In September of 1973, Chile's social fabric was ripped apart when a military coup led by General Augusto Pinochet brought the country's history as a democratic republic to an abrupt halt. This uprising ushered in an era of dictatorship that was to last 17 years.

Throughout this dark period of Chilean history, democracy, free debate, and the equitable distribution of resources were all low priorities on the agenda of a government with a well-documented record of human rights abuses. For the people of Chile, this was a time many would rather put behind them.

But there are signs of change in this coastal South American country. A special plebiscite in October 1988 gave Chileans an opportunity to reject Pinochet's claim to power. Presidential and congressional elections took place a year later, resulting in a clear-cut victory for the opposition coalition, known as the Concertación Democrática.

The new government took over in March 1990 and, despite formidable obstacles, President Patricia Aylwin has succeeded in achieving reforms that even members of his own party had thought impossible.

How did this process of reform come about and who are the people that made it possible?

In the fields of economic and social science research, much of the credit goes to the members of the Latin American economic research corporation, Cieplan (Corporación de Investigaciones Económicas para Latinoamérica). This organization acted as a kind of think tank where a team of scholars headed by Alejandro Foxley, now the Minister of Finance, worked throughout Pinochet's regime to research and examine problems of underdevelopment and authoritarianism in Latin America. It was no easy task.

Following the overthrow of President Salvador Allende in 1973, the new government assumed control of the entire state structure. All opposition was crushed and thousands of the deposed government's supporters were killed or forced into exile.

In university circles, academics were persecuted, social and economic research centres were shut down, and the military intervened in the universities, often appointing its own leaders as university presidents. Any suspicion of dissent was pounced on and punished — opponents were expelled or forced to resign from their jobs.

These developments were not unique to Chile. The same events occurred in other Latin American countries ruled by authoritarian governments in recent decades. Chile's case does, however, have some unique aspects, particularly in the resilience of its academic community and its willingness to carry on research in trying circumstances.

**Basic Mission**

The advent of Cieplan was no accident. It was founded by researchers at the national planning research centre (Centro de Estudios de la Planificación Nacional) at Chile's Universidad Católica, directed by Alejandro Foxley. They were forced to leave that institution in the wake of the military coup and, anticipating a lengthy period of rigid dictatorship, set about establishing a centre that would become a refuge for independent work. The work was to be done by a highly select group of academics who, like themselves, were economists but viewed themselves as social scientists committed to achieving a deeper understanding of a situation beyond details and figures.

Soon after Cieplan was started it established its basic mission: to reflect on the process of events in Latin America and formulate potential solutions to the problems of development and authoritarianism.

In the atmosphere of persecution and repression, it was difficult to do academic research. "The dictatorship, in the most general terms, disturbed the freedom and tranquility required for academic work," Joaquin Vial, a member of Cieplan's current board of directors, notes. "From the research perspective, it made access to official information difficult and also meant that manipulated and falsified data and statistics were provided. The most visible sign of the repression was the absurd banning and seizure of a book despite the fact that its contents had already been published in the media."
Instrument Makers

In this context, one of Cieplan's most important roles was to produce well-researched studies that would provide an accurate record of Chilean economic trends. They compiled basic statistics on inflation, social spending, national accounts, employment, and wages. Cieplan even brought about a complete revamping of the consumer price index (CPI) when researchers discovered that this indicator had been falsified by the government during the crucial period between 1975 and 1977.

There was also ongoing analysis of such issues as determining factors in the balance of payments, the process of setting prices and wages, the operation of the labour market, the financial system, and an assessment of the tools used for monetary and fiscal analysis.

Another direction of Cieplan's studies was the systematic analysis of conflict resolution in other countries. Research was conducted with a view to studying solutions applied to conflicts that might suggest lessons for Chile and Latin America.

Cieplan in Government

Before Chilean President Patricia Aylwin announced the make-up of his Cabinet, it was taken for granted that his Minister of Finance would be Alejandro Foxley, Chairman of Cieplan, and that this research centre would also provide the individuals who would assume major responsibilities in the economic and social fields. In addition to distinguished academic credentials, all of them have worked for years preparing the policies, programs, and instruments for the process of restoring democracy.

