

“INTERNATIONALIST EDUCATION” AND SOLIDARITY WITH CHILE AND LATIN AMERICA IN THE LATE SOVIET PERIOD—BETWEEN GEOPOLITICS, PROTEST, AND SELF-REALIZATION? *Summary*

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This article is dedicated to exploring the problem of mass Soviet campaigns through the example of the Chilean solidarity movement (1973–1989). While the topic of Soviet mass campaigns is rather unexplored, they provide an interesting window on to Soviet society as well as post-Soviet social transformations. As “internationalism” was formerly looked upon mainly as a Soviet geopolitical doctrine, its internal use has not been well studied. At the same time, it is important to note that the campaign of solidarity with Chile, used here as an example of Soviet mass solidarity campaigns, was not an exclusively Soviet phenomenon but took place in several Western European countries as well.

The main aim of this article is to investigate the specifics of the Soviet Chilean solidarity campaign and to examine its contradictions. In particular, I look at knowledge about Latin America and Chile among young people at the time of the campaigns as well as on presentation of the events in Chile in Soviet publications. I pay special attention to so-called “informal solidarity”—the attempts among small numbers of young people to find their own interpretations of the events in Latin America and Chile during the *perestroika* period.

This article is based on two types of sources: official Soviet publications on Latin America and “internationalist education” and the materials of the informal solidarity movement (such as documents of the campaign preserved in personal archives, mainly of those who took part in meetings or volunteer work for Chile as university students). As most sources in this second group date from the 1980s, this article focuses mainly on that period of time. I use the approach of historical anthropology—exploring everyday aspects of solidarity practices as embedded within the historical context of Soviet internationalist education. To begin the article, I look at Soviet structures and representations of the concept of internationalist education. The main part of the article is dedicated to the place of Chile and Latin America in this educational campaign (in particular, it explores the

information on that part of the world that was accessible to Soviet readers). Finally, I examine those practices of solidarity with Chile that in the beginning of the *perestroika* period were described as "informal."

Soviet internationalist education campaigns contained contradictions between messages and ideals. The official Soviet internationalist education since the 1960s was premised on the idea that Soviet school children and young people should receive ideologically correct information about the political situation and life of children and youth in other countries, including the capitalist ones. In particular, internationalist education drew attention to poverty, unemployment, racism, and colonialism as typical characteristics of capitalist societies. As for the internal situation in the USSR, internationalist education was supposed to teach young people about relationships between people belonging to different national and ethnic groups. According to the official ideology, the Soviet Union was experiencing a "process of step by step disappearance of national differences" and the formation of a new historical entity, "the Soviet people." The ideology of internationalism frequently had colonial overtones: the leading role in this process still belonged to the Russian people who were helping other peoples to move from "century-long backwardness" to a "new type of progress."

The most important institutional structure dedicated to internationalist education until the beginning of the 1980s were the *Clubs of International Friendship (KIDs)*. These Clubs were created mainly at schools and universities in order to teach young people about Soviet "peaceful international politics," "revolutionary struggle in other countries," and "friendship between the Soviet people and people from other socialist countries." Activities of the *KIDs* were diverse and could include writing letters to friends from socialist and even Western countries, studying foreign languages, cultural exchanges with youth from other parts of the Soviet Union or countries of the Soviet bloc. Work for internationalist education was seen as politically important and was also performed by other youth groups, for example, Pioneer and Komsomol organizations or Student Summer Work Brigades (*SSOs*). *KIDs* and other structures for internationalist education played an important role in all the Soviet solidarity campaigns, including that dedicated to Chile.

The military coup against the democratically elected People's Unity government in Chile in September 1973 led to mass solidarity protests against authoritarianism in many countries around the world. The Soviet government perceived Chile as an important potential zone of influence of the Communist ideology; thus the Chilean solidarity campaign was officially promoted by the state. The Special Committee on Solidarity with the Chilean Democrats was created in 1973. The Soviet Union also invited Chilean refugees (mainly members of the Communist Party) to stay in the Soviet Union. On the local level, solidarity with Chile was realized through the established structures of internationalist education. *KIDs* were expected to organize contests of political posters and songs in support of the "Chilean patriots" as well as to organize "solidarity fairs" where (usually home-made) objects were sold to raise funds for the Soviet Peace Foundation or similar organizations. The *SSOs* were expected to support the solidarity campaign through meetings, lectures, and in some cases days of voluntary work.

Still, analysis of the main Soviet youth newspaper, *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, from the 1980s shows that during that period the Soviet youth press did not provide much information about events in Chile where a mass anti-dictatorship movement was growing. Instead, many publications devoted to foreign affairs discussed friendship among young people of the socialist bloc or the 1985 Moscow International Youth Festival, while among Latin American countries, it was Nicaragua that received the most attention.

In light of this fact, youth interested in Chilean solidarity found other sources of information about Latin America and Chile. Supplementing the limited number of the Soviet informational publications on events in Chile before and after the military coup, these sources included general fiction and non-fiction publications on Latin American history, its indigenous population, and revolutionary heroes from different Latin American countries. These publications opened for the Soviet young people a romantic and exotic world of proud and heroic Indians, as well as invited them into the lives of Latin American freedom fighters, full of dangers and heroism. Another important source of information about Latin America was its music and literature, which was increasingly popular in the USSR. The most well-known singer was Víctor Jara; and his name was used in the titles of many political song contests in school and Pioneer summer camps, clubs of international friendship were also named after him, and informal solidarity publications cited listening to his music as an act of solidarity itself. All these sources of information created an idealized, romantic image of Latin Americans and Chileans—those coming from an enigmatic “burning continent.”

My discussion of informal solidarity is based on documents from the personal archives of some of the former participants. While it is very difficult to evaluate the scale of this kind of activism, the materials of the Summer Work Brigade from Saratov (*SSO Tovarishch*) and documents from the first independent forum of the associations for internationalist work (Moscow, October 1987) show that some young people in different cities of the Soviet Union voluntarily organized meetings of solidarity with Chile in their schools and universities. Also, some young people attempted to work to raise funds for the “fight against fascism” in Chile. Much of the informal solidarity movements took place in big university cities: it was there that contacts with Chilean (and other Latin American) students and exiled persons were possible. Documents preserved in the personal archives of former participants show that frequently those involved in solidarity activism started doing it because they were searching for more information about the world outside the Soviet Union or because they were attracted by the prospect of new forms of leisure or the possibility of contacts with foreigners. Many were also attracted by the revolutionary romance that was lacking in ordinary Pioneer and Komsomol activities. Most so-called informal solidarity activities were organized through established structures of internationalist education (like *KIDs*). Still, some materials show that despite acting within these structures, participants had some spaces of their own. For example, the materials from the Moscow forum in 1987 suggest that while this event was produced in coordination with Komsomol, many of the participants expressed independent views on the aims and forms of

solidarity and had direct contacts with Chilean exiles. The same is true for the participants of the *SSO Tovarishch* from Saratov, who were not only taking part in solidarity meetings but were also donating most of their summer agricultural work wages "for Chile." The documents also show that participants in informal solidarity frequently criticized Komsomol and other organizers of the official campaign citing their bureaucratism and the superficial character of many planned events.

In sum, Soviet internationalist education had contradictory consequences at the level of everyday practices and interpretations. While "solidarity with Chile" remained for most of the Soviet youth just one more exercise in Soviet propaganda, a few young people tried to use established structures and slogans in order to generate and practice their own understanding of "help" and "solidarity."