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& the Myth Makers

CPYRGHT *Political Realism & Revolutionary Romance*

UNFEELING AS IT MAY SEEM to say so when the bloodshed of the Chilean *coup d'état* is still so keenly remembered and the generals who made it are riding unpleasantly high, the fact remains that Salvador Allende died a lucky man. In life he was a failure. Both his policies and his country were shattered long before the end. But in death he achieved success beyond his dreams. Instantly canonised as the Western world's newest left-wing martyr, he became overnight the most potent political cult-figure since his old friend, Che Guevara.

To some extent, of course, the congregation had already been prepared for this posthumous elevation. In the three years of Allende's administration the "Chilean experiment" and the "Chilean road to socialism" had become favourite topics of discussion among left-wing groups in Europe, where Chile's supposed resemblance to Italy or France had encouraged the belief that Europe might, for once, follow in Latin America's footsteps instead of the other way about. Many aspiring revolutionaries from Europe and the United States had actually joined their Latin American counterparts in Chile in much the same spirit as their dropped-out contemporaries had hitch-hiked to Nepal hoping for a glimpse of Paradise in action. By the time of the September *coup* the military junta claimed there were as many as 15,000 foreigners of all kinds in Chile, actively supporting—sometimes with violence—the "socialist revolution."

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These specially interested groups or individuals obviously provided a ready network for international propaganda in the aftermath of Allende's death. But the shocked and, at times, almost hysterical reaction to the *coup* went far beyond such committed parties to embrace many of the West's ordinary liberals and social democrats. For them, as much as for the self-styled revolutionaries, it seemed, a bright light of world-wide hope had been extinguished in Santiago; and from Washington to Rome, via Paris, Bonn and London, anguished cries of "Foul!" rent the air.

Revolt Against the Ballot Box" for which the Chilean armed forces could offer no excuse (*The Guardian*, 12/9/73); as a "Disaster in Chile" that would "set back the cause of socialism and democracy everywhere" (*New Statesman*, 14/9/73); and as "The Death of a Hope" comparable, even, to the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia that ended Alexander Dubcek's régime in 1968 (*The Observer*, 16/9/73).

Within 24 hours of the first, bare news of the *coup* the General-Secretary of the British Labour Party, Mr Ron Hayward, was writing officially to one of Allende's former colleagues to say that it was difficult to express the sense of horror and anger felt by the British Labour movement "as the aspirations of the working people of Chile—shared by so many others around the world—are destroyed at the hands of a few arrogant and ignorant officers acting at the behest of those who believe their right to rule is unchallengeable" (*The Times*, 13/9/73). Mr Len Murray, General-Secretary of the Trades Union Council, expressed his shock and abhorrence with equal speed and vigour. And Mrs Judith Hart, speaking as a member of the Labour Party's National Executive, unleashed a torrent of assertions so passionate as to suggest that her mind had come close to being overthrown with Allende's government. They ranged from the declaration that "the democratic will of the people of Chile" had been defeated by capitalist "collusion" (*The Guardian*, 17/9/73) to "for Socialists of this generation Chile is our Spain" and "This is the most vicious fascism we have seen in generations" (*The Guardian*, 19/9/73).

When the Labour Party Conference met at Blackpool three weeks later these instant reactions had hardened into established orthodoxy. The former Chilean Ambassador in London was given a standing ovation when he became the first non-delegate to address a Party Conference since two Spanish Republicans were allowed to do so in the 1930s. Resolutions were then carried utterly condemning the military *coup* and the precipitate action of the British Government in recognising the military junta; demanding the recall of the British Ambassador from Santiago and the withholding from the military régime of all aid, loans, and credits; and calling on the Labour Movement to campaign for the restoration of democracy in Chile and to offer financial and other assistance to the Popular Unity (Allende's) movement (*The Times*, 5/10/73). My italics.

the reasons for this fierce reaction would repay study. Probably they included a happy chance of timing. Several of the most fashionable matters of Western political protest had passed into history or been shadowed by disillusionment in the year or two before Allende's downfall, from Viet Nam and Greece to Black Power and the Student Movement. Allende's dramatic end supplied a new cause just when it was wanted. Familiar double standards were certainly involved. Nobody at the Labour Party Conference, for example, thought it necessary to ask why such a royal welcome should be offered to the representative of a government which had included one of the very few Communist parties outside Eastern Europe to approve the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia. A Pavlovian response to the very idea of "revolution" was also clearly in evidence—and made all the more eager, it seemed, by the fact that this particular revolution had been taking place at such a safe distance in such sublimely foreign parts. There was, perhaps, a characteristic love of worldly failure, too—for it was difficult to read some of the more extravagant expressions of grief at Allende's death without sensing a touch of gratification at the idea that Good had once more succumbed to Evil and so delivered another martyr unto Heaven before he could be corrupted by the practical demands of life on Earth. But most of all, perhaps, the response seemed to stem from ignorance and wishful thinking—always the two most powerful sources of political romanticism—which left the facts of life in Allende's Chile either unknown or ignored and the field wide open, therefore, to the creation of instant myth. Hence the composite picture, now accepted throughout a wide spectrum of Western liberal and left-wing opinion, of Allende as a genuine social democrat of impeccable constitutional propriety who met his end at the hands of a fascist conspiracy on behalf of a minority "ruling class" aided and abetted by the United States of America.

To replace this romantic vision with something approaching reality may already be impossible, for myths undoubtedly possess a life of their own immune to rational challenge. To attempt to do so also may entail some risk of abuse, for it seems to be a common assumption nowadays that anyone who seeks a rational explanation of a military *coup d'état* (unless it happens to represent a left-wing interest) is necessarily a fascist beast.

I SHOULD MAKE IT PLAIN, therefore, that I am concerned here with Allende's Chile and not with what has taken its place. I hold no brief for military juntas, nor for the summary executions, mass imprisonments, censorship or whatever that the Chilean junta may have inspired or tolerated during its early months of power. Indeed, because

I happen to know and like Chile as a country and count a number of Chileans among my friends I feel some personal sadness at the country's present plight. But I feel no surprise nor, I am afraid, much moral shock. Military men will be military men, the world over; and in any case Chile was left in such a mess by Allende that some vindictiveness, alas, was only to be expected when he fell.

Nor am I concerned with Chilean might-have-beens. I accept that the country needed genuine social reform and I believe that it probably could have been achieved without violence by a democratic government that was ready to work pragmatically within the constitution and with a proper respect for what the economic and political fabric of Chile would stand.

But that is not the point any more. What I am concerned about is how the country came to its present pass. And without wishing to speak ill of the dead, it seems to me necessary to say outright for the sake of the living that the Chilean *coup* was largely Allende's own fault and that the myths with which it has been surrounded on the Left are not merely a falsification of Chilean history but a potential danger to the future of liberal and social democratic politics in the Western world as well. Indeed, what is most disturbing to me about the fashionable Western reactions to events in Chile is their revelation of the degree to which revolutionary romanticism has combined with left-wing cynicism in recent years to corrupt our own politics. It is certainly "no accident" that, for example, the British Labour Party which so uncritically adopts Allende's cause is also the party which has permitted its self-avowed Marxists and utopian socialists to gain factional positions of unprecedented power.

I will leave others to pursue that theme, however. All I want to do is to try to set some of the Chilean record straight—or at any rate, straighter—by looking in some detail at three of the main myths that now surround the end of Allende and his famous experiment.

1. The American Intervention Myth

THIS FOUND its most virulent expression in the equation of Allende's downfall with that of Dubcek. Yet in the absence of any American armed assault to compare with the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia—let alone the fact that whereas Dubcek's Parliament supported him against the Russians, a majority of Allende's Congress invited him to resign—there were only stereotype suppositions to sustain it.

In general, the American intervention myth seemed to derive from that characteristic Latin American and left-wing scapegoat complex which

insists that the *Yanquis* are responsible for everything (except, of course, anything good). Garnished with historical fact (Guatemala, the Bay of Pigs, etc.) this is frequently transmuted in Latin American affairs into a plausible anti-American smear; and the state of Washington politics in 1973 was, of course, guaranteed to give such a smear extra credence this time. The *New Statesman* offered a fine example. "The likelihood is that the trail will lead back to the Pentagon", it assured its readers, "if a proper investigation can ever be mounted. But in default of this it does seem possible to say that Nixonism and its allies were already too heavily implicated in the subversion of Allende for them to be exonerated now" (14/9/73). The charge is almost ectoplasmically vague yet simultaneously all-embracing. But what does it actually rest on?

