

Chile cabinet changes + Uruguay institutional crisis + Argentina Peron may return
Central America market + Bolivian peso + Colombia politics + Brazil ships

Chile: poker game

The battle between the government and the opposition has now moved back to congress, where four ministers seemed to face certain impeachment.

A major cabinet reshuffle will be taking place in Chile this weekend. The two ministers standing in the congressional elections next March were expected to hand in their resignations to President Salvador Allende on Saturday. This is the deadline under Chile's electoral law, which requires that candidates resign from public office 120 days before the poll. But the prospective impeachment of four ministers, called for this week by the opposition alliance, the Confederación Democrática, in fact resulted in Allende requesting the resignation of the entire cabinet.

One of the ministers facing impeachment, Jaime Suárez, the minister of the interior, was standing in the elections and so was leaving the cabinet anyway. He had held the portfolio since July when the previous minister, Hernán del Canto, was impeached by congress. Apart from Jaime Suárez, the others accused by the opposition of violating the constitution were Carlos Matus, the minister of economy, Aníbal Palma, the minister of education, and Jacques Chonchol, the minister of agriculture. Whether the charges against them are true or not, their impeachment seemed certain. It needs only a simple majority in both chambers of congress, and this the opposition parties can muster. To impeach the President, which the right-wing Partido Nacional is also demanding, the opposition would have to control two thirds of the seats in each chamber; at present they are just short of this total.

But Allende may well call the opposition's bluff. When he was forced to dismiss José Tohá and Hernán del Canto, the two previously impeached ministers of the interior, he immediately gave them other cabinet posts. Tohá, in fact, is still minister of defence, while del Canto, as one of the ministers standing in the elections, was expected to resign this weekend as secretary general of the government (minister of portfolio). This time the

President can take the wind out of the opposition's sails by reshuffling his ministers before the impeachment process is completed. Even so, the whole business is bound to make the daily process of government more difficult for him. The loss of Chonchol, by far Chile's best agrarian expert, from the ministry of agriculture, would itself be a serious blow. And of course the prolongation of the lorry owners' strike last weekend, when Allende broke off negotiations because of their 'excessive' political demands, meant an added burden to the economy—which, he has said, had already suffered to the tune of 100 million dollars.

Uruguay: grandmother's footsteps

With the arrest by the armed forces of Jorge Batlle, Uruguay took one more step towards the brink of an outright confrontation between the civilian government and the military.

Of all the gauntlets thrown down by the armed forces to the civilian political establishment, none has been so downright offensive as the arrest last week of the prominent Colorado politician Jorge Batlle. As leader of the Unidad y Reforma faction of the Colorado Party, a faction sometimes known as List 15, and as a man with wide-ranging business interests, Batlle is the type of politician for whom certain sectors of the armed forces have been gunning for some time. Indeed rumours had been flying about Montevideo that, with the help of detained Tupamaros, some units had been collecting evidence to charge him with illegal currency transactions and other profiteering. These rumours stung Batlle to reply last week with a broadcast denouncing military interference in politics, and suggesting that any officer who cooperated over anything at all with the Tupamaros should be cashiered for "treating with the enemy". This was the last straw for the armed forces, and

News in brief

Argentina: The Paris-based committee for the defence of Argentine political prisoners has expressed its fear that the 15 prisoners accused of having participated in the kidnapping and killing of the Fiat executive Oberdan Sallustro last April will be sentenced to death. President Lanusse has recently been emphasizing that although the six-year-old state of siege may be lifted in November, there is no question of abolishing the death penalty for political crimes.

Brazil: *Prensa Latina* confirmed an increasing number of unofficial reports coming out of Brazil to the effect that the military is facing armed bands of peasants and guerrillas in northern Goias, western Maranhão, and southern Pará. Soldiers have been killed by guerrillas along the line of the new trans-Amazonian highway, and a large scale military operation has been mounted in an attempt to eliminate the *focos* of resistance.

Chile & Mexico: The Mexican government is following up the agreements reached during President Echeverría's visit to Chile six months ago, and they are already bearing fruit in terms of trade and cooperation. Mexico has backed up the Chilean government in its dispute with the Kennecott Copper Company and it is likely that President Salvador Allende will visit Mexico in the next six months.

Colombia: The protestant missionary organization, which uses the title Summer Institute of Linguistics as a cover for its operations in a number of countries around the Amazon basin, has been given 5 years to get out of the country. The institute has long been criticized for its activities and for its links with extreme right-wing organizations in the United States. The institute is now known to fear that Colombia's action will spark similar moves by other governments.

Colombia: After 452 days—the longest military trial in Colombian history—23 army officers and 7 civilian employees of the army were convicted of fraud and embezzlement. The frauds covered several garrisons in different parts of the country and involved a sum equivalent to more than 250,000 dollars. The sentences will not be handed down for several weeks yet.

Costa Rica: Plans for turning San José into a tax haven for the headquarters of multinational companies have been attacked by many of the government's own supporters, despite the fact that the plan was sponsored by President José Figueres himself.

Cuba: The government plans to sharply increase expenditure and effort on public health measures, which will include investment in cleaning up the environment and ensuring proper supplies of drinking water for the entire population. This is the only programme of its kind being undertaken anywhere in Latin America.

Cuba: The director of the national building department said the construction industry had completed more work during the first nine months of this year than in the whole of the two previous years. Improved labour productivity was reported to have been a major factor in achieving this growth.

Grenada: A constitutional conference to discuss independence for the island will be held in London in May.

Mexico: The authorities have formerly charged 91 people in the state of Guerrero with participating in guerrilla struggles against the army last August. It is now admitted that 28 soldiers were killed and 16 wounded in the clashes.

Peru: President Velasco has announced the promotion of the former foreign minister, General Edgardo Mercado Jarrin, to the post of minister of war and prime minister from 1 January. The minister of war is effectively commander-in-chief of the army and this move—long expected—places General Mercado firmly in line to succeed Velasco when the moment comes. Mercado has spent the past year as chief of general staff.

Peru: Preliminary census data suggests that 3.8 million of Peru's 13.6 million inhabitants live in the greater Lima area.

Venezuela: The Jesuit run Andres Bello university is close to collapse following the resignation of the rector and the rest of the university council. Their resignations follow student protests against the expulsion of students and teachers who were suspected of holding radical political views. The private foundation which subsidizes the university has threatened to withdraw its support.

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