

# *Marmaduke Grove and the Chilean National Election of 1932*

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As Chileans prepared for the election of October, 1932, the political scene was clouded. No less than thirty-two political parties existed, some of them organized by fraternal organizations, labor unions, and splinter groups from traditional parties. But the influence of these was negligible. As in previous years the election would be decided by the major parties: Conservative, Liberal, Radical, and Liberal Democrat. Yet, fractionalism also became a factor within these parties, threatening to destroy their power which had been developed through many years of political warfare. The long period of military intervention in politics, dating back to September, 1924, and the subsequent loss of faith in the democratic process by the citizenry left a legacy of near anarchy among the Chilean people. Through those eight years they had experienced either weak presidents dominated by the military or strong-man dictatorships. In neither case were they in a position to change their government at the ballot box.<sup>1</sup>

The election date of October 30 was not selected until late September which gave political parties little time to line up behind the candidates of their choice, and the candidates even less time to campaign. A portion of the Conservative Party nominated Hector Rodríguez de la Sota, while the remaining Conservatives, some Liberals, and

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<sup>1</sup> *La Nación* (Santiago), September 26, 1932 (Editorial).

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Liberal Democrats supported Enrique Zañartu Prieto. The Communist Party displayed amazing recuperative power after being outlawed for three years and named Elias Lafertte as its presidential nominee. Some socialist parties, along with portions of the Radical and Liberal parties, nominated Arturo Alessandri Palma, a former reform-minded president who had been the victim of military uprisings in 1924 and 1925. One of the smaller socialist parties, the *Partido Acción Revolucionario Socialista* (ARS), amazed everyone by nominating Marmaduke Grove Vallejo, then a political prisoner on Easter Island.

A career army officer, Marmaduke Grove had studied military tactics in pre-World War I Germany, served as assistant director of the Chilean Military Academy, and directed the air force during its formative years. In the mid-twenties, after participating in two successful military insurrections, he was expelled from the service, launched an abortive third revolt, and was finally exiled to Easter Island.<sup>2</sup> Grove escaped from the island in 1931 with the aid of another 1932 presidential candidate-to-be, Arturo Alessandri. Once back in Santiago Grove managed to gain reinstatement in the army, only to lead still another military revolt on June 4, 1932. This had only temporary success and within two weeks Grove was on his way back to Easter Island where he was living in exile when the ARS nominated him for president.<sup>3</sup>

In the middle of September the campaigns began. For Alessandri, Zañartu, Rodríguez de la Sota, and Lafertte, campaigning progressed in the time-honored tradition of rallies, speeches, club meetings, and discussions with other

<sup>2</sup> Ejército de Chile, Comando en Jefe, Dirección del Personal, *Datos Biográficos del ex-coronel (F) Don Marmaduke Grove Vallejos [sic]*. Prepared for the author by the Personnel Division of the Chilean Army, November 3, 1961.

<sup>3</sup> Jorge Grove Vallejo, *Descorriendo el velo* (Valparaiso: Imprenta "Aurora de Chile," 1934), 142.

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politicians.<sup>4</sup> But Grove's nomination created a unique situation. Since communications between Easter Island and Chile were virtually non-existent, he did not even learn of his candidacy until the middle of October when a ship arrived to take him home. When he finally discovered that he was a candidate for president, more than two weeks elapsed before he could reach Santiago. Consequently, those who placed his name in nomination had to carry the full burden of the campaign, handicapped by the absence of their candidate. True, the *grovista* leadership may have chosen Grove because he was outside the country in the hope that his name would generate emotional fervor among the workers. On the other hand, his backers may have been motivated by a desire to build up a following for the Grove name, which to many Chileans had become synonymous with socialism, and later transfer that allegiance from Grove to a socialist unification movement. In either case the socialists could profit from the publicity of the campaign and there always remained the outside chance that Grove would be elected president.