First, presumably, the celebrated memorandum of ITT which suggested ways of preventing Allende from assuming the Presidency in 1970 and of toppling his régime if he did so. There is, of course, no doubt of this memorandum's authenticity, nor of its appalling folly; and with such organisations admittedly pushing their conspiratorial notions at the heart of American politics it is not surprising that suspicions of *Yanqui* skulduggery were aroused. But there is a major snag for anyone who sees the memorandum as evidence of actual dirty work: simply, that all inquiries so far indicate that its recommendations were never adopted. They were studied by the CIA, where one department produced a contingency plan based upon them. But neither the memorandum nor the plan seems to have received assent at any higher level; and given the kind of public exposure to which the workings of the White House, the CIA and most other things in Washington have been treated during the Watergate crisis (including the allegations of Nixon's personal involvement with ITT), I am hard-pressed to believe that if such assent had been given it could have been kept quiet until now.¹

Secondly, in support of the American intervention theory, it is pointed out that the U.S. maintained its contacts with the Chilean armed forces and continued to supply them with arms when other American aid to Chile was suspended. Therefore, so the implication goes, the Pentagon was deliberately keeping open the option of inspiring a military *coup* against an unwelcome government. But this is obviously a two-edged argument. For one thing, an army that is still getting its toys to play with is usually rather more than less likely to endure the follies of its ruling politicians gladly. And for another, what would have been said if the Americans had actually suspended arms shipments to forces whose commanders were serving in Allende's cabinet? The outcry about "*Yanqui* imperialism" and "Pentagon politics" may easily be imagined.

Thirdly, the strangulation of foreign aid and

credit is laid at Washington's door as a major weapon in a cold war against Allende from the start. At first glance this has more substance to it. The U.S. certainly suspended further commercial credits of its own to Chile after Allende had nationalised the American-owned copper mines on terms amounting to confiscation. As the major power in the World Bank and the IMF the U.S. also argued there against further aid for Chile; and to the extent that it was successful it must have added to Allende's financial difficulties. But it was not able to prevent other Western countries (e.g. Holland and Sweden) from continuing to offer credit; it never persuaded Britain to close down its small aid programme; it did not exclude the re-scheduling of most of Chile's foreign debt repayments in 1972, and it had not prevented the discussion (incomplete at the time of the *coup*) of a similar re-scheduling for 1973. In short, the U.S. influence may have limited Western aid and credit but it was far from being able to condemn Allende's Chile to economic purdah. In any case, Chile was not one of the under-developed world's hard cases, totally dependent on external aid and credits for its survival. The wealth of its copper mines alone ensured that in normal times it was not more than marginally "aid-worthy", and with sensible economic management it ought to have been able to withstand a good deal of external pressure. Unfortunately, nobody with even a nodding acquaintance with economics could have classified the management of the Allende government as anything but disastrous. To a great extent it placed itself beyond the pale for any but the most trusting—or dedicated—of creditors. But even if that had not been so, and if the blame for Chile's economic difficulties could have been laid fairly and squarely at Washington's door, Allende would surely have had small cause for complaint. It was, after all, his administration which announced its immediate determination to "expropriate imperialist capital . . . realise a policy of self-financing . . . and review, denounce and repudiate, as the case may be, treaties or agreements limiting our sovereignty, specifically the reciprocal assistance treaties, the mutual aid pacts, and others, between Chile and the United States" (*The People's Unity—Basic Programme of Government, 1970*).

It was also his administration which promised to "repudiate the agreements between us and the International Monetary Fund" (*The People's Government—First 40 Steps, 1970*). These bold intentions were never fully realised, it is true; but they were expressed as official policy before the United States or any other "imperialist" power had actually done anything to embarrass Allende's government. In other words, it was Allende who decided to pick the quarrel. It seems naive, to say the least, to complain that his chosen opponents took defensive measures. What else were they expected to do?

THOSE WHO DO COMPLAIN of American action, nevertheless, might be better employed in asking why Allende got so little support from most of the governments which professed to be his friends. Except for Cuba, which offered enthusiastic (but not always practical) advice to Allende, as well as supplying arms and training for his militant Left, the world's established Marxist governments were consistently cool to the "Chilean experiment." The farthest the Soviet Union would go to show its approval was to open a 12-year credit in roubles for Chilean imports of Russian industrial goods and to agree to take a limited amount of Chilean copper for a year or two in repayment. But the hard currency loans that Chile really needed to plug the gaps that quickly opened between Allende's economic promises and performance were never forthcoming from any Marxist source. Nor was that surprising. In the nature of things, Marxist countries rarely have hard currency to spare and they were unlikely to devote what little they might have to bailing out a régime which seemed intent upon over-reaching itself in every direction.

Conceivably, Allende would have done better for himself and his country if he had simply abandoned the "free" world market altogether and taken Chile at once into the controlled trade bloc of the Communist world in the hope of getting total Soviet support. But that would have meant imposing a completely centralised economy and strict political control inside Chile—in short, abandoning the romantic pretence of "constitutional revolution" for the more customary revolution by decree. To his credit, perhaps, Allende was unwilling (or unable) to do that; but even if he had, it might not have worked. To support Castro's Cuba is believed to have cost Moscow the equivalent of about \$1 million a day for many years. To support a similar régime in Chile would probably have cost even more. There was never the slightest sign that Mr Brezhnev, or anyone else in the Kremlin, was ready to accept such a burden.

To sum up, then, it seems to me that the idea of an American conspiracy to overthrow Allende is both unproven and unnecessary to explain his downfall. I am not saying, of course, that Washington was not relieved to see him go; although I think some American officials would have preferred to see him stumble on for some time longer in the hope that growing disillusionment would infect even his stoutest supporters and accordingly diminish the chances of his being made a martyr when nemesis finally overtook him. But in general the American attitude seems to have been a predictably cautious one:

*Thou shalt not kill, but need'st not strive
Officially to keep alive. . . .*

A realistic Chilean government embarked on its "road to socialism" would surely have bargained

for that much, and (on a truly Marxist analysis such as Allende professed) it should have expected much more—that America would move in for the kill as soon as possible. Yet while adopting a deliberately provocative stance, Allende took no steps to protect himself against possible American reprisals, declined to compromise for the sake of other Western help, and failed to provide grounds even for his supposed Marxist friends to help him.

It was magnificent, perhaps, but it was not politics. At the very least, Allende must be convicted here of a lack of realism that would probably have been fatal to any statesman anywhere.

2. The Ruling Class Conspiracy Myth

THE PICTURE of Allende being overthrown by what has been variously described as a "revolt of the privileged," a series of "bosses' strikes" or a "conspiracy of the traditional ruling class" contains so many misconceptions that it is hard to know where to begin to sort them out. One idea, however, seems basic to them all: that Allende and his Popular Unity coalition were somehow the uniquely legitimate representatives of "the People's Will." That such an odd belief should have gained any currency whatever outside purely propagandist circles is a mark of the confusion that surrounds the Chilean experience in the minds of many non-Chileans. To judge from published comments, such as those referring to the "defeat of the democratic will", some of Allende's sympathisers abroad seem even to believe that he not merely enjoyed a massive popular majority of the vote but was also the first President of his country to do so.

Yet the facts are beyond dispute. Chile was and had been for many years a functioning democracy with a constitution which vested executive power in the President and legislative power in Congress. Both in theory and in practice, no doubt, there were serious weaknesses—as revealed, for instance, in the inability of previous governments to press through social reforms as swiftly as many Chileans would have wished. But by common consent the system was the best and most stable in Latin America and it had enabled Allende himself to contest the Presidency unsuccessfully three times before he finally won it at his fourth attempt in 1970. There was no doubt of the legitimacy of that victory. But, unfortunately for those who saw it as a unique expression of "the people's will", it was gained only through a narrow plurality in which Allende obtained just over 36% of the poll. His nearest rival, only a couple of percentage points behind, was the candidate of the conservative National

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Party, whose members in Congress opposed Allende from the start. Another 28% went to the third candidate, a radical reformist from the Christian Democrat party, many of whose members in Congress at first gave Allende the benefit of the doubt, hoping he would modify his avowed Marxism in practice to a kind of reformism compatible with their own ideas and the existing constitution.

In the mid-term Congressional elections of March 1973, the Popular Unity coalition raised its share of the vote to 44% (although this time the "legitimacy" was suspect owing to opposition allegations of substantial electoral fraud). But the opposition parties retained a large majority in Congress where, by that time, most of the Christian Democrats had joined the Nationalists in outright antagonism to the President. On these facts it seems plain that, so far from representing "the People's Will", Allende never actually represented more than a substantial minority interest. Only if "the People" are identified as being those who voted for Allende, while the rest—the majority—are relegated to the status of "non-people" can any other interpretation be sustained. But that, of course, is just what is implied by the myth of the "ruling class conspiracy."

IF THERE WAS a "ruling class" in Chile it was that of the politicians and the surrounding establishment drawn mostly from the narrow upper end of Chile's prosperous middle class. Allende himself and many of his ministers and leading supporters were as much part of that group as were their political opponents. But, ironically, it was a group that often suffered less than others from Allende's socialism because its members on both sides generally possessed enough cash or property to exploit the black market at home or slip into agreeable exile if things got too rough—in any case, to survive (like Allende himself until his death) in very reasonable comfort. But the people who did most to overthrow Allende were rarely of this group at all. With the possible exception of some naval officers, the armed forces were very much apart from the establishment of any political colour; and even after Allende brought the service commanders into his government they remained aloof from, and remarkably little known by, those relatively small circles in Santiago which were accustomed to set the country's political tone.

