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Another Dictator Teetering?

Is another political exorcism under way—this time the satanic Pinochet of Chile, to follow the riddance of Duvalier of Haiti and Marcos of the Philippines? The July 6 death of Rodrigo Rojas, the Washington resident who witnesses say was beaten and set on fire by government security forces in Santiago, appears to have focused the world on the raw hatefulness of Gen. Augusto Pinochet for his people.

That, and his defiance. Pinochet states that not only are the current strikes and protests against his dictatorship not going to drive him from office but that he will survive the mess because the Chilean constitution says so. In 1989, he plans to run for another eight-year term, with a 1980 constitutional provision saying that the junta's candidate can seek reelection unopposed. Pinochet is fanatically anticommunist, except that his technique of guaranteed electoral victory is Kremliquesque.

Marcos and Duvalier also hated the Soviet's ideology but liked their style of elections. If 1986 is the year of the fallen dictators, Pinochet could well be next. Many of the seeming strengths of power and longevity that Marcos and Duvalier believed would keep them entrenched are now being used by Pinochet: rampant human-rights violations, the silencing of political opponents, killing citizens involved in street demonstrations and a reliance on U.S. support.

In Pinochet's case, the support has been fulsome. In August 1981, Jeane Kirkpatrick, then the Reagan administration's ambassador to the United Nations, visited the dictator in Santiago and found him to her liking. Why not? The pair thought alike. In 1980, in the Commentary magazine article that caught the

eye of fellow intellectual Ronald Reagan, Kirkpatrick argued in favor of backing "positively friendly" authoritarians. "Right-wing autocracies," she insisted, "do sometimes evolve into democracies."

Two years before, in a New York Times interview, Pinochet said the same: "I think that many times hard and strong authority is necessary because that strong and hard authority allows democracy later." Sixteen years and thousands of high crimes after, this "later" has yet to evolve.

The state terror and repression were ignored by Kirkpatrick on her 1981 trip. She said in Santiago that the Reagan administration intended to "normalize completely its relations with Chile in order to work together in a pleasant way." Two days after Kirkpatrick's bouquet of pleasantries fell into Pinochet's lap, Chilean security forces expelled four opposition politicians, including the president of the country's commission on human rights.

The Kirkpatrick legacy is worth remembering because one of its most shameless heirs is Sen. Jesse Helms (R-N.C.). Last month he was in Santiago and, like Kirkpatrick before him, was untroubled by the government's policies of murder and torture as long as communism was being fought. Helms, all but celebrating the Pinochet policies, criticized the State Department for pressuring Chile to investigate the death of Rodrigo Rojas. Helms was asking for no more than consistency. In five years, the administration has remained unalarmed by the reign of Pinochet brutalities. Why a raised eyebrow now? Let's stick by our man in Santiago.

Unwittingly, Helms raised the question that is repeatedly thrown in the face of the United States: Once you support a monster, how large must the monstrosities of death and torture become before the support is withdrawn? The South African crisis is that. George Shultz told the Senate last week that under the regime in Pretoria "a sharp turn for the worse" has occurred. What did he expect, a sharp turn for the better? Repressive turns are always for the worse, in South Africa, the Philippines, Haiti and now Chile.

Our complicity in the crimes of Pinochet is greater than with the others. In the early 1970s, Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger ruled that the Chileans' choice of the Allende government was not acceptable. Instead of sending in the Marines, they sent in the CIA. Pinochet resulted.

In 1977, Richard Helms, the CIA director at the time his agents of democracy were destroying democracy in Chile, was convicted of not testifying fully and accurately to a Senate committee. The judge in the case told Helms at the time of his conviction: "You dishonored your oath and you now stand before this court in disgrace and shame." After his sentencing, Helms said, "I don't feel disgraced at all."

That might well be the motto of American policy toward Pinochet. From Richard Helms to Jesse Helms, and with Kirkpatrick and Reagan in between, no brutality has been too great. In 1976, the Pinochet regime killed a former Chilean diplomat and an American woman on a Washington street. In 1986, it killed a Washington youth on a Santiago street. Relations between Pinochet and Reagan continue "in a pleasant way."

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