As a first step in the campaign, Grove's supporters began a concerted drive to bring their candidate back from exile. On September 23 Eugenio González, educator and socialist leader, asked Provisional President Bartolomé Blanche to return Grove and the other political exiles from Easter Island. Blanche assured the Grove forces that he would bring back their candidate as quickly as possible.<sup>5</sup> Not content with a mere promise, Grove's followers petitioned the Santiago Court of Appeals which ruled on September 26, 1932 that Grove and his compatriots were held unlawfully on Easter Island. The court officially informed the government of its decision, thus forcing Blanche to announce that a ship would be dispatched before the end of September for the express purpose of returning the Easter Island

<sup>4</sup> *La Nación* (Santiago), September 23, 1932.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

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prisoners to Chilean soil.<sup>6</sup>

Blanche, meanwhile, was in the midst of a quarrel with the opposition which was to topple him from authority in a matter of hours. By October 1 the government still had not sent a ship and the Grove campaign committee bitterly castigated this tardiness as an intentional act perpetrated by those in authority. The *grovistas* charged that this sluggishness grew out of the government's fear that Grove would be elected if he had an opportunity to campaign. On October 4 the new Provisional President, Abraham Oyanedel, announced that the naval vessel *Apolo* would sail on the following day and that Grove would be back in Chile by October 25, five days before the election. Actually, the *Castro*, a slower craft, was finally sent. The voyage required twenty-four days, bringing Grove back home on the afternoon of election day.<sup>7</sup>

When the Grove forces realized that their candidate would not be available, they agitated for postponement of the election. They initiated their new strategy on October 21, with a huge nationwide rally called the "March of Liberty." At the main gathering held in Santiago, the leadership issued a petition asking the government to postpone the election until November 15, or no sooner than fifteen days after Grove's arrival. Simultaneously the *grovistas* formed a committee to plan elaborate ceremonies to mark the return of the Easter Island prisoners.<sup>8</sup>

Subsequent to this rally a party of Grove's followers took the petition for postponement to the government. The Minister of Interior, Javier A. Figueroa, assured the committee that he would study the request and that after careful consideration he would make a decision. After

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, September 29, 1932.

<sup>7</sup> Marmaduke Grove, "La elección presidencial de 1932," *Claridad*, April 24, 1938.

<sup>8</sup> *La Nación* (Santiago), October 21, 1932 and *El Mercurio* (Valparaiso), October 21, 1932.

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consulting the other candidates, political parties, and various social and economic associations, the government announced on October 26 that the elections would be held on the date originally selected, October 30.<sup>9</sup>

Meanwhile, Grove's campaign moved steadily forward. Early in October a supporter published an article in the newspaper *La Nación*, in which he analyzed Grove's candidacy. Only a small elite of the population, he wrote, looked upon possible election of the exile as a national catastrophe. Those who performed manual labor for their sustenance found Grove entirely acceptable. Grove, he went on, desired a responsible, evolutionary socialism and did not condone violence and death but rather sought peaceful means to alleviate the "misery, hunger, and ignorance" of the workers. To achieve this end he advocated the abolition of national capitalism and foreign domination of the Chilean economy. Both the extreme Right and extreme Left were obnoxious to him. "Old politicians, demagogues, and privileged foreign capitalists," said the article, "find Grove to be dangerous but the people respect and trust him."<sup>10</sup>

A day prior to the release of this article a huge rally formally proclaimed Grove's candidacy before a capacity crowd in the National Stadium. Factories in Santiago closed early to permit their workers to participate in the event, while busses brought hundreds from suburban areas and distant provinces. Eugenio González opened the rally with a speech describing Grove's principles and ideology. This man, said González, emphasized the plight of the people and would do everything in his power to ease their suffering. He had considered various solutions to the social difficulties and had finally concluded that only a socialist government could alleviate the workers' misery. Once convinced of the

<sup>9</sup> *El Mercurio* (Valparaiso), October 27, 1932 (Editorial) and *La Nación* (Santiago), October 27, 1932.