Indeed, as events since the *coup d'état* have shown, Chile's military men—like their counterparts elsewhere—were probably as contemptuous of the politicians (and as ignorant of politics) as the politicians were of them. They had stayed outside politics for nearly 40 years, and if Allende

himself had not dragged them into the whirlpool they might have been content to remain that way. But their position was made intolerable by the President's own decisions. On the one hand they were encouraged to turn a blind eye to the steady growth of illegal, para-military forces under the command of the President's friends or others who were more extreme in their revolutionary commitment. On the other hand they were required to serve in his cabinet to maintain "law and order" and reassure the country of the President's constitutional propriety. On top of that they were threatened by attempts from within the President's own circle to subvert their authority within their own forces, as in the naval conspiracy uncovered in July 1973, and the public call for a naval insurrection by Allende's friend and fellow-leader of the Socialist Party, Senator Carlos Altamirano, made only three days before the *coup*.

A surer way can hardly be imagined of provoking mutiny among responsible officers, and it is only surprising, in retrospect, that it did not happen sooner—as in most Latin American countries it surely would have done. To ascribe the mutiny thereafter to the machinations of "the ruling class" is to understand nothing, either of military men in general or of Chile's military in particular.

SIMILARLY, THE SO-CALLED "bosses' strikes" which preceded the military *coup* were, in fact, nothing of the kind. The lorry-men who paralysed half, or more, of Chile's transport by their month-long strike in September-October 1972, and their even longer strike in July-September 1973, were mostly owner-drivers who would have fitted fairly readily into the Teamsters' Union in the United States. They displayed the fierce economic and social protectionism typical of what in Europe or North America would be called the lower middle class, and they saw themselves threatened by galloping inflation and by what they believed to be the Government's intention to destroy their way of life through state control or ownership of their services. Along with the small shopkeepers who supported them—not forgetting the queue-weary housewives whose famous "Saucepan March" in Santiago was the most dramatic early sign of revolt—they might be classed as the *Poujadistes* of Chile. But by no stretch of the imagination could they be described as representatives of a "boss" or "ruling" class, or even as being especially "privileged" in a social or economic sense. Moreover, they owed little, if any, allegiance to the traditional political groupings of Chilean politics, although they obviously welcomed any support they could get from them. On the contrary, they tended to cut across the traditional

spectrum and look to new leaders, whether of right or left. Thus, their principal spokesman, Senor Leon Vilarin, was actually a member of Allende's Socialist Party while others of the leadership came from the Nationalist Party ranks or from no party at all.

The members of the various professional associations, like doctors, dentists, lawyers and airline pilots, which joined the second transport strike, were likewise not "bosses" although they were certainly, in Chilean terms, rather more "privileged." Their protest was probably more ideological than that of the lorry-men and the shopkeepers—it was usually their wives, for example, who objected most forcibly to the Government's politically-inspired changes in the school curriculum—but it was also provoked by sheer exasperation and fear at the growing threat to their professional status posed by the Government's combination of administrative inefficiency and dubious social priorities. For example, Chile's economic collapse and inflation not only threatened many doctors financially but seriously frustrated their work. Some early reports from Santiago after the *coup* made the point that hospitals were appealing urgently for bandages and drugs to treat the wounded, as if that indicated that the number of casualties must be overwhelmingly high. But bandages, drugs, and other medical supplies had been only sporadically obtainable in Chile for many months beforehand. The daily round of the pharmacies in search of the simplest medicines had become a regular feature of Santiago life; and foreign embassies had been driven to stock-pile their own supplies, imported through the diplomatic bag, for the treatment of the most normal ailments among their staffs. It was partly in the hope of ending that situation that many otherwise conscientious doctors finally joined the movement to get Allende out.

NOR SHOULD IT BE FORGOTTEN that some of the most damaging strikes of all were those of Chile's most influential blue-collar workers—the copper-miners. The last lorry-men's strike was immediately preceded by a two months' strike for higher wages by miners at El Teniente, the country's biggest mine. Because copper accounts for three-quarters of Chile's foreign earnings, that strike probably cost the country far more in real terms than the transport strike, whose costs to a great extent could be absorbed internally. Indeed, as one West European diplomat remarked to me in Santiago, the money lost in those two months at El Teniente would have more than repaid Chile's entire debt to his government—a debt which Allende at that moment was trying to re-schedule for the second consecutive year.

It is true that the copper-miners were the elite

of Chile's blue-collar class and, no doubt, wanted to keep it that way. To that extent, perhaps, they may be deemed "privileged"—like, say, coal miners or motor car workers in Britain; although I doubt if that is what members of the British Labour Party, or the *New Statesman*, can have had in mind in embracing the "privileged" thesis. But a more important reason for the miners' restiveness, I believe, is that although they were the most vital of all Chile's manual workers they suffered far more than most of their erstwhile comrades from the country's shattering economic decline under Allende. Unlike farm and factory workers, they could not supplement their official wages by selling the fruits of their labour on the black market. The farm worker who could take home a sack of potatoes, a few chickens, or even a side of beef, could make a good living on the black market even if his official wages remained stationary while inflation roared ahead. The factory worker who was entitled to buy a proportion of his factory's output at official fixed prices could (and did) sell that at six or ten times what he had paid as soon as he left the factory gate. But miners could hardly find ready buyers for a stolen truck-load of copper ore.³

Thus the copper-miners were thrust, in effect, into the same position as the lorry-men, the shopkeepers, and virtually all of Chile's salaried professional men and women: they were left more or less defenceless against the most vicious inflation the country had ever experienced.

SOME APOLOGISTS for Allende have maintained that the degree of inflation was exaggerated or, at any rate, little worse than was customary in Chile and elsewhere in Latin America. The truth is that it was far beyond anything normally endured in that continent. As little as nine months after Allende came to power, when I first visited Chile, the escudo had already fallen from 20 to 40 against the U.S. dollar on the free, or black, market. Eighteen months later, on my second visit, the Government's own figures put the rate of inflation at 130% in a year, the money issue was going up by 10% a month and the escudo had fallen to about 350 to the black U.S. dollar. By August 1973, the official inflation rate was 323% and rising fast, and the escudo was worth only 2,000 to the dollar—an effective devaluation in less than three years of 10,000%!

Nor is it enough to attribute these catastrophic rates to such adventitious or malicious factors as—and again I refer to published arguments—falling world copper prices, the normal difficulties of maintaining industrial and farm output in a time of radical political change, or deliberate American intervention.

On the last of these three I have already said

enough, I hope, to show that it was far from decisive and that it was, anyway, largely self-invited. As to falling copper prices, the fact is that after a fall in the first year of Allende's Government, prices recovered until by the time of his overthrow they were 80% above the level at the time of his election. Had they not risen so steeply he would almost certainly have fallen sooner and probably would not have secured his relative, short-lived success in the mid-term elections of March 1973. The difficulties of maintaining output in a time of change, however, were real—unfortunately, far more so than Allende ever seemed to realise.

To take just two examples: copper and milk. Expropriation of the copper mines from their American owners would, no doubt, have led in itself to the withdrawal of American technicians as well as of American management with some consequent risk of losing production temporarily, at least. But this might have been overcome by the promotion of trained Chilean managers and technicians, of whom there was no shortage.

Alas, for Chile's national income, Allende not merely nationalised but deliberately politicised the mines as well. Jobs for the party boys were handed out in thousands while trained Chileans emigrated so that, after three years of Popular Unity Government, mining manpower and costs had risen by more than a third while mining output was down by about the same amount.

I take milk as the second example because it was specifically mentioned in Popular Unity election manifestos, which guaranteed "every Chilean child half-a-quart of milk daily." Here again, the government's programme of land reform, intended to break the power of Chile's remaining landlords and open the way to co-operative or state farming, might have been expected to result in some shortfall in dairy production for a year or two while the teething problems were sorted out. In fact, however, milk production dropped as if someone had simply punched a hole in the bottom of every churn in the land. At one large cooperative dairy in Temuco, one of the main milk-producing areas of Chile, the average daily winter intake of milk was about 50-60,000 gallons in 1970. By 1973 it was down to 7,000. Nor was this surprising. Apart from the fact that legal land reform had been accompanied by widespread and unchecked illegal land seizures so that too many farms were in the hands of people utterly without experience, the prices established for milk—as for most other farm products—were simply economic nonsense. Presumably in the hope of getting half-a-quart of milk for every child on the cheap, the government decreed that a gallon of milk would fetch less than half the price of one egg. Inevitably, nobody was interested in producing milk and cows were slaughtered wholesale for beef—legally or illegally—or driven over the mountains to Argentina while Allende was

forced to scour the world for dried milk imports that, thanks to his policy in the copper mines, he no longer had foreign currency to pay for.

SUCH FOLLIES were repeated everywhere as the romantic gestures of self-styled revolution were preferred to facing the facts of life. While overall production in both agriculture and industry fell disastrously, Allende simultaneously attempted to redistribute the national wealth by giving Chile's poorer classes more money to spend. They were his constituency and they were properly grateful, for many of them certainly had never had much before. But you can't redistribute what you have already thrown away; and as output vanished, so domestic queues grew longer, foreign debts piled up, and the budget deficit expanded like a hydrogen balloon. A year before the final collapse I asked one of Allende's chief economic advisers what they were going to do to control a situation that was already looking critical. He replied, with commendable candour, that he really didn't know. "I know," he said, "what we ought to do—we should impose an austerity régime tomorrow, freeze wages, and ration essential supplies. But how can we? We would destroy our own political base...."

