

**Review: Grace Livingstone, *Britain and the Dictatorships of Argentina and Chile, 1973-1982: Foreign Policy, Corporations and Social Movements***

Grace Livingstone's book, newly released in paperback, is a comparative study that sets out to understand the British government's response to authoritarian regimes in Chile (1973-1990) and Argentina (1976-1983). By contrasting the very different foreign policy decisions to two neighbouring countries whose dictatorships displayed clear similarities in ideology and repressive strategy, the study explores the underlying forces that drove these responses. The result is a close analysis of the interplay between the elite social networks of Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) bureaucracy, interwoven economic and strategic state interests and solidarity campaigners rooted in the labour movement.

Livingstone draws primarily from a raft of official government papers held at Kew National Archives, declassified in recent years in line with the thirty-year rule. Unfortunately, she discovers through a Freedom of Information request that over 300 FCO folders relating to the lead up to the 1982 conflict between Argentina and Britain were destroyed. Nevertheless, the documentation that does exist enables Livingstone to pay close attention to the FCO's priorities in dealing with repressive Cold War dictatorships, and officials' interactions with both ministers and civil society. By combining these with diaries, memoirs, political pamphlets and interviews, she pieces together a rich analysis of this constant negotiation between civil service, politicians, social movements and commercial interests.

The story that unfolds is a fascinating one that has much to teach us about two areas: the development of British foreign policy; and the capacity for interest groups to influence foreign policy. On the first, the analysis emphasises the elite networks of sociability in which the FCO functioned, which aligned far more comfortably with Conservative administrations than Labour governments. Livingstone builds a carefully evidenced account of the way in which the upper-class milieu of the Foreign Office shaped policy instincts. Providing an enlightening survey of FCO officials, she notes that this department, particularly, was 'the preserve of the upper-class public school-educated Oxbridge graduate' (p. 57), with 75% of officials attended fee-paying schools. This helps to explain why the range of views 'remained within a narrow spectrum from conservative to conservatively moderate and all new recruits imbibed the ethos of gentlemanly capitalism that permeated the institution' (p. 7). With regard to the second area, the book shows that despite the major structural obstacles facing international solidarity movements, there are conditions in which they have been able to influence foreign policy.

Such was the case of the Chilean solidarity movement – led by the famous Chile Solidarity Campaign – which, despite the FCO's attempts to steer the Labour government away from campaigners'

demands, could claim some key victories in influencing the Labour governments of 1974-1979: arms sales were embargoed, economic sanctions imposed, refugees welcomed and even the British ambassador was withdrawn from Santiago in 1976. Heath's Conservative administration had aligned far more closely with departmental officials, as 'both agreed that protecting British trade and investment was paramount and that the stability brought by Pinochet was welcome' (p. 52). However, in a period of historic trade union militancy, Livingstone shows that campaigners, through institutional leverage, had the ear of sympathetic Labour ministers during the Wilson and Callaghan administrations, via pressure within party branches, unions and MPs – nine of whom sat on the Chile Solidarity Campaign's executive. As a result, we are told, the Labour government advanced an early example of an ethical foreign policy that functioned in tension with the conservative FCO ethos. Of course, most of these achievements were rolled back from 1979 under Thatcher, who later struck up a close friendship with Pinochet, as the refugee programme was shut down, restrictions on arms sales loosened and an ambassador reinstated.

In the case of Argentina, Livingstone explores the reasons why the anti-dictatorship cause did not capture the public imagination (at least of those on the left) like it did with Chile. Much of this had to do with the particular Cold War configurations in the countries in question. Unlike in Chile, where the Labour left saw a clear battle between socialism and fascism, Argentine ideological divides and bitter left-wing rifts did not map onto British politics comfortably. The British labour movement was almost uniformly unsympathetic to Peronism, and even more so to the discredited Isabel Perón government: 'While left-wingers had been inspired by Allende's peaceful road to socialism, no Labour politician mourned the fall of the Peronist government' (p. 121). Moreover, Livingstone suggests that British Communists – a militant force within the left – were disoriented by the Argentine Communist Party failure to publicly oppose the coup. Although she might have looked closer at the International Marxist Group, who maintained contact with the ERP-PRT Trotskyist dissidents, her point still stands: the political dynamics in Argentina could only produce a relatively weak solidarity movement among the British left, mostly limited to people with a close personal interest in Argentina. Despite a publicity boost in 1978 for campaigners during the World Cup, the influence on foreign policy was minimal: no sanctions were imposed, a mere twenty refugees were accepted into the UK (compared to 3,000 from Chile) and arms sales continued in such uninterrupted fashion that the military attaché was still pitching bomber planes only days before the 1982 war began. But Livingstone puts government papers to good use, revealing details of the business and diplomatic sectors' ties to the regime. While some lower-ranking officials and embassy workers assisted campaigners, the conservative networks comprising the Anglo-Argentine community, diplomats and business sectors scolded critical journalists and Amnesty International for highlighting the regime's violence.

Ending her study in 1982, Livingstone also offers new evidence that helps explain Britain's aggressive response. She rejects the idea that Britain was primarily motivated by oil, although she provides documentation that shows that interest in off-shore reserves certainly played a part in lobbying for the retention of sovereignty. Instead, government papers suggest that fear of domestic criticism over losing sovereignty weighed most heavily on the thinking of Thatcher's administration. She also notes the mixed response of the left, as human rights campaign groups took practically no formal positions on the dispute and Labour left figures found themselves on opposing sides.

Overall, the book is undoubtedly a major contribution to literature on British foreign policy during the Cold War, but also on the study of international human rights and solidarity movements. By weaving together class and social movement approaches, Livingstone skilfully demonstrates both the social and ideological environment within which British foreign policy was produced and the extent to which – or conditions in which – civil society groups were able to push the state towards more ethical positions.