STAT

3

NEW YORK TIMES MAGAZINE
13 APRIL 1975

Law and order in Chile

By Victor Perera

SANTIAGO. I had come to Chile not long ago as n admitted opponent of the military junta that nseated Marxist President Salvador Allende Gos- ens on Sept. 11, 1973, in one of the bloodiest ilitary take-overs in Latin America's history. would find that the military junta's policies have ippled the country's long-standing democratic stitutions in ways that go far beyond the damage ready suffered during Allende's three years in fice.

I entered as a tourist, to forestall the harassment countered by two fellow journalists after they d written articles critical of the Government. seph Novitski of The Washington Post had been aced under house arrest for several hours, and nathan Kandell of The New York Times had been opped at Pudahuel Airport and placed on the next ane to Lima.

Tensions then were heightened by the assassina- n of exiled Army Gen. Carlos Prats Gonzáles, ho had been Allende's Commander in Chief. The neral and his wife were blown up in their car, Argentina, by unknown assailants, and his body as flown back to Santiago for a politically arged funeral. General Prats, who had still commanded the respect and loyalty of many younger ficers and enlisted men despite his promise to ep a "correct" silence while in exile, had remained e of the few men considered strong enough to ark an internal rebellion against Gen. Augusto ochet Ugarte and his ruling junta. Another source added tension was a holdup of the Bank of Chile, act that embarrassed the junta and led to ssive roundups of suspected leftists.

Soon after my arrival, I walk around Santiago's er city, which is outwardly calm and orderly. e streets are spotlessly clean and the air is so ar that distant Andean snow peaks seem to g in air, just above the city's rooftops. The de- tment stores seem scantily stocked and de- d of chic; even the store-window mannequins k dowdy and outmoded. Bookstore windows minently display Piers Paul Read's account of Uruguayan Andean survivors, "Alive," in nish translation. Other favorite titles are e Little Prince" and Richard Bach's lvador Gaviota" ("Jonathan Livingston Seagull"). university bookstores, student journals contain cles on archeology, the stiff new grading system pre-20th-century literature and history. There is onspicuous vacuum on politics and current nts.

n uneasy stillness pervades Santiago's restau- ts and cafes, particularly in the evening; the in of speaking in hushed voices is felt like a cold draft. As I sit in the Waldorf Cafe I hear o the radio a Government spokesman expressing "th people's great admiration for the men who guar us." He calls for closer relations between th grateful citizenry and the military. "On the Da of the Fatherland write your local garrison and share with a soldier some anecdotes of his life . . . and you, women citizens, partake with a soldier's wife her valorous experiences while he is in the guardhouse performing his duty. . . ."

The huge central post office is empty, as desolate as a mausoleum. The sullen clerk refuses to sell me stamps and insists on machine-stamping my letter so that I cannot mail it from outside. A hand-lettered sign in front of another window reads, "Do not inquire except for urgent reasons, and then be brief." The clerk sits thumbing desultorily through a sheaf of papers.

At the rear of the post office a large red and blue poster boasts with specious logic, "In Every Chilean There Is a Soldier. In Every Soldier There Is a Chilean." The small copyright below belongs to a United States advertising agency.

The oppressiveness in the city lets up briefly at dusk, in that charged interval between day and night when the blood quickens and strangers smile and brush shoulders in the street. At twilight, a schoolgirl smiles and lifts her shoulder at me. This innocent flirtation startles me out of a deepening numbness. I realize that during my stay in Chile my senses have been closing up; I am becoming anesthetized. The absence of gesture has been so prevalent that even the simplest transactions acquire a lucid distinctness.

By around 10 at night, three hours before the curfew, restless crowds mill about the parklike Plaza de Armas. Under state-of-siege provisions, organized public assembly is prohibited, but tensions build during the day, and the plaza is one of the few places where they can be released without attracting the attention of the military police.

As I enter the square a ragpicker is screaming that his sack of old clothes has been stolen. "They have robbed me," he shouts, flailing his arms at the crowd that has gathered to jeer him. "They have beaten me on the head. I am not a bad man." A policeman tries to calm the ragpicker but he keeps breaking loose and flailing his arms at the spectators who taunt him and squeal aloud as they dodge his blows. A second policeman starts to beat him.

"They are all the same, these filthy police," a woman in provincial dress mutters aloud. A bent old man standing nearby reproaches her: "One doesn't speak that way any more."

The woman wheels around and turns on the old man. "Who are you to tell me how to speak, you dried-up old goat? I have three small children who could beat you up."

continued