<sup>10</sup> Claudio Arteago, "Grove — Catástrofe," *La Nación* (Santiago), October 4, 1932.

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soundness of his views he was a man who put ideas into action and "installed the second socialist republic that existed in the world."<sup>11</sup>

Still another vast concentration of workers met on October 12 to pledge their allegiance to Grove. Great throngs, from many suburban areas, converged upon the business district. Stopping briefly at the presidential offices to demonstrate for a postponement of the elections, they moved on six blocks to the Plaza de Armas where leading figures in the Grove camp addressed the rally. Afterwards the Executive National Committee of the Grove for President Organization sent its program to Provisional President Oyanedel. In the economic realm, they asked for: sanctions against speculators, the dissolution of COSACH (Compania Salitre de Chile, a government-private interest nitrate monopoly), improved sanitation through a public works program, and the reduction of the work day but with the same rate of pay. On the political scene the Grove supporters protested the delay in bringing their candidate back from exile, again called for a fifteen day postponement of elections, requested the release of all political prisoners, and condemned civilian armed forces as a danger to the internal security of the nation.<sup>12</sup>

Two weeks later, as election day approached, Eugenio González explained to another meeting of *grovistas* the exiled colonel's program as González understood it. He recalled that socialism developed in Chile only because the capitalist system failed to meet the needs of the total population. While technical progress enabled a few to live in magnificence, the vast majority lived in misery. Because of this situation Grove demanded a change from the capitalist to the socialist system, a change which would elevate the downtrodden to economic comfort and social dignity. González further charged that the entire political system of

<sup>11</sup> *La Nación* (Santiago), October 4, 1932.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, October 13, 1932.

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Chile was nothing more than an instrument of the wealthy. To reform this unjust system, he proposed replacing the political parties with groups of manual and intellectual worker elements whose representatives would "constitute a Legislative Body" and "Technical Councils of State." These would then "coordinate and direct national life."<sup>13</sup>

Understandably, the traditional parties opposed Grove on the basis of his socialist tendencies. But, he also met opposition from the extreme Left. In an editorial in the Communist newspaper, *Bandera Roja*, the party villified "*grovismo*." Claiming that Grove used socialist phrases to gain support among the workers, the editorial asserted that he could not be considered a socialist. In Communist eyes *grovismo* was a "bourgeois movement" which diverted the workers from true revolutionary goals while, at the same time, making use of barracks revolts. Socialism, concluded the writer, could not be realized by decree laws, by collaboration with the armed forces, or by association with imperialists. It could become reality only when "the true party of the workers," the Communist Party, gained control of the government.<sup>14</sup>

While the *grovistas* struggled to win votes for their candidate, most Chileans continued to believe that Alessandri was the strongest candidate and that his competition would come from Zañartu. An experienced politician, Zañartu had developed a clear economic and political philosophy over the years, but his economic concepts were basically reactionary. No one doubted his sincerity nor his capacity for public service. Yet the views he had expressed in the past were exactly the reasons why he now found it difficult to build a substantial following. Time after time, he pledged himself to an economic pattern which enabled the wealthy to continue enriching themselves while the vast majority of

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, October 27, 1932.

<sup>14</sup> *Bandera Roja* (Santiago), October 23, 1932 (Editorial)

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the population remained outside the pale of prosperity.<sup>15</sup>

Alessandri, equally experienced in politics, had served in congress as a representative from the northern province of Tarapacá until his election to the presidency in 1920. He had been an attractive reform candidate in the 1920 presidential election, and consequently as president he commanded much respect among left-of-center elements in 1932. Although reform-minded, he was sufficiently astute to avoid being labeled a radical. Employing his long experience as a politician, Alessandri read the temper of the age correctly. He knew that people wanted stability and an end to the eight years of political chaos, but he also realized that the majority did not want a return to a government controlled by the oligarchy.<sup>16</sup>

