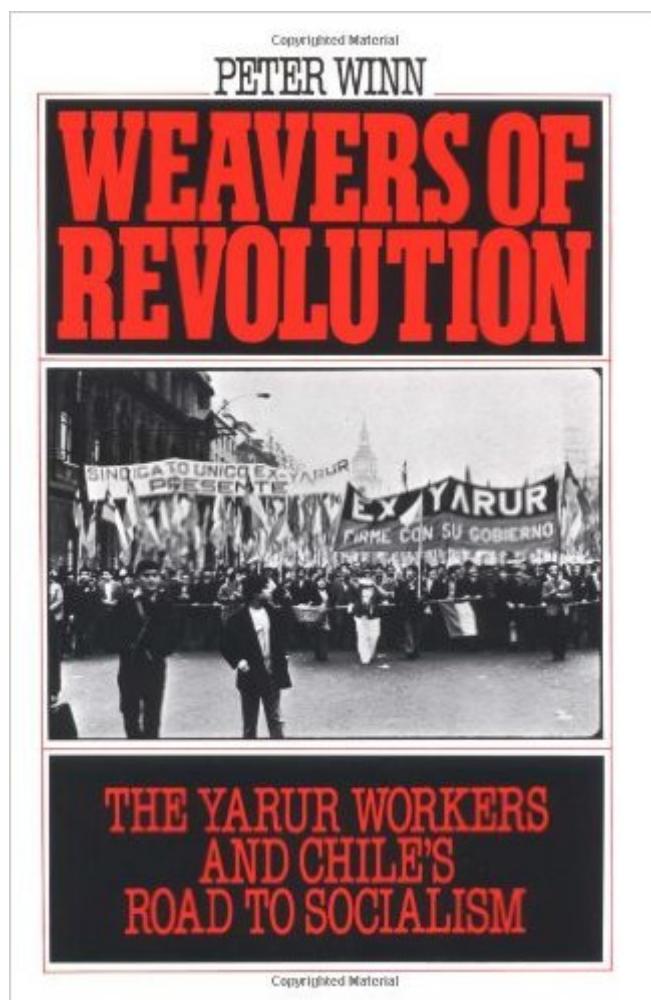


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Weavers Of Revolution: The Yarur Workers And Chile's Road To Socialism



Synopsis

Peter Winn, a highly regarded and internationally recognized Latin-American scholar and journalist, has written an innovative case study of Chile's revolution from below. Winn's analysis of the dramatic seizure of the Yarur cotton mill in Santiago and its widely felt repercussions for Allende's revolution is based on extensive, unique interviews. He juxtaposes the workers' views and activities during the revolution with a portrait of the government.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The seizure of Yarur factory on April 25, 1971 marked the beginning of a tumultuous struggle for socialism in Chile. Salvador Allende, of the popular unity party, ran on a platform that sought to unify the working population. Allende's vow to guide Chile down the democratic road to socialism is one of his greatest legacies. The democratic road to socialism was paved, at least symbolically, with the efforts of the working class. The failures and successes of Allende's travel through la "via Chilena" hinge on whether "the Chilean revolutionary process was of and by the workers or merely for the workers." Allende would die the death of a martyr: machine gun in hand in an enflamed national palace that had been besieged by a hostile coup. If Allende died the death of martyr, to whom was he a hero? Inconsistent with traditional revolutionary ideology Allende feared a rampant revolution. As a self-proclaimed Marxist his views irked both capitalists and the middle class. El presidente compaÃ±ero, regardless, was a president for the people. His core constituency demanded a revolution from below and thus complicated the revolution from above that Allende attempted to

impose. With these conflicts in mind Peter Winn analyzes the extent to which Allende (a socialist) both failed and succeeded as a revolutionary.

Winn's book gives a detailed (and Trotskyist) account of a "revolution from below" that transpired during Allende's "revolution from above." It depicts the struggles of textile workers as they grew conscious of their class standing, became unionized and, ultimately, seized control of the nation's most prominent mill. In the end, however, Winn demonstrates how the Yarur workers and the Popular Unity government imagined different Chilean roads to socialism, and how this divergence brought the social revolution and the Ex-Yarur mill to a tragic conclusion. It is a well-crafted and readable book...a "must" for any student of Latin American history, social revolution or Marxist theory.

I agree with the last reviewer, except for her\his curious reference to this being a "Trotskyist" view. What I like about this book is the way one can see the dilemmas and perspectives of different actors within the coalition that backed Allende. Less an endorsement of any one tendency's political line, this book brings out the tragedy of various democratic revolutionary factions all trying to do the right thing and unable to unite in the face of repression. Best of all, it links the perspectives of ordinary workers with the difficult choices faced by leaders.

Readable, well-written, and highly informative. I couldn't imagine what it must have been like for the Old Timers who, having been exploited brutally for decades, now possessed the dignity and pride of being the cooperative owners and managers of their mill.

Winn is puzzlingly ignorant of the basic history of socialism, frequently making inaccurate claims about the novelty of worker actions or perspectives and failing to explain extremely straightforward applications of mainstream socialist thought. I cannot imagine that he has ever read Marx, which seems an odd blind spot for someone who publishes about socialist revolutionary process. His pro-capitalist perspective is further puzzling. Winn never misses an opportunity to explain that the workers never understood what they were doing, or to praise Yarur, even seeming amused that the factory owner kept a "harem" of female workers and assigned favorable work opportunities according to sexual favors. While the work on the Yarur factory is clearly exhaustively researched, the frequent errors in context and analysis substantially discount the scholarly value of the work. Aesthetically it is a good example of academic writing of its period: thus contemporary readers may

find it insufferably florid.

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