’s bill was unlikely to pass: “She warned us that the proposed bill was unlikely to be approved, because it is a double-edged sword for the empleadas: the bill has good and bad things in it, but if it passed it might cause a lot of unemployment.”

In July of the same year, Deputy Luis Espinoza met with union leaders, “and expressed his interest in bringing the proposed bill, a copy of which we sent him, to the Parliament. The proposed bill joins the ideas from Deputy Carmen Lazo’s bill with ANECAP’s changes.” While there is no record of Espinoza’s bill, we do know is that on November 16, 1972, the Chilean congress legalized the term “empleados de casas particulares,” a partial victory for domestic workers’ longstanding objections to the term empleada doméstica.

Whatever the shortcomings of Lazo’s original bill from the point of view of domestic worker activists, the increasing interactions of domestic workers’ leadership with political leaders of the Popular Unity further facilitated incorporation of domestic workers into the national union structure. In the months before the final coup, Aída Moreno has recounted, TCP leadership worked closely with CUT representatives to form the Unified National Union of Household Employees (Sindicato Único Nacional de Empleadas de Casa Particular) in 1972, which represented the nineteen domestic workers’ unions the active in Chile. Closer relations with the CUT formalized domestic workers’ access to activities enjoyed by other unionized workers:

Yes, a lot was achieved in that period: we made agreements with help from the CUT, we got workers’ vacations, the [household] workers participated a lot. We bought household goods, refrigerators, stoves, heaters, all those things that have been privatized back then we did everything through the unions, and for that reason it was excellent work. We worked with a lot of university students, the guys came from the University of Chile to train us, to give us workshops, there was great participation.

The Sindicato Único was given an office alongside the CUT in the government UNCTAD building, and in January 1973 celebrated a national congress there with over 800 domestic workers, and representatives of the CUT and
Labor Ministry in attendance. Moreno has frequently recounted how the Sindicato Único enjoyed the attendance of President Allende and Sra. Moy de Tohá (wife of Allende Minister of Interior José Tohá) at the opening of a child care center for domestic workers. In tandem with the syndicalization and expansion of ANECAP, the leaders of Chile’s oldest domestic workers’ union—Sindicato No. 2—saw their efforts applauded and promoted at the highest level of national union politics.

In addition to the increased visibility of domestic worker activists in political and union venues, oral history accounts of the period invariably note the change in workers’ attitudes—and employer responses—because of workers’ increasing sense of labor rights. If, on the one hand, these changes made it harder for activists staffing the Hogar de las Empleadas to find jobs for leftist domestic workers, Elba Bravo pointed out that employers were more restrained in Allende’s time:

I can tell you this because it was my job to place the girls, to talk to them, with the señora up in los Dominicos, and I got this sense that “look, it’s like this: I’m not going to say no if she’s very UP (Popular Unity), but you know how things are, that it’s hard to buy things, you know, poor people, that if we’re suffering how must it be for them?” But they were treated with a lot of care, I don’t know if it was superficial . . . with a lot of care because they were afraid that they would get reported for this and that. It was different from how things were under Pinochet, very different, a very big change. I personally suffered under both [leaders], so I don’t support either of them, but I value some of the positive things about Allende.46

Conclusion

This chapter has examined how the increasing strength of popular mobilization in late 1960s Chile invigorated the small domestic workers’ unions and associations of Santiago, leading to their expansion at the national level, turning even Catholic associations into centers for the politicization of women domestic workers. In 1970, domestic worker activists gained unprecedented access to government offices, reaping the benefits of visibility and legislative activism that further incorporated them into formal union and party politics. The military coup of 1973 radically altered this trajectory, shrinking union rolls and creating new solidarities of surviving groups with Catholic and international religious agencies, as well as with the middle-class feminist organizations.
The study of domestic workers in this short period sheds new light on key questions in the study of Cold War Chile and the Allende period. From Church as well as ANECAP records, we can see how transformations integral to the Catholic Church in this period, and the explicit embrace of Catholic leaders of liberation theology, dovetailed easily with the Church’s historic commitment to empleadas. Without skipping a beat, Catholic leaders moved from promoting a jocist ideology of the dignity of work and association for all workers to one that incorporated Marxist analysis of class relations and even quasi-feminist critiques of female exploitation. This shift allowed the Church’s considerable resources dedicated to the defense of empleadas to be channeled into a series of grassroots campaigns, in Santiago and the provinces, which in turn laid a foundation for increased domestic worker mobilization. This, in combination with Church leaders’ greater advocacy for ecumenical cooperation with non-Catholics and continuing recognition of the secular union as a sister organization to ANECAP, proved auspicious for expanding the reach of ANECAP—and the Church—into new parishes and activities. In the years prior to the increased polarization over socialism within the Chilean Church, such strategies offered Church leaders opportunities to advance “the preferential option for the poor,” and advocate for structural change in ways consistent with liberationist Catholic discourse of the post-conciliar age.

Although we have far fewer details about what might have motivated Carmen Lazo, Moy de Tohá, and other Leftist politicians to support domestic workers’ political aspirations, it should not be too surprising that their political gaze—long expanded to include workers in informal sectors and land or neighborhood tomas—should come to incorporate empleadas in this period as well. Although the most formal and masculine of Chilean trades remained at the head of national union and political party efforts (copper, truckers, industrial workers), the tent of the Chilean left had broadened to include other workers and their specific strategies to exert political pressure on formal politics. It tells us a great deal that it took a successful Socialist electoral bid to open up these spaces for empleada activists, when their votes—largely female, many rural—had been there for the getting since female suffrage was instituted in the 1940s. As studies of rural women and work have also demonstrated, even as the Chilean left broadened its mantle to usher in women and their “issues,” or rural families and theirs, it remained an electoral strategy hindered by deeply preconceived notions of gender, citizenship, and modernization. Notwithstanding the misogynistic cast of Chile’s Cold War left parties, the existence of a growing empleadas’ movement, and the evident labor rights enshrined in their demands for corresponding
legislation, brought at least some sectors of the Socialist Party into cooperation with those movements under Allende.