The following members of Cieplan were in the end called upon to fill the following positions in government:

- Alejandro Foxley, Minister of Finance
- René Cortazar, Minister of Labour and Forecasting
- José Pablo Arrellano, Budget Director
- Pablo Pinera, Deputy Minister of Finance
- Ricardo French-Davis, Research Director of the Central Bank of Chile
- Nicolas Flano, Chile's Executive Director at the World Bank
- Manuel Marfan, Advisor to the Ministry of Finance and Coordinator of Macroeconomic Policy
- Mario Marcel, Research Director of the Budget Department
- Ignacio Walker, Advisor to the President's Office
- Claudia Serrano, Head of Social Services for the Municipality of Santiago
- Esteban Jadresic, officer in the Research Department of the Central Bank

Among the hundreds of books, papers, and research reports produced by Cieplan, experts point to the importance of "Políticas Macroeconómicas" (macroeconomic policies), a document that represents the fruit of years of study on a range of economic and development issues common to Latin America and is considered "a Latin American classic which contains the best answers from the South to the North based on scientific analysis."

The relationship between risk and the development of Chile's political process deepened in the 1980s, when the political and economic crisis prompted outbursts that were suppressed with extreme severity by the dictatorship. Under these circumstances, nongovernmental organizations like Cieplan became meeting places where intellectuals and social and political leaders could exchange ideas on possible solutions to the country's problems. They thus helped build the bridges that were necessary and paved the way for the process that culminated in the emergence of Concertación Democrática in 1988.

One former member of Cieplan, now a senior government official, explained that "the economy was a battle ground and an area where great debates developed, but in addition to the criticism we also assumed that it was necessary to think about a new government."

Joaquín Vial adds that "the basic thesis underlying many of the ideas at Cieplan and later adopted by the Concertación Democrática was that areas of consensus had been produced in Chile — despite or perhaps as a result of the dictatorship — that were much broader than those that had existed historically. There was a common yearning among the people for stability and economic progress and a shared desire to salvage the positive achievements of the military regime and integrate the traditional values of egalitarianism and solidarity," he says. "Our traditional values apparent in such fields as education, health, and forecasting could perhaps
be integrated with some of the positive aspects of the dictatorship such as respect for the private sector, increased efficiency, and competitiveness."

The development of these thoughts in a manifesto called "El consenso económico es posible" (economic consensus is possible), was key to ending the dictatorship and is reflected in the program now being implemented by the current government. It was published under the signature of Cieplan's most senior members in September 1988, a month before the plebiscite called by General Pinochet.

The text included a revealing, sincere analysis of the positive and negative achievements of the military regime and called for the building of a new concept, that of consensus. Its introduction puts it this way:

"We the economists who have put our names to this document are linked professionally to Cieplan and affirm that, in our judgement, a consensus for democracy is possible not only in political terms, but also in economic and social terms.

There are only two basic preconditions for this economic and social consensus to crystallize. First, that those who subscribe to it share the view that the authoritarian cycle in Chile has now run its course and that a new political era of full liberty and democracy must now begin. In order to achieve this, a change in the country's leadership is necessary.

The second condition is that those who support this economic and social consensus are willing to be generous in accepting the advances and contributions made to the development of the country and its economy, both past and present, by the various groups which make up the country. A new era marked by the will to achieve consensus cannot begin if we deny the possibility of synthesizing the experiences and lessons that we as Chileans have learned from the history of the conflicts that have left their mark on recent decades."

Richard Vera in Chile

The scientific discoveries and innovations that are rocking the world today are often unheard of in Nepal, the Himalayan kingdom in South Asia known more for its snow-covered mountains, raging rivers, and wild beauty. Isolation has had a profound effect on the population of this land-locked country — more than 60% of the population live below the poverty-line and 65% are illiterate.

Far from being unconnected, these two statistics are the basis of an IDRC-funded study by the Royal Academy of Science and Technology (RONAST), called "Science Popularization." Researchers with the project realized that science and technology, if properly utilized, can provide answers to many of Nepal's development problems. The trick was how to disseminate knowledge of scientific developments in a country where rugged terrain separates communities and whose population remains trapped in the world of illiteracy and superstition.

RONAST took on the challenge in 1985 by launching a novel, 26-month pilot project designed to spread the word of science and technology through existing channels of mass communication. The project had fairly modest beginnings. It started with RONAST inviting Nepalese media practitioners, publishers, and editors to a meeting to get their views on how best to disseminate information about science. The participants from the media recommended in one voice that the project should make available information packages on science and technology as they "were not in the position to write science features themselves nor could they hire the services of specialized journalists," says Gokul Prasad Pokhrel, a seasoned journalist who headed the Science Popularization project.

The need thus emerged for well-focused and simplified information packages on contemporary science and technology issues that were both relevant to the Nepalese people and available to mass media outlets. In 1986, RONAST Science