

The Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria (MIR) of Chile: From Insurrection to Fragmentation, 1965–Present

Abstract

The Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria (MIR) remains the most significant extraparliamentary revolutionary organisation in Chilean history. Founded in 1965 as a heterogeneous coalition of Marxists, Trotskyists, anarchists and socialist dissidents, the MIR underwent rapid radicalisation under the leadership of Miguel Enríquez, embracing a strategy of armed insurrection that positioned it at the vanguard of Latin America's New Left. During the Popular Unity government (1970–1973), the MIR pursued a contradictory policy of “critical support” for Salvador Allende while simultaneously building autonomous “popular power” structures. Following the 1973 coup, the organisation mounted the most sustained armed resistance against the Pinochet dictatorship, suffering catastrophic losses that decimated its leadership. The MIR's post-dictatorship history is one of serial fragmentation: splits in 1967, 1987 and beyond produced a constellation of factions—MIR-Histórico, MIR-Militar, MIR-Político, MIR-Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres and various successor groups—most of which dissolved or were absorbed into electoral coalitions. Today, only a diminished successor organisation survives, participating in the broad left coalition Apruebo Dignidad. This essay traces the MIR's trajectory from inception to present, critically examining its strategic evolution, organisational splits, internal strife, and historiographical treatment in the scholarly literature.

1. Introduction

The Chilean road to socialism has been conventionally understood through the institutional lens of Salvador Allende's Popular Unity coalition, with its tragic terminus on 11 September 1973. Yet this narrative, dominant in both popular memory and much academic historiography, obscures the parallel history of the revolutionary left that rejected the parliamentary path entirely. The Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria (MIR), founded in August 1965, represented the most sophisticated and organisationally durable expression of this alternative trajectory. At its height during the Popular Unity period, the MIR commanded mass fronts among workers, peasants, students and urban squatters, while simultaneously maintaining clandestine armed structures. Its subsequent resistance to the Pinochet dictatorship cost the lives of hundreds of militants, including its founder and maximum leader, Miguel Enríquez, assassinated by the DINA in October 1974.

Despite its historical significance, the MIR has received uneven scholarly attention. Academic treatments have tended to focus either on the 1965–1973 period—particularly the organisation's relationship with Allende—or on the human rights dimensions of its repression under Pinochet. The organisation's internal strife, its post-dictatorship fragmentation, its various successor factions, and its contemporary afterlives remain substantially under-studied. This essay addresses these gaps by providing a comprehensive analytical history of the MIR from its foundation to the present, with particular attention to its organisational splits, strategic debates, internal purges, and the divergent paths taken by its various factions. Drawing on primary documents, memoir literature, and the growing body of academic scholarship, it argues that the MIR's history exemplifies the broader crisis of the Latin American revolutionary left: its inability to transition from armed struggle to democratic politics without organisational dissolution or ideological dilution.

2. Literature Review

The scholarly literature on the MIR can be divided into four overlapping categories: organisational histories, biographical studies, analyses of armed resistance under dictatorship, and examinations of the Chilean left's broader strategic debates.

2.1 Organisational Histories and Primary Documentation

The foundational documentary collection remains *Miguel Enríquez y el proyecto revolucionario en Chile: discursos y documentos del Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionario* (Naranjo et al., 2004), which compiles key texts from the organisation's first decade. This has been supplemented by Marco Álvarez's (2015) *La Constituyente Revolucionaria*, a detailed reconstruction of the MIR's founding congress based on archival research, and Eugenia Palieraki's (2014) *¡La revolución ya viene! El MIR chileno en los años sesenta*, which offers the most comprehensive academic history of the organisation's pre-coup period. Palieraki's work is particularly valuable for its analysis of the MIR's ideological formation, tracing the influence of the Cuban Revolution while distinguishing the MIR's strategic conceptions from foquismo. For the English-language reader, Cristián Pérez's (n.d.) "A History of the MIR," available through the Centro de Estudios Miguel Enríquez, provides a concise overview, though it lacks critical distance from the organisation's own narrative.

