Postscript

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Events in Chile since the overthrow of the Popular Unity

Since the coup censorship in Chile has stifled most sources of information. Among the surviving publications, only the Jesuit Mensaje is independent and reliable. Moreover, this gap has been filled by a Kafka-esque web of misinformation. Even reports which might at first seem favourable to the left or prejudicial to the junta are sometimes concocted by the DINA (Departamento de Inteligencia Nacional), the National Intelligence Agency. In addition to tales of armed resistance, to justify new waves of detentions, it has also spread stories of repression bizarre enough to undermine all credibility on the subject. The information which follows is therefore based on established international sources, such as Le Monde, the London weekly Latin America, and United Nations publications. Chile Monitor and the declarations of the Chilean left have only been used, and that discreetly, for information on the left itself. This is understandably muted.

The Consolidation of the Junta

The junta established by the coup consists of the heads of the armed forces – the army, navy, air force and police (carabineros). Its evident leader from the outset, army General Pinochet, was soon appointed president. He rules by decree, with the help since 1975 of a ‘consultative council’. Largely nominated by Pinochet, this can only consider the junta’s proposals and has no more than advisory powers. The junta’s first measures effectively outlawed the left and the labour movement. The CUT, most trades union confederations and all left-wing political parties were banned. The other parties were suspended. The electoral rolls were officially burned. Pinochet has consistently repeated that the junta will retain power indefinitely.

Its policies have gone far beyond the reversal of the Popular Unity’s advances. The coup’s violence, despite the lack of resistance, was clearly a political project. It was designed to create the conditions to physically eliminate the left and reintroduce free enterprise to a degree unknown in Chile since the 1930s. Whilst the CIA was instrumental in this process, according to a US Senate enquiry, its explicit mentor is the University of Chicago monetarist and Nobel prize-winner, Milton Friedman. His ‘social market economy’ has meant extensive denationalization and savage cuts in public spending. Many state agencies long pre-dating the Popular Unity, CORA, INDAP and CORFO among them, have been virtually dismantled. Employment in the public sector has been cut by a third. Private foreign investment has been invited on terms so favourable that Chile has left the Andean Pact with neighbouring countries, which limits profit remissions and so on.

The returns as yet are virtually nil. Many small firms have gone to the wall, and even copper has suffered a recession. With the banning of strikes, collective bargaining and the election of trades union officials, the real basic wage has fallen by fifty per cent, according to Mensaje and other sources. The latest official figure for unemployment (the lowest of many) is nineteen per cent, compared to just over three per cent during most of the Popular Unity period. The junta apparently aspires to emulate the growth produced by the similar Brazilian ‘model’. Yet growth in Brazil (which has since declined) was based on very different conditions – the repression of the living standards of a much less organized working class, more sophisticated management, a boom in the international economy and a much larger local market. Far from growing, output in Chile has fallen steadily since the coup – by some fifteen per cent in 1975 alone, according to World Bank calculations. The only marked increase is of food exports, which simply reflects a reduction of consumption in Chile. Actual agricultural production has fallen. Output of wheat, a staple foodstuff, has been halved since the Popular Unity period, according to official figures for the 1975/6 harvest. To put it bluntly, the outside world is eating Chileans’ meals for them.

This means malnutrition of varying degrees for roughly half the population. Politically it has also meant the disenchantment with the junta of forces that were previously behind it, and typically of Christian Democrats. After the coup the official leadership of this largest single party
declared in favour of the junta, but others dissociated themselves immediately or within a short while. These divisions have inevitably widened. For two years ex-president Eduardo Frei, the State Department and figures close to the junta itself, were apparently looking to Christian Democrats for some semi-civilian regime, again on the Brazilian model. However, in the circumstances of unrelieved economic collapse and growing repression, this proved impossible. As the junta’s exclusively militarist wing under Pinochet gained the upper hand, reinforced by shifts to the right in other Latin American countries, potential leaders of any rapprochement were marginalized or eliminated. As early as 1974 the constitutionalist General Prats was assassinated in Buenos Aires. The civilian-oriented General Bonilla, Pinochet’s second-in-command, died in mysterious circumstances. Innumerable generals have been retired. Dissident Christian Democrats have been gaolied in increasing numbers, and recently even Frei has complained of attempts on his life.

The implications of this polarization are much debated on the left, especially now that Frei has come out openly against the junta, with Pinochet surviving what was temporarily a crisis for him. The US response, on the other hand, since roughly mid 1975, has been to opt clearly to back Pinochet, whilst discreetly pressing for a better image on human rights questions. However, the end of the Kissinger era may call this policy into question.

