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## Education in Chile

# Beyer gets the boot

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HARALD BEYER is an unassuming kind of guy. Before becoming Chile's education minister he worked for more than 20 years at Santiago's Centre for Public Studies, a think-tank. He published papers on inequality, the labor market and, above all, education. It's fair to describe him as an educational nerd. There are few people in the country who know as much about the subject as he does.



Mr Beyer doesn't belong to a political party. He advised Socialist President Michelle Bachelet on her education policy in 2006. In 2011 he became the third education minister of Sebastián Piñera, the current, centre-right president. As minister he cut the interest rate that students pay on their university loans from 6% to 2%, and made more money available for grants for poor students. He sent a bill to Congress to set up a regulator for higher education, and tried to placate Chile's students, who for the past two years have staged huge protests in favor of radical education reform.

None of this seems to matter to Chile's congressmen, at least those from the centre-left opposition, the Concertación. On April 17th they kicked Mr Beyer out of his job. By 20 votes to 18 the Senate, which the Concertación narrowly controls, impeached him, accusing him of turning a blind eye to illegal profiteering at Chile's universities. The vote followed a similar defeat in the Chamber of Deputies two weeks earlier, in which the Concertación relied on the

votes of a few small, left-wing parties. As a result of his impeachment, Mr Beyer is barred from public office for five years.

It's true that Mr Beyer presided over an imperfect education system, plagued by financial irregularities. Maybe he could have done more to regulate it. But the same could be said of his two predecessors under Mr Piñera, or indeed of any education minister of the previous 20 years, when the Concertación was in power.

The vote smacks of revenge. Five years ago the centre-right impeached the Concertación's education minister, Yasna Provoste. Many on the centre-left remember that and have not forgiven it. The impeachment also has a strong whiff of electioneering. Chileans will choose a new president in November, and the campaign is already getting nasty.

Chileans deserve better from their legislators, and they know it. On April 5th Adimark GfK, a pollster, published a survey showing that the approval ratings of the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate were close to historic lows, at 16% and 20% respectively. When congressmen boot out good ministers to score political points, the public's lack of confidence in Congress is hardly surprising.