Precisely. In the end, rather than do that they plunged on down the primrose path of promises and illusions and practically destroyed the country. The "ruling class conspiracy" was the gloss that they and their supporters put upon the reality of their own miscalculations.

3. The Myth of the Constitutional Revolutionary

HERE WE COME to the crux of Allende's policies and character about which, finally, all the other arguments revolve. Was he a genuine constitutionalist? Was he a true revolutionary? Was he—could he ever have been—both?

Allende himself, of course, admitted no doubts. Repeatedly, he insisted that he was a revolutionary and a Marxist, and that he intended to establish at least the preconditions for what he told Régis Debray would be "total, scientific Marxist socialism." Equally repeatedly, he proclaimed his faith that he could achieve this end by constitutional means, through the ballot box and all it implied. That was, after all, to be the distinctive "Chilean road to socialism" of which so many people outside Chile cherished such high hopes.

But no hindsight is required to see that both theory and practice were riddled with contradictions. Revolutions are born of, or generate, sectional conflict—a fact of political life that Allende acknowledged every time he spoke of "overthrowing" what he called the "bourgeois".

state. But a democratic constitution rests upon consensus—a basic acceptance of the fact that the State represents more than a merely sectional interest. The second permits reform, but the first denies it; and there is no way of reconciling the two.

All Allende's practical difficulties followed from this simple distinction. Taken seriously, his constitutionalism meant that his programme could only succeed if a majority would actually vote for it. But, elected as he was with only just over a third of the popular vote and with a large majority of Congress against him, Allende had neither a democratic nor an administratively effective mandate for his revolution. Indeed, in a parliamentary rather than a presidential democracy, he would probably never have been able to begin.

If he was to succeed within his six-year term of office even in opening the door to revolution, let alone establishing it as accomplished fact, he had to transform his minority into a majority. But how to do it? For, if words meant anything, Allende's had to mean that he intended to replace the existing, reformable constitution of Chile with another that would be, of its Marxist nature, irreversible. In other words, a system that was admittedly democratic was to be used to build another that would be effectively dictatorial. This was asking the majority to hang itself from its own gallows; and, not surprisingly, it declined.

ALLENDE'S ATTEMPTS to overcome this basic illogicality in his position were precisely what ensured his ultimate downfall. Refusing to abandon either his revolutionary rhetoric or his professed constitutionalism he was forced to rely more and more upon political illusionism. His sleight-of-hand was often remarkable, as he sought to outwit the opposition majority in Congress by exploiting the letter of the constitution, using every legal loophole to force upon them measures they did not want. But in the process, inevitably, he destroyed the constitution's spirit, so that his opponents became as ruthless as he was. At the start he won considerable opposition support in Congress for needed changes like the nationalisation of the copper mines, land reform, and the state's takeover of banks and major industries—evidence that the democratic consensus could and would work within the existing constitution. But, at the end, not a single member of the opposition majority would cast a vote in his support. They voted unanimously to condemn his "habitual illegalities" and were even joined by the Supreme Court in accusing him of disregarding the rule of law. He had cut away the middle ground of Chilean politics, wrecked the democratic consensus, and begotten the reality of counter-revolution through his own addiction to revolutionary slogans.

Equally inevitable was the economic breakdown, which came from Allende's attempts to enlarge his popular base outside the political institutions. Here his plan was two-fold: to buy political support among "the People" through massive wage increases and other benefits and at the same time to squeeze the middle class into submission, or even flight from the country, through wholesale nationalisation of their interests and the appointment of his own men to all significant civil-service jobs. The two simply cancelled each other out; for while the first part of the plan raised vast new expectations and demands, the second diminished the country's capacity to meet them. The whirling spiral of inflation followed as a *necessary* result of Allende's political confusions.

THESE BASIC CONTRADICTIONS were compounded by the fragmented nature of Allende's support. His Popular Unity coalition was far from united. Its majority element was Allende's own Socialist Party—a body that bore little resemblance

beyond its name to most of the democratic socialist parties of Europe which so enthusiastically espoused its cause. It was, in fact, a revolutionary Marxist party that began as a splinter of the more bureaucratic and Stalinist Chilean Communist party in the 1930s, and in recent years had acquired a fiery "New Left" wing as well. Several of its leaders, like Senator Altamirano, and many of its rank and file, constantly urged Allende to "speed up the revolution" without much regard for constitutional niceties. The smallest element of the coalition was the Christian radicals of various persuasions, some of whom hoped to offer a bridge to the centre of Chilean politics by cooperating with the left wing of the Christian Democrats, but none of whom ever attained positions of real influence. The coalition's sheet anchor was the Communist Party which, as business and administration slipped into chaos, became increasingly important as a source of discipline and strategic thinking.

IT WOULD HAVE BEEN hard enough to drive this *troika* anyway without either overstepping the constitutional limits of government or antagonising one or other of its elements and thereby jeopardising the only "democratic" base the revolution had. But Allende had also to contend with the still more militant left outside the coalition, led by the Movement of the Revolutionary Left (MIR), which insisted on revolution now, and by violence if necessary—as, in MIR's view, it was.

Here Allende's professed constitutionalism was

revealed as, at best, equivocal. He officially rejected MIR's violence, yet he never permitted the Army to root out their para-military groups. When they stigmatised his land-reform programme as "inadequate" and seized hundreds of farms at gun-point he rebuked them in occasional speeches but did nothing to reverse their actions.*

When they hi-jacked lorry-loads of valuable manufactures, to raise funds by selling them on the black market, he rarely tried to redress the crime. The Left said this was because the MIR truly represented "the People" against whom Allende dared not act. But the truth, I fear, was more squalid. For one thing, the MIR had close friends in the Socialist Party and in Allende's own entourage whom the President did not want to offend. For another, as long as their activities did not actually split the Popular Unity coalition, it was often convenient to see them pushing along

the revolution by unconstitutional means while Allende denounced them in his role as a constitutionalist.

It was not as if Allende was unable to deal with the MIR when he had to. For example, when a *Mirista* force blockaded the Philips television-factory in Santiago in 1973 after an unsuccessful attempt to hi-jack a lorry-load of TV sets, they were allowed by the Government to remain unmolested for ten days, although a police post was just across the road. Yet when diplomatic representations were made by the Dutch *chargé d'affaires* with the hint that his country's financial aid might have to be reconsidered if this harassment of a Dutch enterprise continued, the *Miristas* were hustled away without a shot in 24 hours.

A SIMILAR EQUIVOCATION was evident in Allende's adoption of a personal armed bodyguard—the first in memory to accompany a Chilean President. It is true that the extreme Right in Chile was quick to threaten violence as a response to Allende's proclaimed revolution, and Allende himself always maintained that he needed protection. But right-wing para-military groups were never as big or as highly organised as those on the Left; and, in any case, the proper reaction of a constitutionally-minded President would surely have been to call upon his state security forces to protect him.

Instead, Allende formed a personal unit, known as "the Group of Friends of the President." Trained, armed, and partly manned by Cubans, it was led by known revolutionaries, sympathetic to the MIR, including Allende's son-in-law. The existence of such a group at the very centre of the State was not merely a provocation to the established security forces and an affront to Chilean tradition, it was also an implied rejection of the principle of constitutional rule.

DOUBTS ABOUT the real depth of Allende's constitutionalism were raised also by his personal history and his language, both of which suggested a romantic attachment to violence. He was, after all, a founder and first president of the Latin American Solidarity Organisation, created in Havana in the 1960s and dedicated to the encouragement of armed insurrection throughout the continent. He promised to "paint Santiago with blood" in 1970 if Congress declined to ratify his election as President, and he repeatedly tried to intimidate the opposition, inside and outside Congress, with the threat of civil war. These were not the actions or the sentiments of a man dedicated to constitutional change, except as a matter of expediency.

On the other hand, it was hard to see Allende as a genuine revolutionary. He never looked anything but the complete bourgeois gentleman. *A bon viveur*, florid but well-groomed, a snappy dresser, with a twinkling eye for the ladies and a good deal of personal charm, his strongest political card was his skill in tactical manoeuvre. But as a strategist, a thinker, a man with a real message, he was unconvincing. Towards the end, as he appeared with increasing frequency on the presidential balcony in Santiago to address chanting crowds of his supporters with revolutionary platitudes, he seemed to me to lose all contact with reality, to have become an actor in love with his revolutionary part rather than a serious leader who knew where he was going.

IN RETROSPECT, I am inclined to think this was always the truth of the matter with Allende. Basically, he was a political romantic, dealing in sensations rather than sense. He enjoyed his hour upon the stage but he never properly assessed the forces he was dealing with, either for or against him. He raised expectations on his own side without commanding the means to satisfy them, and he encouraged opposition on the other side by his use of a revolutionary rhetoric whose threats he also could not fulfil.

At best he was muddle-headed; and time may show that he was deliberately deceitful. Certainly he managed to deceive a lot of people, including himself. But in the end reality taught its own, hard lessons. That you can't be a democrat *and* a revolutionary—at least, not in a society that is already admittedly democratic. That you can't be anti-American *and* expect the Americans to help you. That you can't pose as the people's leader *and* kick most people in the teeth. That you can't conscript soldiers into politics *and* expect them to remain apolitical. That you can't have inflation roaring out of sight *and* maintain a base for social welfare. That, in short, the real world is not Cloud-cuckoo-land. Down here, you just can't have your cake *and* eat it.