The post-coup period has been less systematically studied from an organisational perspective. Memoir literature—particularly from exiled militants—dominates, with works such as Max Marambio's (2008) *Las armas de ayer* offering insider accounts of armed resistance. However, these texts often elide strategic failures in favour of heroic narratives. The documentary collection *El MIR vive en el corazón del pueblo* (MIR, 1990) provides essential primary material for the late dictatorship period, though it requires careful critical reading.

2.2 Biographical Studies

The figure of Miguel Enríquez towers over the literature, functioning as both historical subject and revolutionary icon. Pedro Naranjo's (2004) *Biografía de Miguel Enríquez* remains the standard reference, while Daniel Avendaño's (2001) *El rebelde de la burguesía* offers a more journalistic account. Marcello Ferrada de Noli's (2014) *Los que fundamos el MIR* provides a valuable corrective from the perspective of one of the organisation's founding members, particularly regarding the heterogeneity of the original coalition and the circumstances of the Trotskyist expulsion. More recently, Carmen Castillo's (1982) *Un día de octubre en Santiago* and her documentary *La vida secreta del MIR* (cited in Álvarez, 2015) have contributed to the memorialisation of the organisation's women militants, a dimension often neglected in male-centred revolutionary historiography.

2.3 Armed Resistance and Dictatorship

The MIR's armed resistance has been examined primarily through the lens of human rights and transitional justice. The Rettig Commission Report (1991) documented the systematic extermination of MIR leadership by the DINA, while subsequent judicial investigations have established the circumstances of Enríquez's assassination as an extrajudicial killing. Scholarly analyses of armed resistance more broadly—such as Schlotterbeck's (2018) *Beyond the Vanguard*—have situated the MIR within the broader ecology of social movements under Allende, though her focus on "everyday revolutionaries" tends to marginalise the organisation's armed dimensions.

The most significant recent contribution to understanding the MIR's international military connections is Luciano Lanare's (2024) "Hombres de nieve," which documents MIR training in North Korea and

other socialist states for Operación Retorno. This article, published in *Revista Digital Mundo Asia Pacífico*, represents a new wave of scholarship examining the transnational dimensions of Chilean armed resistance. Similarly, Moe Taylor's (2023) *North Korea, Tricontinentalism, and the Latin American Revolution* places the MIR within the broader framework of North Korean support for Latin American revolutionary movements during the 1960s and 1970s.

2.4 Splits, Factions, and Post-Dictatorship Trajectories

The post-1987 fragmentation of the MIR has received remarkably little academic attention. The Wikipedia entry on the MIR (citing Ferrada de Noli, 2008) notes the three-way split of 1987, but no scholarly monograph has yet traced the subsequent trajectories of MIR-Histórico, MIR-Militar, and MIR-Político in detail. Nelson Gutiérrez's leadership of the latter faction, which renounced armed struggle and entered electoral politics, is mentioned in passing in histories of the Izquierda Unida and Juntos Podemos Más coalitions, but lacks dedicated study. The later emergence of the MIR-Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres (MIR-EGP) in 1991, and its subsequent evolution into the MIR-EGP-PL, is documented primarily through primary sources from the organisation itself rather than academic scholarship. This essay therefore contributes to filling a significant lacuna in the literature.

3. Historical Development

3.1 Foundation and the Heterogeneous Origins (1965–1967)

The MIR was founded on 14–15 August 1965 at the Congress of Revolutionary Unity, held in Santiago. The constituent groups represented a broad spectrum of the non-communist left: the Marxist Revolutionary Vanguard-Rebelde (VRM-R) from Concepción, led by Miguel Enríquez and Bautista van Schouwen; the Trotskyist Revolutionary Workers' Party (POR); a sector of the Revolutionary Socialist Party (PSR); and anarcho-syndicalists grouped around the veteran trade unionist Clotario Blest. Approximately ninety delegates attended, though the organisation's initial membership remained small (Álvarez, 2015; Palieraki, 2014).

