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President Ford and Secretary of State Kissinger, adopting the traditional rationale for the clandestine activities of the Central Intelligence Agency, have described its actions in Chile as no more than an effort to preserve that nation's democratic institutions. But even as they painted that benign portrait, further evidence surfaced to demonstrate that the C.I.A. may have been far more involved than has previously been known in the overthrow of the democratically elected Government of Dr. Salvador Allende Gossens.

The President, defending the actions taken by his predecessor, Richard M. Nixon, said at a press conference that "in the best interest of the people of Chile" the C.I.A. had undertaken to financially support the parties and newspapers that opposed Dr. Allende. That action was justified, the President argued, because the Chilean leader, a Marxist, was threatening to suppress the opposition and end freedom of the press, thereby eliminating democracy. But Mr. Ford denied that the agency had had a hand in the overthrow of Dr. Allende by a military junta,

The Official Story Faced Contradiction

The President's interpretation was supported by Mr. Kissinger, who told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that the \$8-million authorized to be spent on covert operations in Chile was not money for subversion but insurance that Chile would not succumb to one-party rule.

Mr. Kissinger's assertion, however, was contradicted the next day in a report by Seymour M. Hersh of The New York Times, which disclosed that more than half of the money had, in fact, gone into direct subsidies for strikes aimed at toppling the Allende regime. The striking truck and taxi drivers and shopkeepers, whose protest caused wide economic disruption, were, in effect, given subsistence payments by the C.I.A.

An official quoted in the report said, "What we really were doing was supporting a civilian resistance movement against an arbitrary government." Less than half of the C.I.A. money went to the supposedly endangered politicians and antigovernment press.

In Congress, a bill was introduced in the Senate to effect closer legislative oversight of intelligence activities than now provided by a subcommittee in each house. More than 100 such bills have failed to pass in recent years, and the latest one was not given much of a chance.

Whatever the defects of the oversight system, it seems apparent that some Congressmen at least knew about the C.I.A. role in Chile before it became public. The expenditure of the \$8-million was reported to a closed Senate hearing and only later leaked out. Some Congressmen conceded they were not surprised. Representative F. Edward Hébert, a Louisiana Democrat who is a member of the House intelligence subcommittee, said, "As far as I am concerned the C.I.A. functions properly and our committee is totally informed."

Even those Congressmen unaware of the Chile activities could not have been uninformed about the C.I.A.'s prior record of clandestine actions aimed at other governments. Normally, when objections were raised, they followed C.I.A. failures. This time, the complaints follow what the Nixon and Ford Administrations have considered a success.