It is sad that such elementary lessons should have to be taught yet again at such tragic cost in Chile. But it is alarming that so many people elsewhere should evidently fail to grasp that they are the lessons.

¹ Addicts of the IIT conspiracy theory might like to work out, incidentally, why IIT in Chile was never taken over by Allende, even after the notorious memorandum became public property. Was it, perhaps, because its operations there were mostly losing money and Allende did not want to share its financial embarrassments? Or was it that he knew the company had given him an effective political stick to beat his opponents with and he did not want to throw it away by kicking the company out? Either way, IIT's apparent immunity from reprisal did not suggest that he took its challenge very seriously.

² Although even that was not unthinkable towards the end, such was the chaos the economy had fallen into. The last time I left Chile, a week or so before the *coup*, I drove over the Andes to Argentina and at the Chilean customs post at the summit of the pass I found officials taking a large American car to pieces and laying upon the snow-covered ground around it *one ton* of copper ingots that had been hidden in various nooks and crannies of the chassis. It would have been worth around U.S. \$2,000 in cash in Argentina—a fortune, by then, in Chilean terms, of about *four million* escudos on the black market.

³ Indeed, as I discovered for myself on a visit to southern Chile nine months after Allende's elections, local police forces there were under specific instructions not to attempt to restore the farms to their legal owners. See also Robert Moss's report in *ENCOUNTER*, "Allende's Chile", August 1973, and Alistair Horne's "Commandante Pepe", July 1971.

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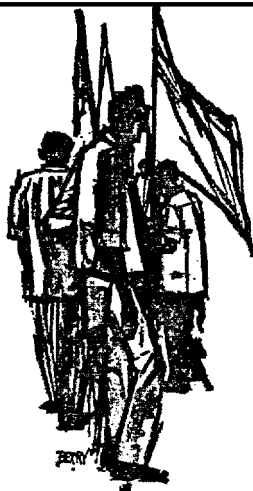
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POINTS OF THE COMPASS

Letter from Santiago

Chile's Coup & After

CPYRGHT *By Robert Moss*



NOT LONG AFTER Allende's death, the police searched the home of his former chief of detectives, Eduardo "Coco" Paredes, who had been killed during the fighting. Among his papers, they found a neat inventory of the contents of 13 crates addressed to the late president that had been flown in from Havana on a Cuban plane. The arrival of those crates, back in March 1972,

had excited widespread speculation about possible arms smuggling and much outraged muttering about the "comrade president's" immunity from customs. Needled by his critics in the press, Allende finally disclosed that the crates contained mango-flavoured ice-cream—a tribute from the heroic socialist women of Cuba. And there the matter was allowed to rest until "Coco" Paredes's inventory turned up. It showed that, as the reader may have already guessed, the crates had been crammed full with Czech automatic weapons, pistols, grenades and ammunition, which all went into the private arsenals that Allende maintained in his palace, his fortress-like home in the Avenida Tomas Moro, and his weekender at El Cañaveral

¹ His justifiers often add that papers like *El Mercurio*, being voices of the "reactionary middle-class," were ripe for the rubbish-heap anyway. The methods of a pro-Marxist paper like *Clarín* (in which Allende had shares)—conservative leaders were sometimes depicted as naked whores with swastikas around their necks—rarely come under the same kind of critical analysis.

up in the Andean foothills, where his guards gave instruction in guerrilla tactics and mass-produced home-made explosives.

The truth about the "mango ice-cream" is one detail among the rest that suggest that Allende was no more a man of peace and non-violence than his friend Fidel Castro. Now he is dead and the generals give orders, it is often argued that such details, even if true, are irrelevant. This argument rests on nothing more solid than the claim that, whatever wicked things Allende and his friends were doing, they were not as bad as the "pitiless repression" that followed his overthrow. In the hands of Allende's apologists, this quantitative comparison of the two régimes becomes a simple way of evading the charge that the Marxist government, though democratically elected, had made itself undemocratic. Allende interfered with the press, certainly, but after all—the argument runs—he didn't close down all the papers he didn't like, as the junta has already done.¹ He flouted the wishes of the opposition majority in Congress, certainly, but he didn't close down the opposition parties. His supporters may have set up guerrilla bases and stored up arms for an

It is a curious foible of contemporary journalism—the ideologised reporters are content to know only their own special political contacts, their "pals", and can't bear to gather all the facts from all possible sources. When, for example, Mr Richard Gott—Penguin's editor of their "Latin American Library" of paperbacks and The Guardian's regular correspondent—arrived in Santiago a few days after the September coup, he confessed that there was "nobody left" he knew from whom he could gather a scrap of information. Nobody at all? In other times this would have been an embarrassing, and damaging, confession for foreign correspondents who usually knew how to talk to Hitler as well as to Ossietzky, to Mussolini as well as Matteotti, who cultivated contacts in all walks of life in order to collect information for a reasonably accurate, comprehensive, and objective story of onrushing events.

ROBERT MOSS continues the reconstruction of the recent tragedy in Chile which we began with David Holden's article on "Allende & the Myth Makers" in the January ENCOUNTER. Moss contributed an earlier "Letter" on Allende's Chile to the August 1972 ENCOUNTER; his book on "Allende's Marxist Experiment" was published last year by David & Charles. He is now working on a biography of General Giap and on a study of "The Age of the Terrorist" to follow his "Urban Guerrillas" (Temple Smith, 1972). Mr Moss is a special correspondent of "The Economist" (London).

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eventual—and violent—“revolution within the revolution,” but wasn’t that all rather childish and forlorn compared with the smooth efficiency with which the big battalions swung into action when the signal was given on last September 11th?

In debating the rights and wrongs of what has happened in Chile, the important question is not whether the “lesser evil” is a Marxist government on the way to setting up a dictatorship or a military junta that has already done so. It is whether Chile was still a real or viable democracy on the eve of the coup. If, as seems clear to me, it had ceased to be a viable democracy—through the breakdown of consensus politics, the routine violence of both political extremes, the government’s systematic violation of the law and, above all, an economic crisis of Weimar proportions—who was primarily responsible?

SUPPOSE THAT a leader of the Labour left became prime minister of Britain and started off by releasing members of the Angry Brigade and the IRA who are currently in jail and formed a private bodyguard out of them to defend No 10 Downing Street. Suppose that he then embarked on a programme of confiscation of private property that affected not just a handful of property speculators, but every small farmer and industrialist in the country and was sped along by the activities of armed squatters seizing houses and farms at gunpoint. Suppose that inflation at an annual rate of three hundred and fifty (350)% was then used as a means of wiping out the savings and the salaries of the middle class, and that (finally) the government’s supporters, having turned Manchester and Birmingham into armed camps with the aid of Palestinian terrorists and KGB instructors, incited mutiny within the armed forces. Few people, on either the right or the left, would argue that Britain had remained a viable democracy.

The obvious *riposte* is that the scenario is inconceivable in Britain (which, one prays, it is) and that the substitution is therefore untenable. The point is that if a government in Britain acted in the same way as Allende’s did, few people would describe it as democratic, and even fewer if—as would be impossible under the British parliamentary system—it ignored parliament even in the face of a majority ruling that it had “systematically violated the constitution.”² Those in favour of such a government would have to define their terms rather more carefully than those who persist in calling the Allende régime a “democratic” or even a “people’s” government. Many of the liberals who mourn Allende as a progressive reformer would probably man the

² *El Mercurio*, 23 August 1973.

barricades against a leader who did the same things in Britain. But then Chile, like Czechoslovakia, is a far-away country about which we know precious little and one can always appeal to the mistaken belief that it is just another tin-pot Latin American area where the rich trample on the poor and where an honest man must take the side of the revolutionaries.

MY PURPOSE HERE is not to justify what has happened since the coup—which must raise serious doubts about the future of democracy in Chile, even if the wilder rumour-mongering is discounted—but to show why in some sense the coup became inevitable.

The Chilean coup bore some resemblance to the military takeover in Indonesia in 1965. In both cases, the armed forces had been ready to take orders from a radical left-wing government until it rounded upon them. The Indonesian Communists, who had found a pliant tool in President Sukarno, narrowly failed to eliminate their potential opponents in the high command on the night of 30 September 1965, when six key generals were murdered. There is now evidence to suggest that the leaders of the far left in Chile were planning to deal with suspect generals in a similar way, and that the September coup may have pre-empted an *autogolpe*—a self-made coup.

THREE THINGS SHOULD be made clear at once. First, the coup was made in Chile. If anyone was “meddling” in Santiago politics, it was the Communist side. The 1,400-odd Russians in Chile were not exclusively concerned with importing tractors. The Cubans did not confine themselves to supplying guns and instructors to the Guerrilla Left. They may have played a more critical role than was previously suspected in the counsels of the Allende government. Allende’s Cuban son-in-law, Luis Fernández de Oña, who had formerly been the desk-officer behind Che Guevara’s Bolivian expedition, took over his wife’s office inside the presidential palace, where he was presumably well-placed to examine important cables and correspondence travelling in and out.