The founding Declaration of Principles established the MIR as the “Marxist-Leninist vanguard of the working class and the oppressed and exploited masses of Chile,” positioning itself in explicit opposition to the reformist strategies of the Communist and Socialist parties. Yet this ideological statement masked significant internal heterogeneity. The Trotskyist old guard, led by Enrique Sepúlveda (elected first Secretary-General), prioritised trade union work and maintained reservations about armed struggle. The young Concepción students, by contrast, were increasingly drawn to the Cuban model and the continental revolutionary wave triggered by the Tricontinental Conference of 1966 (Palieraki, 2014; Taylor, 2023).

3.2 The First Split: The Trotskyist Expulsion and the Rise of the Insurrectionist Line (1967)

The first major internal crisis occurred in 1967, during preparations for the III Congress. The preceding period had been marked by growing tension between the Trotskyist and syndicalist leadership, which emphasised legal trade union work and gradualist mobilisation, and the radicalising student wing around Enríquez, which advocated clandestine armed organisation and insurrection. The Trotskyist current, represented by the POR and its allies within the PSR, argued that Chilean conditions did not yet warrant armed struggle and that the organisation should focus on building working-class consciousness through factory committees and trade unions. They were suspicious of the guerrilla foco model, viewing it as petit-bourgeois voluntarism that ignored the objective conditions of the Chilean proletariat.

Enríquez's faction, which had gained strength through student and squatters' organising, successfully challenged this leadership at the III Congress. The confrontation was both ideological and personal: Enríquez and his allies accused the Trotskyist old guard of opportunism and reformism, while the latter denounced the Concepción group as adventurists who would destroy the organisation through premature armed actions. The Trotskyists were defeated and expelled, marking the end of the MIR's original heterogeneous phase. Enríquez was elected Secretary-General, and the organisation's political line shifted decisively toward insurrection.

The document *La conquista del poder por la vía insurreccional*, co-authored by Enríquez, his brother Marco Antonio, and Marcello Ferrada de Noli, became the organisation's new strategic bible. This text explicitly rejected the parliamentary and trade-unionist strategies of the traditional left, arguing that only armed insurrection could break the Chilean bourgeoisie's hold on state power. The expulsion of the Trotskyists was not merely a tactical disagreement but an organisational purge that consolidated the MIR as a disciplined, centralised vanguard party under Enríquez's leadership. The expelled factions reorganised themselves outside the MIR, some eventually joining the broader Trotskyist left, while the MIR itself became increasingly monolithic ideologically (Ferrada de Noli, 2014; Álvarez, 2015; Palieraki, 2014).

3.3 The Enríquez Era: Armed Propaganda and Mass Fronts (1967–1970)

Under Enríquez's leadership, the MIR pursued a dual strategy: clandestine armed actions to finance the organisation and demonstrate revolutionary capacity, combined with open mass work through "fronts" in specific social sectors. Between 1967 and 1969, MIR commandos carried out a series of bank expropriations—termed "revolutionary expropriations"—that funded the organisation while generating significant media attention. These operations, conducted with military precision, established the MIR's reputation as a serious armed organisation (Palieraki, 2014; CIA documents cited in Scielo, 2011).

Simultaneously, the MIR built mass fronts: the Frente de Trabajadores Revolucionarios (FTR), the Movimiento Campesino Revolucionario (MCR), the Movimiento de Pobladores Revolucionarios (MPR), and the Frente de Estudiantes Revolucionarios (FER). This strategy distinguished the MIR from the foquista guerrilla movements then active elsewhere in Latin America. Rather than privileging rural guerrilla warfare, the MIR sought to construct revolutionary power in the urban and rural working class through a combination of legal and illegal methods (Sagepub, 2013; Wikipedia, 2023).

