Preface

I became a Chile-watcher in the early 1960s, when my interest in ideologies of development and in the prospects for constitutional democracy naturally led me to a country where both seemed to flourish. A teaching stint at the two major universities in Santiago in 1967 under the auspices of the Rockefeller Foundation gave me a deeper understanding of a complex society at a crucial point in its development. Direct observation of the 1970 presidential election and visits to Chile and articles on Chilean politics over a decade induced me to begin to write this book during the last part of the Allende regime.

Since the book was begun before the 1973 coup, it was not written with a preestablished thesis in mind, although I was interested initially in comparing the effectiveness of the Frei reforms, which were based on a blend of Christian Democratic, populist, and technocratic prescriptions, with the Marxist-inspired changes being introduced by the Allende regime. The tragic overthrow of Chilean democracy in September 1973 led me to shift the focus to a more direct analysis of the proximate and remote causes of the coup as well as its consequences in the drastic changes which followed. Finally the post-coup revelations of the extent of U.S. intervention in Chile since the early 1960s required a consideration of the relative influence of external and domestic factors on the course of Chilean politics.

While I did not and still do not possess a single explanation around which to organize the narrative that follows, I have operated with certain assumptions which probably should be stated at the outset. As befits a scholar whose original training and writing was in political philosophy, I have assumed that ideas are not mere epiphenomena, but, particularly in a literate and free society, exert a direct influence on conduct and political decision-making. When, as in Chile, they are organized into ideologies which form part of the raison d’être of a multiparty system, they mobilize to political action, influence policy, and complicate the task of developing democratic consensus. I also believe that in a political system with the strong constitutional and legalist tradition of Chile, institutions and legitimated patterns
of political action make a difference in political outcomes. That the Frei government could adopt the strongest agrarian reform law ever adopted under democratic auspices, that a committed Marxist could come to the presidency of what was basically a very "bourgeois" society, and that he would only be overthrown after the breakdown of the economy and the widespread belief that his government was systematically violating the constitution, are all explicable in terms of the strength of Chilean political institutions which until September 1973 endured strains that no other democratic system in the world could have supported for such a period of time.

In keeping with this, I also believe that Chilean politics is influenced principally by internal factors, and that, contrary to the dependency school now dominant in Latin American social science, external influences have not been central determinants of the course of political life there. This emphasis therefore distinguishes this study from those which attempt to explain recent Chilean politics primarily in terms of either U.S., Soviet, or Cuban intervention. I take account of the role of the CIA and U.S. policy, but I do not believe it made a decisive difference. I am now convinced—with the benefit of hindsight—that even if the CIA had not been giving substantial financial support to the opposition, Allende would not have lasted a full six-year term unless he had drastically altered his policies, so long as the armed forces retained the autonomy and independence which they were guaranteed from the outset of his administration. There were also external pressures inspired or influenced by U.S. policy, but Allende's self-defeating domestic economic policies and polarizing politics were adopted from the outset of his administration and seemed to ignore or disregard what his predecessor had recognized—that, particularly with as fragile and inflation-prone an economy as Chile's, there are serious economic constraints on the possibilities of more than incremental changes in a democratic system, although over time those changes may in fact result in a "revolutionary" shift in political and economic power.

Recognizing the political, economic, and institutional limits on policymaking, I also have assumed that there was no inevitability about the course of recent Chilean history, and that there were always alternatives available—some of which might have avoided the tragic denouement of 1973. In particular, at the beginning of both the Frei and Allende administrations, alternative ways of dealing with those outside the government party or parties could have made a difference in Chile's subsequent political evolution. Similarly, in the middle of their periods in office, both presidents had opportunities to alter their political and economic policies in ways which could have avoided the downward spiral which occurred in both cases—with far greater intensity and adverse effects, of course, in Allende's case than in Frei's. To identify these and other crucial turning points in the stormy recent history of Chile, I refer the reader to the following chapters.

As I hope this book will demonstrate, neither Frei nor Allende fits into the neat categories that the mythmakers of left and right have assigned to them. Frei was neither the willing tool of foreign and domestic reaction nor the initiator of a social revolution in Chile, but a dedicated democrat who tried to use constitutional channels to promote a greater degree of social justice for low-income groups. Allende was neither an innocent social democrat overthrown by fascist thugs and the CIA, nor a Marxist revolutionary who manipulated Chile's democratic institutions in order to set the stage for a violent Communist seizure of power. Rather, he was a skilled parliamentary politician committed to aiding the poor and underprivileged, who could never abandon his romantic admiration for those, like Castro and Guevara, who had waged a successful armed revolution. When at last the contradiction between parliamentarism and revolution led to his overthrow, he chose to die holding a submachine gun which was a gift from Fidel Castro.

There is not space to identify and thank all those who have helped me, especially the hundreds of Chileans with whom I have discussed politics since my first visit in 1963. Besides the Rockefeller Foundation, which supported my teaching there, I should also express my gratitude to the Committee on Regional and International Studies and the Committee on Research in the Social Sciences and the Humanities of Princeton University, which made possible repeated visits to Chile over more than a decade, and to the Princeton Center of International Studies for its support for two summers of research and writing. The Twentieth Century Fund's sponsorship of my current work on nationalization in Latin America was also helpful in the sections on Chilean policy toward the copper industry. Finally I wish to thank my wife for her continued advice, assistance, and example as to what a dedicated democratic (and Democratic) politician can accomplish. This book is dedicated to the Chilean people in the hope that they may soon reestablish the free society concerned with social justice that all those who have worked with them have known and loved.