Second, the coup did not happen in a political vacuum. In a country as politically-minded as Chile, it would not have been possible without the backing of the major opposition parties, whose leaders now, ironically, find themselves in a state of unemployment. The Christian Democrats, who faced the 1970 election with a programme very similar to Allende’s, moved over to qualified support for the military takeover—which may have shown that their death-wish was not as highly developed as Allende had hoped. Allende’s most lasting achievement, clearly, was

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to destroy public confidence in a constitutional system that had served Chile better and longer than similar versions have served most West European countries.

Third, the generals might never have moved if they had not had the gage flung at them, first by the Guerrilla Left, and then by Allende himself. The story of how the different factions in the high command finally coalesced to destroy Allende is not generally known, and is therefore worth looking into in some detail.

The Making of "Operation Seaweed"

NOW THAT THE MILITARY have been sucked into Chilean politics, it may not be all that easy to get them out. But that is also part of Allende's legacy. He took the calculated decision to co-opt the generals into his government. It was a way of keeping them out of trouble and of damping down the opposition—since senators would be slower to speak out (and union leaders more reluctant to strike) against the men in the peaked caps. In the end, of course, Allende only succeeded in giving the generals a sense of their own power—and an appetite for more—without securing their loyalty.

He was fortunate, after the murder of General Schneider in October 1970, to find a powerful ally in the new commander-in-chief, General Carlos Prats Gonzalez. Prats was hardly a man of the Left, though he shared with many of his fellow army-officers a profound distrust of the traditional Right. But he developed a close personal friendship both with Allende and with two of the key men in the Chilean Communist Party, Senator Volodia Teitelboim and Luis Figueroa, the trade union leader. His commitment to the régime deepened as his personal ambition grew; there may well be substance in the rumours that the Communists promised to back him in the presidential elections in 1976.

With Prats' support, Allende managed to persuade the armed forces to help him out of his first major crisis, brought on by the wave of opposition strikes in October 1972. Thus Allende was able to form the first of a series of three joint cabinets that presented the world with the novel

³ See my account in *Chile's Marxist Experiment* (David & Charles, 1973).

⁴ The armed forces had been made more aware of the dimensions of Chile's economic crises by the confidential monthly reports prepared by a group of some 30 young economists (some were from the Christian Democrat and National Parties, but most were independents) who had been meeting since January. Their work established the framework for the junta's economic programme.

spectacle of professional soldiers taking their seats beside Communist and Socialist left-wingers. The first time round, the formula worked exactly as the Communists had said it would. Astonished, and partly reassured, by the new coalition government, the strikers returned to work, and Allende's most strident critics fell temporarily silent.

But Prats became an increasingly lonely man. Not all of his senior colleagues relished their role as the underwriters for a government responsible for the worst economic crisis in Chile's modern history, and most of them were angered by Allende's refusal to take action against the paramilitary groups that were organising on the Far Left. Prats showed disturbing signs of personal instability: he quarrelled violently with opposition senators and then, on 27 June, there was his extraordinary skirmish with a middle-class matron called Alejandrina Cox. Mrs Cox noticed him in a passing car, and stuck her tongue out at him. Prats, in fury, ordered his driver to give chase, pursued her for a dozen blocks, fired two bullets at her car to make her stop and then rushed to her window, put his revolver to her head, and addressed her in the following terms: "Apologise, you shit, or I'll kill you (*Pide perdón mierda, o te mato*)."

The government afterwards tried to make out, clumsily, that this was all part of some "assassination attempt."

Prats offered his resignation, which was refused. Providentially for him (or perhaps not so providentially, since it seems that government *agents provocateurs* may have been involved³) the comic-opera exploits of Colonel Roberto Souper, who attacked the presidential palace with a few tanks two days later, gave him the chance to present himself as the national saviour. But he had lost all credibility with his colleagues. Prats realised that his career was over on 22 August, when Congress ruled that the government had been acting unconstitutionally that day. The women of Santiago, who appear to have played a crucial role at every major turning-point in Chile over the past three years, demonstrated outside his home. The riot police who came to disperse them with tear-gas apparently failed to realise that most of the 300 women present were officers' wives, and that four of them were the wives of serving generals! (There are few countries in the world where you can fire tear-gas into the face of a general's wife and get away with it.) General Prats resigned the following day. He, more than any man, had been the main prop of the Allende government since the October strikes. With the appointment of General Augusto Pinochet as his successor, the way was open for direct military intervention.⁴

BUT THE NAVY, not the Army, was the driving

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force behind the coup. Its officers, drawn from the middle class and proud of their long relationship with the Royal Navy—visible by their “English” uniforms and their fondness for pink gin—were always regarded as the most conservative section of the armed forces. Allende’s attempts to woo the military with decorations, wage increases, and bland flattery made little impression on them. Although Admiral Raúl Montero, the Navy’s commander, was a cautious constitutionalist, he was unpopular with many of his subordinates, who felt that it was his duty to take a firmer stand with Allende—especially after the discovery of left-wing plans for a mutiny.

Early in July, some young naval officers at Talcahuano detected the first signs of what was afoot. Although the Navy is a professional force, left-wing elements had managed to set up “political cells” among young petty officers and ratings. Plans had been drawn up to seize control of the cruiser *Latorre* and the destroyer *Blanco Encalada* and then use them to bombard naval shore installations at Valparaiso. The mutiny was to take place at night; the officers of the watch were to be eliminated, and lists were drawn up of other officers who were to be attacked in their homes. If the mutiny was successful, the ring-leaders were going to claim that they had headed off a Right-wing coup and appeal to Allende to close down Congress and seize total power.

On 7 August, after more than 400 sailors had been arrested and interrogated, the Navy demanded that the parliamentary immunity of two leaders of Allende’s coalition—Carlos Altamirano of the Socialist Party and Oscar Garretón of the Movement of United Popular Action (*Mapu*)—should be lifted so that they could be put on trial for their part in the conspiracy. The Navy also called for the arrest of Miguel Enriquez, the chieftain of the Movement of the Revolutionary Left (*Mir*). It is now established that all three had met with the ring-leaders of the mutiny. Whether Allende himself was also involved is less clear.

I talked shortly after the coup with one officer from the cruiser *Prat* who claimed that the key organiser on board his ship, a petty officer called Maldonado, had told him that he had taken part in a secret meeting with Allende in the high-rise apartments known as the *Torres de Tajamar* in Santiago. That may well be the kind of thing that a frightened man says under pressure to please his interrogators; but whether or not Allende was personally involved in the plot, it is clear that his government was.

It was with this knowledge that a group of Valparaiso navy planners put the final touches to a secret plan for military intervention. Its code-name was “*Plan Cochayuya*,” derived from the name of a kind of seaweed found along the Chil-

ean coast. The series of incidents that finally brought it into effect will appeal to those who favour the “Cleopatra’s nose” conception of history. In fact, what appeared on the surface to be a petty squabble over promotion—over whether or not Admiral Montero would resign to make way for Merino as his successor—merely served to ignite the powder-barrel that Allende had been perching on uncomfortably for many months. While the admirals quarrelled with the president, truck-drivers crippled the country’s land communications, Right-wing saboteurs from *Patria y Libertad* blew up railway-lines, and the extreme Left, through its workers’ committees and para-military brigades, worked feverishly to gain the upper hand in the confrontation that now seemed inevitable.

AGAINST THIS BACKGROUND, Allende tried to gain time. He tried to allay the increasing militancy of the Christian Democrats by airy promises of changing his policy, of taking them into the cabinet, and even of facing the country with a referendum. He tried to placate the armed forces by allowing them to conduct arms searches in the heartlands of the Guerrilla Left—the Santiago *poblaciones* and the rural bases in the south—while at the same time trying to elbow out conservative officers like the Air Force commander, General Cesar Ruiz, who lost his job in mid-August. He even tried to use the old formula of a joint Military-Marxist cabinet that had bought him time back in 1972. He formed a new cabinet with the service commanders on 9 August, and when that fell apart after Prats’ resignation, he managed to cobble together yet another one.

But the tightrope that Allende was trying to walk was being cut away at both ends. As Allende’s friend Régis Debray later acknowledged, the Left and the Right were engaged in a race against time. If the junta is to be believed, the Socialist Left and the *Mir* were now preparing their “*Z plan*”—a plan for the assassination of senior officers and civilian opposition leaders that was to have been executed on 18 September. It seems that they timed it a week too late.

ON WEDNESDAY, 29 August, Admiral Merino and Admiral Sergio Huidobro, the chief of the Chilean marines, went up to Santiago to see their commander. They told Admiral Montero that he had lost the confidence of the Navy: he should resign, and the armed forces should withdraw from the cabinet. Montero insisted on consulting the president. So the three admirals drove around to the Avenida Tomás Moro shortly after midnight, where they found Allende “slightly drunk.”

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According to one account,⁵ he raged at Merino: "I know what you are doing. Well, go ahead! What you discovered at Valparaiso is only one tenth of what the Communists and the *miristas* are doing." And later, shaking his fist, "I have declared war on the Navy." He had thrown down the gauntlet. He is even said to have boasted that his house in Tomás Moro was an "impregnable fortress." To which Huidobro replied: "You should leave matters of security to the experts." It was as if Allende had strayed into that state of *ate* described by the Greek tragedians, in which it becomes impossible to decipher reality from illusion.