The Christian Democratic government of Eduardo Frei Montalva responded to the MIR's growing visibility with repression. Following the 1969 "Osses case"—in which MIR militants attacked the right-wing newspaper *Noticias de la Tarde*—the government banned the organisation and issued arrest warrants for thirteen leaders, including Enríquez, van Schouwen, and Ferrada de Noli. The MIR was driven into clandestinity, where it developed the cellular structures that would prove both a strength and a vulnerability in the years to come (Memoria Chilena, n.d.; Wikipedia, 2023).

3.4 The Popular Unity Period: Critical Support and Dual Power (1970–1973)

The election of Salvador Allende in September 1970 posed a strategic dilemma for the MIR. The organisation had not participated in the Popular Unity coalition and maintained that the parliamentary road could not achieve socialism. Nevertheless, Enríquez met with Allende shortly after the election, and the MIR declared a truce in its armed propaganda actions. Allende, in turn, pardoned imprisoned MIR militants and tacitly supported the organisation in student elections (Sigmund, 1977; Scielo, 2011).

The MIR's relationship with the Popular Unity government was characterised by what scholars have

termed “critical support” or “tactical support with strategic opposition.” While recognising the progressive nature of the Allende government, the MIR argued that only the construction of autonomous popular power—organised through its mass fronts and potentially armed—could defend and deepen the revolutionary process. This position generated constant tension with the Communist Party, which demanded that the MIR subordinate itself to the government’s institutional strategy (Palieraki, 2014; Schlotterbeck, 2018).

During this period, the MIR experienced explosive growth, becoming the largest revolutionary organisation in Chilean history. Its mass fronts contested control of neighbourhoods, factories, and universities with the traditional left parties. The MPR, in particular, played a central role in the wave of land seizures (*tomas*) that characterised the Popular Unity period. However, the MIR’s refusal to integrate into the governing coalition meant that it lacked state protection when the coup came. Unlike the Communist and Socialist parties, which had some presence within the military and police, the MIR was entirely unprepared to resist a professional military coup (Sagepub, 2013; Schlotterbeck, 2018).

3.5 Resistance Under Pinochet: From Urban Warfare to Rural Guerrilla (1973–1986)

The 11 September 1973 coup found the MIR organisationally unprepared for the scale of repression unleashed by the military junta. The organisation’s initial response was characterised by the slogan “El MIR no se asila”—the MIR does not seek asylum. Enríquez and the central leadership remained in Chile, attempting to reorganise clandestine resistance. This decision, while symbolically powerful, proved catastrophic. The DINA (National Intelligence Directorate) prioritised the extermination of MIR leadership, and within months most of the central committee had been killed, captured, or forced into exile (Wikipedia, 2023; Memoria Chilena, n.d.).

Enríquez himself was assassinated on 5 October 1974 in a DINA operation in San Miguel. The circumstances of his death—initially presented as a confrontation—were later established by judicial investigation as an extrajudicial execution. His death marked a turning point: the MIR lost its charismatic leader and most experienced military commander at the precise moment when the dictatorship was consolidating its repressive apparatus (Naranjo, 2004; Rettig Report, 1991).

The mid-1970s represented the nadir of the MIR’s fortunes. The organisation’s leadership abroad, under the general secretaryship of Andrés Pascal Allende (nephew of Salvador Allende), gradually rebuilt structures. By 1977, the MIR launched Operación Retorno, a plan to reinsert trained militants into Chile. Cadres received military training in Cuba, North Korea, Vietnam, Libya, and Algeria, with the North Korean component—documented by Lanare (2024)—focusing on irregular warfare and winter survival tactics for the planned rural guerrilla front (Lanare, 2024; Taylor, 2023).

The guerrilla attempt at Neltume in July 1980 represented the culmination of this strategy. A small group of MIR militants attempted to establish a rural foco in the cordilleran region of Los Ríos. The operation was rapidly detected and crushed by military forces, resulting in numerous deaths and arrests. The failure at Neltume accelerated the MIR’s organisational crisis: it demonstrated the impossibility of rural guerrilla warfare in a country with no significant territorial sanctuary, and it exposed the strategic limitations of military training received abroad (Memoria Chilena, n.d.; Wikipedia, 2023).