On October 5 Alessandri gave further evidence of his political sagacity when he published a letter to the Radical Party which had offered him its support. In this thoughtful document he refrained from making glaring promises; instead he accurately summed up Chile's problems. He pointed out that "the country has lived through eight years of confusion during which the stability of its institutions has been totally destroyed." As a result, "It is necessary, before all else, to reconstruct the republic over the unshakable base of strength and respect for its fundamental institutions. The hour is propitious and opportune. Resolution and character are all that is necessary to realize success." The letter concluded:

If I become the prime Magistrate of the nation my total energy . . . will be used in the service of my country and my fellow citizens, without accepting the predominance of determined and exclusive interests. My action will be directed to the benefit of the collectivity and for the general well-being of the country. I ask for this work once

<sup>15</sup> Carlos Sáez M. *Recuerdos de un soldado: El ejército y la política* (Santiago: Biblioteca Ercilla, 1934), III, 311.

<sup>16</sup> Samuel Gajardo, *Alessandri y su destino* (Santiago: n.p., 1951), 221-22.



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again, and for the cooperation of all Chileans; of all my countrymen.<sup>17</sup>

At 2:30 on the afternoon of October 30, 1932, election day, Grove and his fellow exiles arrived at Valparaiso. The welcome for them was so extensive that it was difficult for the ex-prisoners to debark. Grove met and greeted his family briefly but soon became separated from them in the thick crowd. After passing through customs, he and his party went to a hotel from the balcony of which he greeted thousands waiting in the street below. At dinner that evening, Grove learned that, although Alessandri had been elected president, he had finished second. Out of the total of 339,709 votes, Alessandri received 184,754 and Grove 60,965, Rodríguez de la Sota was third with 46,428 and Zañartu Prieto fourth with 42,910. Grove was not disappointed for he had not expected to win, but he later noted that the surprising support he received convinced him that he should continue to participate in Chilean politics. He considered it amazing that he could win over 60,000 votes with so little organization.<sup>18</sup>

During the first hours in Valparaiso, despite the confusion of the welcome, some members of the press managed to question Grove. Concerning Alessandri he stated that he was sorry to have been placed in nomination opposite such an illustrious citizen of Chile and such a good friend who had helped him escape from Easter Island during the dictatorship of Ibáñez. Grove expressed the view that there was hope for social progress under Alessandri's leadership, but he insisted that he would work untiringly for the principles of the June 4 movement.<sup>19</sup>

The following morning the Grove family boarded a train for Santiago. A great and enthusiastic assemblage filled

<sup>17</sup> *El Mercurio* (Valparaiso), October 5, 1932.

<sup>18</sup> Marmaduke Grove, *Claridad*, April 24, 1938 and *El Mercurio* (Valparaiso), October 31, 1932.

<sup>19</sup> *La Nación* (Santiago), October 31, 1932.

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the Santiago railroad station by noon and shortly thereafter made the streets in the vicinity impassable. When the train reached the city, workers boarded the locomotive and rode it into the station where the people had been singing hymns to occupy themselves until the train's arrival. Grove emerged from the first car to a fifteen minute ovation; then he made his way through the crowd to waiting cars which took his entourage to the offices of the newspaper, *La Opinión*. Here Grove delivered a short address in which he stated that his program was based on "order, work, and liberty," and he asked the people to unite under socialist principles to bring about the desired reform.<sup>20</sup>

Following the gathering in the business district of Santiago, Grové left for his home to spend some moments with his family. Crowds moved about his neighborhood forcing him to make an appearance on the balcony. Later Alessandri telephoned to arrange a meeting. Discussing the future with his old friend the next afternoon Grove asserted:

