

Criminal Negligence: Congress, Chile, and the CIA

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Though political purists may bridle at the comparison, the late president of Chile, Salvador Allende, and the Democratic Senator from South Dakota, George McGovern, had much in common. Both aspired to the presidency of nations with long democratic traditions. Both publicly espoused a more equitable distribution of wealth and greater governmental control of giant corporations. Both were feared by the middle classes, who believed their own economic power and prestige would decline to the extent that the lot of the poor was improved. Most fundamentally, however, both were victims—targets of a White House-directed effort to prevent their election to office; targets of vast conspiracies to subvert the free election process through which citizens exercise the right of self-determination.

Many of the tactics brought into play in the Nixon Administration's secret intervention in the Chilean election of 1970 were also employed in the U.S. Presidential election two years later. The dirty tricks that Allende had managed to overcome—funding of opposition candidates, manipulation of the media, violations of individual privacy, illegal campaign contributions—all were components of the corruption now categorized in our national shorthand as "Watergate." What the United States unknowingly experienced in 1972, and ultimately exposed and repudiated two years later, was the "Chileanization" of American politics.

Although Congress has now seemed to repudiate such activities at home, it has not rejected their use in Chile or in other nations unfortunate enough to be considered even marginally significant to American

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"national security." In the Watergate affair, Congress was compelled to begin impeachment proceedings against Richard M. Nixon for his orchestration of the White House coverup of illegal activities. In the case of Chile, however, the coverup of similar White House-inspired activities is being carried out by Congress itself.

By rejecting a thorough investigation of the Central Intelligence Agency's role in the "destabilization" of the Allende regime, Congress is adopting the Nixon technique of "stonewalling." Moreover, by refusing to conduct a broader investigation of the origins of the U.S. Government's anti-Allende policy, the Senate is abandoning its constitutional responsibility for advising and consenting to the Executive's foreign policies. Finally, through inaction, Congress is inviting another Watergate, a second round of domestic internalization of the cloak-and-dagger activities commonly deployed abroad by the American intelligence establishment. As Senator Frank Church, Idaho Democrat, warned six months before the CIA intervention in Chile was publicly disclosed, "Is it possible to insulate our constitutional and democratic processes at home from the kind of foreign policy we have conducted . . . a policy of almost uninterrupted cold war, hot war, and clandestine war?"

The Congressional effort to shield the CIA from public scrutiny in this case is all the more baffling in view of what CIA Director William Colby and President Ford have already acknowledged about covert CIA intervention in Chile. In the past, Congress could rely on its traditional rationale for unwillingness to exercise oversight: "The agency never fully briefs us; we did not

Ford, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, the ranking members of the House and Senate Armed Services committees (who are responsible for overseeing covert CIA operations), and Congressional leaders held a two-hour meeting. Although the White House claimed, in proper diplomatic language, that the group had engaged in "full and frank" discussion of CIA covert activities in Chile and elsewhere, several sources report that the major topic of conversation was the danger supposedly posed to "the national interest" by such incidents as the Harrington leak, and the problem of safeguarding future "sensitive" testimony before legislative committees. "They really had a rope with Harrington's name on it," says one Capitol Hill source.

In briefings of top Congressional Republicans and the Senate Democratic Caucus, Kissinger also emphasized the importance of safeguarding delicate CIA testimony before Congressional committees.

The House demonstrated little enthusiasm for the kind of investigation Harrington had requested. Fascell, whose subcommittee had been holding innocuous hearings on Chile for a year, expressed no interest even in obtaining a transcript of Colby's actual testimony before the Nedzi oversight group. "That's not the way I want to run my subcommittee," Fascell told me.

There has been continuing interest, however, in identifying the source of the leak of Colby's testimony. On September 25, Harrington appeared before the Nedzi oversight subcommittee to testify about the leak of his letter. Although Harrington made it clear that he had volunteered to appear, subcommittee members made it equally clear that the panel had power to subpoena him if he were to refuse. Instead of discussing the substance of Harrington's complaints about the lack of oversight of the CIA, the subcommittee preferred, in closed session, to take up the issue of whether Harrington ought to be censured for citing details of Colby's secret testimony in confidential letters to Representatives and Senators ostensibly responsible for foreign affairs.