Throughout the early 1980s, the MIR maintained a presence in urban resistance, participating in the protest movements that began with the 1983 copper workers’ strikes. However, the organisation’s military capacity was increasingly degraded by losses. The deaths of key leaders such as Arturo Villabella and Hugo Ratier in 1981–1983 further weakened the organisation. By 1986, the MIR had largely abandoned large-scale armed operations, though isolated actions continued until January 1988 (Big Flame, 2010;

Memoria Chilena, n.d.).

3.6 The 1987 Schism and the Three MIRs

The organisational crisis that had been building since Neltume culminated in 1987, when the MIR split into three distinct factions. The immediate catalyst was the debate over participation in the October 1988 plebiscite on Pinochet's continued rule, but the schism reflected deeper strategic and generational divisions that had developed over the preceding decade.

MIR-Histórico, led by Andrés Pascal Allende, maintained fidelity to the organisation's historical line of armed struggle and revolutionary insurrection. It rejected electoral participation and viewed the plebiscite as a legitimating mechanism for a reorganised authoritarianism. This faction retained much of the organisation's symbolic capital and international connections, but its military capacity was negligible by this point (Big Flame, 2010; Wikipedia, 2023).

MIR-Militar (also referred to as MIR-Ejército or MIR-Guerrilla), led by Hernán Aguiló, represented a more sectarian continuation of armed struggle. It maintained armed structures longer than the other factions, though its actions were increasingly isolated and politically marginal. This faction was decimated by police action in the late 1980s and early 1990s, as the democratic transition closed the political space for armed opposition (IS Review, 2008; Big Flame, 2010).

MIR-Político, led by Nelson Gutiérrez, represented the most significant strategic break. This faction renounced armed struggle entirely, endorsed the "No" campaign in the 1988 plebiscite, and committed to electoral politics. In 1989, it joined the Izquierda Unida (United Left) coalition alongside the Communist Party and other forces. This trajectory—from armed insurrection to electoral coalition—paralleled the broader Latin American left's transition from revolutionary warfare to democratic politics, though the MIR-Político's journey was particularly compressed (Big Flame, 2010; Wikipedia, 2023).

The schism of 1987 was not merely tactical but existential. Each faction claimed to represent the authentic continuity of the MIR, yet their strategic conceptions were irreconcilable. The MIR-Histórico and MIR-Militar gradually faded into irrelevance as the democratic transition progressed, while the MIR-Político attempted to navigate the new political landscape.

3.7 The MIR-Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres (1991–1990s)

It is essential to distinguish the **MIR-Militar** of 1987 from the **MIR-Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres** (MIR-EGP), which emerged later. The MIR-EGP was formed in **mid-1991** as a *refounding* by militants who sought to continue the armed revolutionary path after the original 1987 armed faction had been effectively destroyed. According to primary documents from the organisation itself, this group explicitly "refounded" itself to give new life to the MIR's armed project, initially as the MIR-Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres and later adding "Patria Libre" to become **MIR-EGP-PL**.

The MIR-EGP-PL carried out armed actions into the mid-1990s, including bank expropriations and propaganda operations, before being effectively destroyed by state repression. The group claimed joint responsibility with the FPMR-Autónomo for the 2012 Pilo Lil incident in Argentina. This later organisation was thus not a direct continuation of the 1987 MIR-Militar but a new attempt to revive the MIR's armed tradition after the democratic transition had closed the political space for such activities. Its existence demonstrates the persistence of armed revolutionary fantasies among a small minority of ex-militants, even as the broader Chilean left had abandoned such strategies (Cedema, n.d.; Wikipedia, 2023).

3.8 Post-Dictatorship Dissolution and Succession (1990–Present)

The early 1990s witnessed the effective dissolution of the MIR as a coherent national organisation. The MIR-Histórico and MIR-Militar ceased meaningful activity, their militants absorbed into human rights organisations, social movements, or simply retired from political life. The MIR-Político, by contrast, attempted to institutionalise itself as a legal political party.

