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Articles

Chile: Evolution of the Opposition

The relative progress of Chile's political opposition forces in formulating common objectives and strategies is raising the prospects for a showdown with President Pinochet. Moderate political and labor coalitions have sponsored generally better coordinated monthly protests since May, in anticipation of the 10th anniversary of Pinochet's rule on 11 September. Leftist political parties, meanwhile, have begun to shift away from strategies of armed struggle toward cooperation with a broad opposition front. At the same time, some dissatisfied conservatives have revitalized their political parties.

The National Development Project, Multipartidaria, and Socialist Convergence political coalitions were all formed during the past eight months, as were the labor blocs of the National Workers Command and the National Superior Land Transportation Council. These coalitions are primarily responsible for organizing the national protests and strikes and for defining the issues. They have managed to put Pinochet under greater pressure than he has ever faced, but only now are they beginning to give substantive focus to their opposition.

Opposition Coalitions and Transition Proposals
The National Development Project—founded by Christian Democrats, conservatives, and trade unionists—was the first new group to call for changes. It issued a statement in February 1983 demanding that congressional elections be held within six months and that a complete transition to democracy be completed within two years. In early August the group's leader, former Christian Democratic Senator Jorge Lavandero, announced that the fourth day of

national protest on 11 August was being organized to demand Pinochet's resignation. These would be the first protests to focus more on the President than on issues related to the transition, the economy, and the status of exiles.

The Multipartidaria—formed by representatives of the Christian Democratic, Republican, Social Democratic, and Radical parties and three factions of the Socialist Party—issued a "Democratic manifesto" on 14 March 1983. This called for an immediate end to the state of emergency, election of a constituent assembly to draft a new constitution, legalization of political party activities, more liberal economic policies, more public works programs, restoration of civil liberties, and the return of Chile's exiles.

Multipartidaria leader Gabriel Valdes—also head of the Christian Democratic Party—has been a key organizer of the four days of national protest.



The Socialist Convergence and its associated Committee of Political Unity were formed in April 1983 by socialist factions that had been badly splintered for years. The Committee issued a manifesto on 19 April calling for a democratic, autonomous, and nationalist—as well as socialist—alternative to the military government, a sufficiently general position to suggest that differences still had not been resolved. ■

Two important labor coalitions were also formed. In April, the National Workers Command grouped trade unionists from the country's five largest labor confederations. Led by copperworkers' chief Rodolfo Seguel,

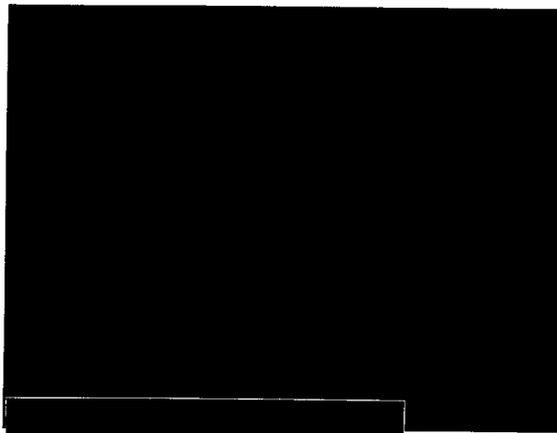
the Command has helped to organize all four days of national protest and backed strikes by copperworkers and truckers in June ■

The National Superior Land Transportation Council—organized in May by the owners and drivers of trucks, taxis, and buses—was the last major coalition formed. In late June, it called a transport strike that led the government to extend debt relief to transport owners and open a dialogue with labor leaders on modifications to the restrictive 1979 labor plan. ■



Recent Developments in the Opposition

Realizing that the factionalization of the 1970s must be overcome if they are to challenge Pinochet, the coalitions, parties, and labor groups are accelerating the process of dialogue within and between the various blocs. These contacts are most intensive in the periods immediately prior to the national protests. This dialogue plus the sustained protests have given the opposition movement a momentum that may be leading to greater unity. The opposition groups are already a sufficiently formidable political force that Pinochet cannot brush them aside, as he would have done in years past.



the Christian Democratic Party—the largest and most influential in the opposition—has consistently refused to sign formal cooperation agreements with the Communists or any group that advocates violence. Both moderate leftists and Christian Democrats realize, however, that the Communists and Clodomiro Almeyda's faction of the Socialists are influential in labor and youth sectors. Because of this, the moderates have discussed some opposition strategies with leftists on an informal basis.

An additional significant trend this year is the reactivation of the conservative parties. During the Allende years, rightists were largely represented by the National Party, but it was voluntarily disbanded after the 1973 coup, when its philosophies were generally adopted by the military junta. Recently, many former Nationalists have begun to disagree with the government, especially over the timing of the return to

democracy, economic policies, and restrictions on civil liberties. Former members of the National Party met several times this spring to discuss reactivation of the party and to outline their new positions.

The conservatives are basically divided into three groups. The so-called Council of State Project includes Republicans, New Democracy advocates, and some military officers and presidential advisers who privately advocate significant political liberalization and an accelerated return to democracy. Another, known as the Military-Civilian Project is made up of supporters of the 1980 constitutional timetable who are seeking to develop support for government policies. The third is an extremely conservative group consisting mainly of members of Roberto Piñero's fascist National Popular Movement.



Outlook

The sustained activism of the political and labor coalitions, the apparent change in leftist strategy, and the erosion of rightist support for Pinochet have significantly increased pressures on the President. He has responded with a mix of repression and limited concessions in an effort to split the opposition. We believe, however, the opposition is becoming increasingly more unified and less willing to settle for cosmetic changes.

On 4 August, Pinochet announced the creation of a commission to incorporate opposition views in a study of ways to bring back political parties and the congress and for holding elections—but not before 1989. We do not believe this will satisfy many critics.