The following Friday, back in Valparaiso, 500 naval officers waited in a conference room for an hour-and-a-half while the admirals talked in the nearby town of Salinas. Admiral Montero found that even his oldest friends were now convinced he should resign. Overcome by emotion, he agreed; and his decision was duly reported to the captains and commanders. But when he returned to Santiago, Allende insisted that he should stay on "a few weeks longer." The following morning, the admirals were summoned to Santiago for a surprise meeting in the Defence Ministry. They expected to be told that Montero's resignation was confirmed. Instead, they were asked by Orlando Letelier, the Defence Minister, to stand up one by one and state their reasons for wanting him to go. Allende had calculated that their reluctance to embarrass a fellow-officer in public would make them hold their tongues. He was wrong. Starting with Merino, the admirals stood up in turn and attacked Montero for failing to secure the arrest of those responsible for the Valparaiso plot and for failing to press for military withdrawal from a cabinet that was "destroying the country."

AFTER THIS SHOW OF ADAMANCY, Allende adopted a different tack. He received Merino and Huidobro privately in his palace on Monday, 3 September, and asked them to give him "five or seven days more" to sort out his problems. At the end of that interval, he promised, he would appoint Merino as the new Navy commander and name an entirely civilian cabinet. Merino went back to the squadron at Valparaiso happy enough with this arrangement. But he found that his fellow-officers were not willing to trust Allende's word. It was agreed that if Allende still refused to take immediate action the following Friday (the date set for Merino's next appointment with the president) the signal would be given to launch

⁵ Allende, is of course, not alive to testify as to the accuracy of these quotations; my account is based on eye-witness reports gathered in Santiago.

"Operation Seaweed." The chief of the joint chiefs of staff, Admiral Patricio Carvajal, had been working for some months to get closer collaboration between the three services and the *Carabineros*, but it was still unclear whether the Navy would have to go it alone.

Merino duly kept his appointment on Friday the 7th, and found that Allende was still unready to sack Montero. He did not argue this time. He went back to Valparaiso and gave the signal to launch *Plan Cochayuya*. The original date for the coup was Monday the 10th, but General Pinochet asked for a 24-hour delay to prepare the Army. The timing was settled when Admiral Huidobro drove up to the capital on Sunday with a small square of lined notepaper concealed in his sock. The message from Merino read: "D-Day is Tuesday. The hour is 0600. (signed) *Jose Toribio*." General Gustavo Leigh, the new Air Force commander, and General Augusto Pinochet examined it in Pinochet's house, and then wrote the word *Conforme* ("I agree") on the back of the paper and signed their names. If they had any remaining doubts about the justification for what they were planning, these had been diminished by the violent speech delivered by Senator Altamirano the previous day, which amounted to incitement to the naval ratings to rebel against their officers.

TWO MAJOR PROBLEMS remained: to enlist the support of the para-military *Carabineros*, whose leaders were mainly pro-Allende men, and to mobilise the troops without alerting the Government to the true nature of the plot. The first problem was solved when the *Carabinero* General Jovani cast in his lot with the conspirators. General Cesar Mendoza (No 7 in the strict order of seniority) followed suit. Their adhesion meant that, on the morning of the coup, Allende found himself abandoned by his police guard at the palace, who turned their armoured cars (*tanquetas*) inwards to point at him.

Security was also fairly well kept. The fleet put out to sea on Monday, supposedly to join in manoeuvres (*Operation Unitas*) with the Americans, and when it sailed back to harbour around dawn on Tuesday, it seems that Allende thought that he only had to contend with an isolated naval rising. Suspicious that something was afoot, he had telephoned to General Herman Brady (the Santiago garrison commander) around midnight, to enquire whether everything was all right. Brady, who had been close to Allende in the past, assured him that the Army was ready to deal with any contingency, although he had already received his marching orders from Pinochet. It is almost certain that Allende would not have driven to his palace on Tuesday morning had he realised that

he was not dealing merely with a handful of dissident admirals, but with the united strength of his armed forces. He drove to his death.*

The Guerrilla Bluff

IN A HEATED DISCUSSION with the generals over the resignation of Admiral Ismael Huerta from the cabinet in January 1973, Allende declared that, if they ever turned against him, he would not commit suicide or seek exile in Cuba. "I will take refuge in the Cordón de Cerrillos," he warned, "and you will never get me out."

The Cordón de Cerrillos is one of those industrial suburbs that point like knife-blades towards the centre of Santiago. These suburbs—and the squatters' camps, or *campamentos*—dotted around the outskirts of the city were viewed by the revolutionary Left as the bases for an eventual October-style insurrection. Within the state-run industries, workers were given political indoctrination and military training, under the supervision of Cuban, North Korean, and Czech instructors. Some factories were turned over to arms production. In the Madeco plant, which makes refrigerators, workers on night-shift soldered together a couple of dozen "people's tanks" (ordinary fork-lift trucks shielded by armour-plating and with heavy machine-guns mounted on top) under the guidance of a Brazilian political exile named Sergio de Moraes.

This was not an isolated example. The finance for such goings-on was either borrowed from the capital of the state-run companies themselves (the government publishing house was a notorious donor) or taken from the secret budgets of various ministries. The foreign ministry alone disposed of more than \$1m a month in clandestine funds. Apprentice guerrillas looking for a job were given sinecures by state agencies like the municipal works corporation (*Cormu*) whose staff increased from 200 to 12,000 under Allende—although there was no notable increase in municipal works. And among the more than 13,000 political exiles

* The testimony of his own doctor and the photographs of his body make it clear that he committed suicide with the automatic weapon sent to him as a gift by Fidel Castro. He had been firing it from a window earlier that morning.

who flooded into Allende's Chile, there were plenty of veteran terrorists to lend their expertise. The Tupamaros toured the slum suburbs in propaganda teams, and built up a rural base in the north of Chile under the leadership of Raúl Bidegain Greissing, one of the few key organisers to escape the Montevideo police.

If all this was taking place, why did armed resistance to the coup crumble so fast? There are two probable explanations. The first is that the threat to mobilise the workers' brigades had never been more than a bluff. The government had been able to call out its supporters in big demonstrations, although (to everyone but the *Guardian* correspondent) it seemed that its drawing power had been badly eroded by the time of the rally on 4 September, a week before the coup. The *Guardian* estimated the crowd that day at 1,250,000, while the *Wall Street Journal* correspondent who was also present observed that the

square where the rally took place could not have held many more than 20,000, and reported how one group of particularly noisy supporters was being led round and round the block to give the general impression of greater numbers.

If the workers were no longer prepared to turn out to hear speeches, would they be ready to face the tanks? It seems that, with some exceptions (pockets of resistance such as the Sumar factory), they were not.

The second factor was that the leaders of the Left-wing parties appear to

have taken the rational decision to go underground as soon as it became clear that the armed forces had not split—as the Communists had believed they would. They were not unprepared for this move. Safe houses had already been chosen, and many of the Socialist and *mirista* leaders were able to make quick getaways. Others simply ducked into the nearest friendly embassy.

It might be tempting to conclude from this that the Guerrilla Left in Chile was *pas sérieux*. But the resistance of the sniper and the saboteur continues, and is met by equally ugly forms of military repression. Whether the campaign of urban terrorism that may now be beginning will develop into a real threat to the new régime will depend on the cohesion of the armed forces, on their capacity to hold on to their initial civilian support, and on the calibre of the guerrillas them-



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selves. The opening attempts at armed resistance to the junta outside Santiago were pathetically amateurish.

One clash took place at Neltume, a small town on the outskirts of the Panguipulli timber reserves. On the day after the coup, a certain Jose Gregorio Liendo, famous in the outside world under his nom-de-guerre "Comandante Pepe,"⁷ turned up at the head of about 50 men and attacked the local *Carabinero* post. Although the police were outnumbered by ten to one, they managed to hold out until three more *Carabineros* from a neighbouring village came to their rescue. Pepe's guerrillas were driven off into the hills, where Pepe himself (together with his wife Yolanda and three of his supporters) was captured on 19 September as he headed towards the Carririne pass into Argentina. One of the Air Force officers who took part in the hunt for Pepe told me that he gave himself up to an advance patrol without firing a single shot. "He said that he did not want to risk his wife's life. But it seems to me that he was not a serious guerrilla. What was she doing up there in the first place?"

Pepe gave his first press interview, to an enterprising young Chilean journalist, back in April 1971. He quickly gained a reputation as "Chile's Che Guevara"—a title that seems rather absurd in retrospect. He talked to the press about the need for a "continental revolution" designed to create a "union of socialist republics" in Latin America. But Pepe's chief virtue was that, unlike the *Mir's* "guerrilla theologians," as a Communist critic once called them, he had some claim to present himself as a kind of "working-class revolutionary." He was the son of a peasant farmer from Magallanes who managed to buy himself a small farm after he won a lottery prize. He studied forestry at the University of Valdivia, but he abandoned his studies after six months in order to join the grindingly poor timber-workers on the big estates up around Panguipulli. Helped by the local left-wing governor (who helped him to escape from the police on one occasion) he organised a series of violent land-seizures.