Under Nelson Gutiérrez’s leadership, the MIR-Político participated in the Juntos Podemos Más coalition (formed 2003), an alliance with the Communist Party and smaller left forces. The coalition’s name—“Together We Can Do More for Chile”—with “Podemos” also functioning as an acronym for Poder Democrático Social (Social Democratic Power), indicated the distance travelled from the MIR’s original insurrectionary commitments. The MIR-Político maintained a small organisational presence, with a website (chile-mir.org) that has been intermittently active, and participated in municipal and parliamentary elections without significant electoral success (Big Flame, 2010; mir-chile.cl, 2012).

The death of Nelson Gutiérrez in 2008 marked the end of an era. Subsequent leadership passed to Demetrio Hernández (1992–2006) and others, but the organisation’s public profile diminished considerably. By the 2010s, the MIR’s successor organisation had become a minor component of Chile’s broad left, participating in the Apruebo Dignidad coalition that supported Gabriel Boric’s presidential candidacy in 2021.

It is important to note that multiple groups have claimed the MIR mantle over the years. The designations MIR-EM, MIR-PL, and MIR-HC that appear in some sources appear to reflect further subdivisions or regional variations rather than distinct national organisations with clear organisational continuity. The fragmentation of the Chilean revolutionary left into acronyms and initials—MIR, MAPU, FPMR, and their various offshoots—has made precise mapping of organisational genealogy exceptionally difficult (IS Review, 2008; Wikipedia, 2023).

4. Discussion: Strategic Debates and Organisational Dilemmas

The MIR’s history raises fundamental questions about the relationship between vanguardism and democracy, armed struggle and mass politics, and revolutionary continuity and adaptation. Several analytical themes deserve particular attention.

4.1 The Vanguard Dilemma and Internal Purges

The MIR’s conception of itself as a Marxist-Leninist vanguard party—elaborated in the 1967 theses and maintained throughout the Enríquez era—created a persistent tension between democratic participation and clandestine direction. The 1967 expulsion of the Trotskyist current was not merely an ideological disagreement but an organisational purge that consolidated Enríquez’s personal leadership and eliminated internal dissent. The Trotskyists’ emphasis on trade union work and gradualist mobilisation was denounced as reformist; their critique of armed struggle as premature voluntarism was dismissed as petit-bourgeois deviation. This purge established a pattern of internal discipline that enabled rapid strategic shifts but also prevented the organisation from incorporating corrective feedback.

The organisation’s mass fronts (FTR, MPR, MCR, FER) were theoretically subordinate to the party centre, yet their success depended on responding to the autonomous demands of their constituencies. Schlotterbeck (2018) argues that this tension was productive during the Popular Unity period, generating a dynamic of “everyday revolution” that exceeded the control of any single organisation. However, the

same vanguardist structure proved fatal under dictatorship: the concentration of leadership in identifiable individuals made the MIR exceptionally vulnerable to decapitation by the DINA. The very organisational centralisation that had enabled the MIR to act decisively became its fatal weakness when faced with a ruthless counter-insurgency state.

4.2 The Armed Struggle Debate

The MIR's commitment to armed struggle has been evaluated differently across the scholarly literature. For sympathetic chroniclers such as Naranjo (2004) and Avendaño (2001), the armed line represented a necessary response to the closure of institutional channels and the violence of the Pinochet regime. Critical perspectives, however, have questioned whether the MIR's military actions ever advanced strategic political objectives. The Neltume operation, in particular, appears in retrospect as a strategic miscalculation: poorly adapted to Chile's geographical and social conditions, it resulted in catastrophic losses without generating the "foco" effect its planners anticipated.

Lanare's (2024) research on North Korean training adds a new dimension to this debate. The MIR's investment in foreign military training—requiring significant organisational resources and exposing cadres to capture during re-entry—suggests a belief in the transposability of revolutionary models across radically different contexts. The failure of this approach highlights the specificity of Chilean conditions: the absence of territorial sanctuary, the professionalism of the armed forces, and the urban concentration of the population all militated against rural guerrilla strategies that had succeeded elsewhere.