I consider it a duty of conscience to organize the seventy [sic] odd thousand voters who, without any remuneration, had sufficient confidence to give me their votes in the last election. I consider it a duty to organize the working masses in our country in order to form a great and unified party that will permit us to attain the triumph we desire.<sup>21</sup>

In a later interview Grove revealed that he planned to retire from active politics but that he would work to organize the Chilean people into a movement which would insure the ultimate establishment of the Socialist Republic of Chile. He believed that he would have to instill in his countrymen a revolutionary conscience to win this objective. The lower classes had to be taught that revolution was not completely a destructive force, that out of the chaos of revolutionary violence some positive good emerges. Once the workers

<sup>20</sup> Marmaduke Grove, "Una promesa de Grove que es hoy una realidad magnífica," *Claridad*, April 26, 1938 and *La Nación* (Santiago), November 1, 1932.

<sup>21</sup> Marmaduke Grove, *Claridad*, April 26, 1938.

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realized this they would then sanction revolution, if this were the only means to gain equality and dignity.<sup>22</sup>

While Grove spoke optimistically about his future role in the development of Chilean socialism, leaders of the various socialist parties remained skeptical of his usefulness. Eugenio Matte Hurtado, founder and director of the important political action group known as *Nueva Acción Pública*, had opposed Grove from the beginning. Another socialist leader, Eugenio González, had supported Grove in the campaign but retained little enthusiasm for his future in the movement. The same attitude could be detected among most leaders. These men had worked exclusively through political channels to build their base of support and they feared that Grove's extra-legal endeavors might endanger the entire socialist movement.

When Grove arrived in Santiago, these party leaders invited him to dinner to discuss subsequent policy. They informed him that he would not be the leader of Chilean socialism. They had chosen him as candidate not because they looked upon him as their leader, it was explained, but because he was a symbol which they believed could evoke emotional support from the lower sectors of society. The leadership believed that workers would unite behind such a man, but they pointed out that now Grove must not become synonymous with socialism. This would ultimately destroy the movement and place Grove in the position of *caudillo*. Such a contingency must be avoided at all costs.<sup>23</sup>

The socialist leadership aimed for a unified socialism in which Grove would play a minor role. They believed that his past military training, his willingness to resort to violence to gain his ends, and his frequent shifts of allegiance would imperil the development of socialism. Consequently they tried to exclude him from the unification movement. Grove,

<sup>22</sup> Carlos Barella, "No proclamo el derecho a la venganza, dice Grove," *Zig-Zag*, No. 1441 (November 5, 1932), 2-8.

<sup>23</sup> *El Pdis* (Santiago), November 7, 1932.

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however, could not be forced into the background after having gained the support of the socialist rank and file in the presidential election. Then too, his revolutionary exploits served to bolster his support from the socialist voters. The socialist worker whose own life was hopelessly mired in routine could identify with the flamboyant colonel and gain vicarious satisfaction from his adventures. With such grass roots support Grove inevitably would become one of the leaders of Chilean socialism.

When unification came on April 19, 1933, Grove was indeed a part of the event. He began immediately to work for the expansion of the now united *Partido Socialista de Chile*. Within the year he became socialist senator from Santiago and later secretary general of the party. In 1937 the party nominated him for the presidency but he stepped down in favor of the Radical candidate once the Popular Front came into existence in 1938.

The socialist leadership in 1932 lacked confidence in Grove and attempted to relegate him to an unimportant position in the movement. But Grove's appeal with the rank and file, stemming from his adventurous and romantic past and his strong showing in the 1932 election assured him a place of importance in Chilean socialism. Furthermore, he assisted in uniting the multitude of small socialist organizations. During the remainder of the thirties and in the early forties Grove led the Socialist Party with distinction. In these crucial years under Grove's guidance, the socialists won four senate seats and elected eighteen deputies, thereby becoming an important factor in Chilean politics. Grove proved to the socialist leaders that he was more than just a symbol; he became the actual leader of the Party and held that position until the Socialist schism of 1942.