I WAS PROBABLY THE LAST FOREIGNER to see Comandante Pepe alive. I managed to visit him in the prison in the drizzly southern city of Valdivia where he was held after his capture. I found a man in his early thirties, short, with a lean, sharp face, several days' growth of beard, and bright but barely focused eyes like polished marbles. He seemed physically well although (like Che Guevara) he was an asthmatic and is said to have been treated for lung complaints in Cuba and

⁷ Alastair Horne, "Commandante Pepe," *ENCOUNTER*, July 1971.

Hungary. He was also very cool and self-possessed, although bitter about his public image. "The world press and Chilean television have done me irreparable harm," he told me. "They gave me the title of *Comandante*, which I never wanted. They attributed acts to me that I never committed."

Pepe's wife Yolanda, whom I visited in the neighbouring municipal jail (the most modern building in Valdivia) where she was being held separately, shared his views about the media. When I asked her whether she felt that the press had made a myth (*un mito*) out of Pepe, she thought that I had used the word *humito*, which means a little puff of smoke. "Yes," she replied, "every day the press was making smoke around my husband." When I asked her whether she felt that Pepe came to see himself as a second Che Guevara—as his admirers made him out to be—she said that "That question is very seditious for my husband. I can't answer it, but I can tell you that I also put it to him."

Yolanda begged that Pepe's life should be spared, for the sake of their infant son who was staying with her father in the Nueva la Habana *población* in Santiago. Pepe himself appeared conscious of what lay in store for him: "I am not worried for myself. I will be united with the march of history." He was judged by a military court and sentenced to death for his guerrilla activities. The sentence was carried out at 8.40 p.m. on 3 October.

There was a sad Bonnie-and-Clyde atmosphere about the whole thing. One could not think of Pepe as a serious guerrilla, still less as a terrorist red in tooth and claw. But more serious contenders will follow.

The New Order

WHAT ROAD WILL Chile follow now? It will be a double tragedy if the alternative to the "Marxist experiment" proves to be nothing better than a blinkered, savagely repressive military dictatorship. The way that the generals have set out to fulfil their self-elected mission to "eradicate the Marxist cancer" makes one think of what François Mauriac, in sorrow, said about the revenge inflicted on the men of Vichy by his comrades from the French Resistance: "The idea of decapitating a head still capable of thought is unwarrantable. . . ."

In fairness, it has to be said that the generals are being reviled as much for imaginary crimes as for real ones. There has been a widespread suspension of the critical faculty in the face of improbable body-counts: the figure of 20,000 or 30,000 killed that was bandied around in the House of Commons during a recent debate, for example, or the

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much-quoted *Newsweek* claim that the Santiago morgue had processed more than 2,700 bodies in the fortnight after the September coup—a figure that later turned out to be the official tally for all bodies processed since 1 January.

No reliable estimate of the casualties since the coup is as yet available. In the order of quantities, the Chilean coup was bloody by comparison with the Greek coup in 1967, bloodless by comparison with the aftermath of the military takeover in Indonesia in 1965. It has almost certainly cost fewer lives than the brief civil war that followed the overthrow and suicide of an earlier Chilean president, Balmaceda, in 1891—when more than 10,000 people (out of a population only a fifth the present size) were killed. But such comparisons are probably not what matters. Chile's new rulers face the familiar temptation of the victors in any internal war: to claim their revenge, and to claim in self-justification that it was the other side that "started it." The continuing violence suggests that they, or their subordinates, have not been able to resist that temptation.

IN A COUNTRY as deeply polarised as Chile has become, it will not be an easy task to persuade those who formerly supported the Allende government (and this means at least 40% of the electorate) to accept the new order of things. This is why no senior officer is talking of restoring the constitutional process in less than a year. General Augusto Pinochet told me that he felt that the country was only at the beginning of the "healing process." He argued that the military must be allowed time to "depoliticise" the Chileans, who were once described by Eduardo Frei as a nation "sick with ideology." General Leigh compares the state of Chile to that of "a drain that has become clogged up with mud and debris," and it has to be "cleared away before the water can flow again."

* Saez was only one of the civilian experts called by the junta to advise on how to straighten out the economy in the days following the coup. Orlando Saenz, the combative young president of the industrialists' association, SOFOFA, was given an important role as economic adviser to the foreign ministry. Roberto Kelly, a retired naval officer and successful private businessman, was made minister-director of the state planning agency, ODEPLAN, and a team of able young economists who had worked on a draft programme for economic reconstruction over the months before the coup quickly found jobs in the administration. A month after the coup, General Rolando Gonzalez, an indecisive army officer who was originally handed the economics portfolio, was replaced by Fernando Leniz, the former president of *El Mercurio*, the major independent newspaper that had played a decisive role in the opposition to Allende. As these appointments suggest, the junta soon grasped the need to place the economy under the control of qualified men.

It is not really surprising that the political leaders of the Centre and the Right are ready to accept the need for a 1-2 year period of military rule, with the exception of a group of left-wing Christian Democrats associated with Bernardo Leighton and Radomiro Tomic. For one thing, it is clear that the labour of economic reconstruction will involve unpopular austerity measures, and the party leaders would prefer to see the armed forces take responsibility for them. That way they do not lose votes. There is also the probability that the extreme Left is preparing a terrorist campaign. Again, the political party leaders would prefer to see the high command take responsibility for dealing with that.

But at the same time, the political leaders who took a stand against Allende expect to be given a place in the new system. One of the early mistakes of the junta was to fill most vacant positions—in the civil service as well as the cabinet—with retired or serving officers. This reflected both the traditional isolation of the armed forces from society in general and the conviction that it was necessary for the junta to transcend party allegiances in order to present a "national image." The influence of key civilian advisers, like Raúl Saez, who was initially seen by the junta as a kind of economic supremo, was connected with their personal *entrée* to the armed forces as well as with their personal capacities.*

But outside the economic sector, the armed forces established a virtual monopoly of the new administration—filling ambassadorships and even university rectorships as well as cabinet jobs. The junta overreached itself badly by placing military men as rectors in most of the universities a fortnight after the coup. By doing this, they risked losing the support of the anti-Marxist student groups who had played a leading part in the movement against Allende; and the way that Eduardo Boeninger, the brave and outspoken Christian Democratic rector of the University of Chile, was driven to resign was scarcely likely to reassure his fellow-Christian-Democrats—nor, indeed, those who believed that, by backing the coup, they were helping to preserve the possibility of a pluralistic society in Chile. Whatever the personal qualities of a man like General Cesar Ruiz Danyau, the retired Air Force chief who was appointed to replace Boeninger, he simply did not possess the intellect or the vision usually required in a university rector. The appearance of retired generals on the campuses is more alarming for Chilean society than isolated incidents like the burning of Marxist literature in Santiago.

OBVIOUSLY A GREAT DEAL WILL DEPEND ON whether the junta can rebuild the economy. On the day of Allende's death, foreign reserves were

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down to \$3½m; the foreign debt had mounted to some \$4 billion; and inflation was running at an annual rate of 350%. The junta's attempt to restore realistic prices and exchange rates will mean some temporary hardship; but it is possibly the only way of restoring incentives for local manufacturers and foreign investors. Similarly, the reorganisation of state-run firms will mean an end to the featherbedding of political favourites and, therefore, more unemployment; but it is also one of the ways to curb the deficits of the public corporations which were one of the prime sources of inflation.

The junta will have to contend with an attempt to isolate it, both internally and externally. It is ironic that many of those who attacked the Americans for limiting credit lines to the Allende government are now calling for an economic blockade of the "fascists" who have replaced him. Such a campaign may fail, but if it succeeds it might help to make the régime still more repressive. If the generals cannot sort out the economy, they will be compelled to fall back on force as the means of keeping themselves in power.

WHAT KIND OF POLITICAL SYSTEM will eventually emerge from the Chilean imbroglio is still obscure. It will obviously be hard to

* Edmund Burke, "Letter to a Member of the National Assembly in answer to some Objections to his Book on Foreign Affairs" (1791).

restore the former system now that the left-wing parties that represented some 40% of the electorate have been outlawed. There are a certain number of "corporatists," both within the high command and among the team of jurists who have been working on a draft constitution, who are fundamentally out of sympathy with the democratic system in any case. They are probably in a minority, but it is an influential one.

The problem is that the system broke down under the stresses imposed on it by Allende and his fellow-Marxists, and cannot be reconstructed overnight. To say that Allende was primarily responsible for destroying Chile's democratic system is not an attempt to cover up the violence and blunders of his successors, but to show where the tragedy began. Those who compare the fashionable mythology that has been woven around Allende with his actions may be reminded of Burke's words about the revolutionaries in France in a different epoch: "They are the same men and the same designs that they were from the first, though varied in their appearance. It was the very same animal that at first crawled about in the shape of a caterpillar, that you now see rise into the air and expand his wings into the sun..."* Allende and his friends cannot be absolved by what has happened since the coup. The men now painted as martyrs for democracy are the same men that smuggled in machine-guns, camouflaged as mango ice-cream, and meant to use them.