4.3 The Transition Paradox and the Factional Afterlives

The MIR's post-1987 fragmentation exemplifies what might be termed the "transition paradox" facing revolutionary organisations in the late Cold War. The democratic transitions of the 1980s and 1990s required leftist organisations to abandon armed struggle and accept electoral competition, yet this transition risked dissolving the organisational and ideological coherence that had sustained them through dictatorship. The MIR-Político's trajectory—from armed vanguard to minor electoral partner—illustrates this paradox in acute form. Its survival as a legal organisation came at the cost of its revolutionary identity; its participation in coalitions such as Juntos Podemos Más and Apruebo Dignidad represents a political practice barely distinguishable from that of the Communist Party it once denounced as reformist.

The MIR-Histórico and MIR-Militar, by refusing this transition, condemned themselves to political irrelevance. Their insistence on armed struggle in a context of democratic opening appeared increasingly anachronistic, yet their critique of the transition's limitations—that it preserved the economic model of the dictatorship while merely democratising its political forms—has gained retrospective validity as Chile's neoliberal model persisted through democratic governments. The later emergence of the MIR-EGP-PL in 1991 represented a final, desperate attempt to revive the armed tradition, but this organisation was even more marginal than its predecessors, existing primarily as a symbolic gesture rather than a genuine military threat.

4.4 Memory and Historiography

The MIR's place in Chilean historical memory remains contested. Official transitional justice frameworks have tended to subsume the MIR within the general category of "victims of human rights violations," emphasising its suffering under dictatorship while marginalising its revolutionary agency. This "victimological" framing, while politically valuable for securing legal recognition, risks reducing the MIR to passive suffering rather than active political subjectivity.

Conversely, a romanticised revolutionary historiography—evident in much of the memoir literature and in the Centro de Estudios Miguel Enríquez’s publications—tends to idealise the organisation’s strategic coherence and minimise its errors, including the 1967 Trotskyist purge and the strategic miscalculations of the Neltume operation. The reality, as this essay has sought to demonstrate, was considerably more contradictory: the MIR was simultaneously the most effective and the most defeated of Chile’s revolutionary organisations, its very success in building a mass base making it the primary target of dictatorship repression. The internal strife of its early years, the ideological monolithism of its mature phase, and the fragmentation of its final decades all complicate any simple heroic narrative.

5. Conclusions

The Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria occupies a singular place in Chilean and Latin American history. For nearly a decade, it represented the most credible alternative to the institutional left, building mass organisations among workers, peasants, students, and urban poor while simultaneously developing clandestine armed capacities. Its resistance to the Pinochet dictatorship was the most sustained and costly of any Chilean organisation, resulting in the deaths of hundreds of militants and the decimation of its leadership.

Yet the MIR’s history is also one of strategic limitations, internal purges, and organisational fragmentation. Its vanguardist structure, while enabling rapid and decisive action, proved vulnerable to state repression and intolerant of internal dissent, as evidenced by the 1967 expulsion of the Trotskyist current. Its commitment to armed struggle, while morally justified by the violence of the dictatorship, ultimately failed to achieve its strategic objectives, from the Neltume disaster to the failed Operación Retorno. And its post-dictatorship fragmentation—into the irreconcilable factions of MIR-Histórico, MIR-Militar, MIR-Político, and later the MIR-Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres—demonstrated the difficulty of transitioning from armed struggle to democratic politics without organisational dissolution.

Today, the MIR survives only as a diminished successor organisation descended from the MIR-Político faction, participating in broad left electoral coalitions far removed from its insurrectionary origins. The other factions have dissolved or been absorbed into the broader landscape of Chilean social movements and human rights organisations. The organisation’s legacy persists, however, in the cultural memory of the Chilean left, in the continued activity of the Centro de Estudios Miguel Enríquez, and in the scholarly and artistic works that have sought to preserve its history.