With one major exception, the Senate's reaction to the disclosures has closely paralleled that of the House. The exception, Senator Frank Church, is chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on Multinational Corporations, whose hearings on the International Telephone and Telegraph Company's involvement in the 1970 Chilean elections had previously produced testimony revealing some degree of CIA cooperation with ITT efforts to prevent Allende's election. But Colby's April 22 testimony, as disclosed in the Harrington letter, clearly contradicted some of the testimony CIA and State Department officials had given during the Church subcommittee's hearings.

Incensed over the apparent discrepancies, Church announced he would turn over any "misleading" testimony to the Justice Department for investigation and possible perjury charges. He also said he would formally ask the full Foreign Relations Committee to review the propriety of covert operations against the constitutionally elected Allende government. In addition,



Engelhardt in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch

'How Else Can We Protect Our Democratic Ideals If We Don't Beat The Commies At Their Own Game?'

tion, Church instructed the chief of his subcommittee staff, Jerome Levinson, to write a report based on a review of the apparently contradictory testimony.

Senator Fulbright, preoccupied in the last months of a lame duck term with hearings on Soviet-American detente, was less than eager to mount a full-fledged investigation of U.S. policy towards the former Allende government. Nevertheless, the revelations in the press forced the Foreign Relations Committee to take up the issue in secret session.

On the morning of the scheduled committee meeting, *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times* carried stories disclosing the recommendations of the confidential report Church had requested his subcommittee staff chief to prepare. The Levinson report recommended that a perjury investigation be initiated against former CIA Director Richard M. Helms. In addition, it accused Kissinger of having "deceived" the Foreign Relations Committee in sworn testimony about the scope and objective of CIA operations in Chile. The memo further questioned the testimony of the former Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, Charles A. Meyer; former U.S. Ambassador to Chile Edward M. Kerry; and the former chief of the CIA's

sional oversight power of the intelligence agencies themselves (though Congress has rejected about 150 such efforts in the past). Senator Symington contends that the Senate's ability to ride herd on CIA covert activities has actually diminished over the years. When the late Senator Richard Russell, Georgia Democrat, was chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, Symington notes, high-ranking members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee were occasionally invited to attend CIA oversight sessions. These invitations ceased, however, when Senator John Stennis, Mississippi Democrat, succeeded Russell as chairman, and oversight meetings became a rarity. As a result of this experience, many Senators believe that any oversight procedure must be written into legislation rather than remain dependent upon a "gentlemen's agreement."

The Administration, clearly, would prefer to head off legislation. Toward that end, Kissinger offered early in October to have Colby provide detailed briefings on future clandestine operations to the House Foreign Affairs Committee as well as to the Armed Services Committee. Whether Congress—and particularly the Senate—will be content with this arrangement remains to be seen. Representative Harrington dismissed it as "a small step for the Foreign Affairs Committee and a smaller step still for the cause of Congressional control over the CIA, but so far still more illusion than reality."

Proposals now pending range from one by Senator James Abourezk, South Dakota Democrat, who would abolish the CIA's covert operations branch, to a bipartisan plan to establish a fourteen-member joint Congressional oversight committee for all intelligence organizations. Senator Walter Mondale, Minnesota Democrat, has called for formation of a Select Committee on Intelligence, fashioned after the Select Committee on Emergency Powers, to study the most effective means of overseeing the intelligence community.

Ultimately, however, Congress is likely to do what it has done in the past—nothing. As the Chilean experience demonstrates, most Senators and Representatives—and certainly most of those in leadership positions—favor the maintenance of a U.S. capability for clandestine operations against foreign governments in general, just as they supported the intervention against Allende in particular.

Congress has had an excellent opportunity to conduct a searching inquiry of the American involvement in Chile and the foreign policy that encouraged such involvement. It has passed up that opportunity on the shopworn pretext that to pursue it might endanger "national security." Although a number of legislators criticized Ford's justification of the intervention in Chile, most accepted his rationale: all powerful nations conduct such shady operations; we spend less money on them than do others.

The United States spent only \$8 million to undermine the elected government of Chile. According to Ford's logic—logic that Congress accepts and tacitly supports—it was a cost-effective coup. □