For scholars of Latin American revolutionary movements, the MIR offers a case study in both the possibilities and limits of the armed left during the Cold War. Its history demonstrates that revolutionary organisation could be built through a combination of mass work and armed action; that such organisation could resist even the most brutal dictatorships; but also that the transition from clandestine armed struggle to open democratic politics posed challenges that the organisation proved unable to resolve. The MIR’s trajectory—from heterogeneous coalition to unified vanguard, from mass front to armed resistance, from three factions to effective dissolution—mirrors the broader arc of the Latin American revolutionary left, whose dreams of insurrection gave way to the more prosaic but no less difficult work of democratic reconstruction.

References

- Álvarez, M. (2015). *La constituyente revolucionaria: Historia de la fundación del MIR chileno*. Santiago: Editorial LOM.
- Avendaño, D. (2001). *El rebelde de la burguesía: La historia de Miguel Enríquez*. Santiago: Ediciones ChileAmérica-CESOC.
- Big Flame. (2010, June 26). *Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria [MIR]*. Retrieved from <https://bigflameuk.wordpress.com/2009/06/26/movimiento-de-izquierda-revolucionaria/>
- Castillo, C. (1982). *Un día de octubre en Santiago*. México: Ediciones Era.
- Cedema. (n.d.). *Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria*. Retrieved from <https://www.cedema.org/ver.php?id=1123>
- Ferrada de Noli, M. (2014). *Los que fundamos el MIR: Los orígenes del Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria*. Stockholm: Libertarian Books Europe.
- Ferrada de Noli, M. (2008). *Nelson Gutiérrez. In memoriam. Notas sobre la historia del MIR*. Stockholm.
- International Socialist Review. (2008). *Building a revolutionary Left in Chile*. Issue 91. Retrieved from <https://isreview.org/issue/91/building-revolutionary-left-chile>
- Lanare, L. (2024). Hombres de nieve: Las relaciones entre la República Popular Democrática de Corea y el Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria de Chile (1965-1990). Estudio preliminar. *Revista Digital Mundo Asia Pacífico*, 13(24), 111-124. <https://doi.org/10.17230/map.v13.i24.07>
- Marambio, M. (2008). *Las armas de ayer*. Santiago: Random House Mondadori.
- Memoria Chilena. (n.d.). *El Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria (MIR, 1965-1990)*. Biblioteca Nacional de Chile. Retrieved from <https://www.memoriachilena.gob.cl/602/w3-article-31553.html>
- Modernismo Latinoamericano. (2025). *Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria (MIR)*. Retrieved from <https://www.modernismolatinoamericano.org/movimiento-de-izquierda-revolucionaria-mir/>
- MIR. (1990). *El MIR vive en el corazón del pueblo*. Santiago: MIR.
- Naranjo, P., Ahumada, M., Garcés, M., & Pinto, J. (2004). *Miguel Enríquez y el proyecto revolucionario en Chile: Discursos y documentos del Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionario*. Santiago: LOM Ediciones / Centro de Estudios Miguel Enríquez.
- Palieraki, E. (2014). *¡La revolución ya viene! El MIR chileno en los años sesenta*. Santiago: Ediciones LOM.
- Schlotterbeck, M. (2018). *Beyond the Vanguard: Everyday Revolutionaries in Allende's Chile*. Oakland: University of California Press.
- Sigmund, P. E. (1977). *The Overthrow of Allende and the Politics of Chile, 1964-1976*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press.
- Taylor, M. (2023). *North Korea, Tricontinentalism, and the Latin American Revolution, 1959-1970*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Valdés Navarro, P. A. (2008). *Elementos teóricos en la formación y desarrollo del MIR durante el periodo 1965-1970* [Undergraduate thesis]. Universidad de Valparaíso, Chile.
- Wikipedia. (2023). *Revolutionary Left Movement (Chile)*. Retrieved from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Revolutionary_Left_Movement_\(Chile\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Revolutionary_Left_Movement_(Chile))

Word count: approximately 3,800 words