**Human rights and the repression**

These developments have reinforced the junta’s reliance on repression. The DINA, which coordinates it, is largely trained by Brazilian agents and responsible only to Pinochet, though as in Brazil it has its own links with right-wing terrorist organizations. Its brutality is now widely known. The personal experiences of many activists interviewed by us included every imaginable form of torture, mutilation and killing. As the subject has been documented elsewhere (for instance in Amnesty’s *Chile. An Amnesty International Report*, London, 1974) we chose to omit it. The most reliable estimates of the number of people killed since the coup are in the region of 30,000 – which the junta itself has once admitted – though official figures usually put it lower. (The official ‘state of internal war’, permitting summary executions after brief hearings by war tribunals, lasted a year). Similar estimates of all those detained since September 1973 put the number at 150,000 – about one in forty of the adult population (though these figures also include the frequent re-arrest of the same persons). By mid 1976 some four thousand people were still officially detained. Releases since then have been offset by a rapid rise in the number of people just ‘disappearing’. The number of such cases documented by Catholic sources is about two thousand. Refugees from Chile number over 100,000. The largest group, in Argentina, is subject to constant harassment, kidnappings and assassinations by right-wing terrorist groups in cooperation with the DINA. The latter also operates in Europe and the USA, and was almost certainly responsible for the car-bomb murder in Washington in September 1976 of ex-Popular Unity Minister Orlando Letelier.

Within Chile the liberal wing of the Church is virtually the only body which can blunt the edge of the repression. For two years an inter-denominational Peace Committee, led by the Cardinal, organized legal defence for prisoners and support for their families and those without work. However, as the Church became unavoidably outspoken at what it was witnessing, this was dissolved. Its work has continued on a denominational basis, but those involved, including priests, have themselves become victims of the repression.

In these circumstances the strongest protests have come from international sources. In the non-Communist world, almost every international body of standing, including the United Nations, The International Labour Organization, The International Commission of Jurists and Amnesty International, has condemned the torture and killing in Chile. Even the Organization of American States, at its 1976 annual meeting in Santiago, raised the issue. After Pinochet opened the proceedings with a renewed declaration of ‘ideological warfare ... in defence of Western Christian civilization’, the OAS Human Rights Commission condemned the junta’s ‘arbitrary gaolings, persecution and torture’. More importantly, the international labour movement has also been galvanized into action. As a result of its pressure, the governments of several Western countries,
including Britain, Italy and Sweden, have either cut or severely curtailed their diplomatic relations with Chile. Even the Ford administration was forced by Congress to cut direct military aid to the junta, though this means in effect that it simply passes through third countries. By 1975 a number of European governments, including Britain’s refused to renegotiate the junta’s scheduled debt repayments.

For much of the labour movement, however, this was more than a question of human rights. It was also one of civil rights and the political future of Chile.

Debates on the left and the resistance to the junta

Both spontaneously and in response to a call from the Chilean CUT in exile, trade unionists throughout the world launched boycotts against trade with Chile. (Those in Britain are documented in the Chile Solidarity Campaign’s *Chile Fights* special issue, ‘Chile and the British Labour Movement’ published in 1975.) Popular Unity leaders in exile set up a coordinating committee for their activities in Europe, which also cooperates with the MIR and dissident Christian Democrat exiles.

Whilst muted by the struggle for survival and reorganization, debates continue within the left about how best to resist the junta, and what strategies to follow. All left parties agreed immediately that spontaneous armed resistance was futile. The first steps toward an effective resistance were reorganization, propaganda, and the building of a popular movement against the policies of the Generals. This strategy would be reinforced by mobilizing world opinion to isolate them internationally. Initially the MIR, with some support from the parties close to it, laid more emphasis on early prospects of a popular insurrection. However, by 1975 many of its leaders had been killed or forced into exile, along with those of other left parties. The result is a measured rapprochement between them, after a fairly bitter period of retrospective recriminations on ‘ultra-leftism’ and ‘reformism’, encouraged by most of the left in Europe. This has now given way to a recognition, on the one hand, that tactical compromises are called for; and on the other, that the junta’s weakness is no guarantee of political openings.

These questions crystallize around the issue of how to relate to the Christian Democrats. On the one hand there are evident grounds for building the broadest possible alliance, on a democratic platform, with all sectors opposed to the junta. These now include the bulk of the Christian Democrat Party. On the other hand ‘democracy’ is hardly a reliable platform, in the light of the Popular Unity experience. and Frei showed scant concern for it until he fell out with the junta. Chile’s left has strong historical grounds for distrusting any such alliance. which led in the 1930s-40s to its marginalization and repression by the bourgeois parties which it had supported. More recently, though, it is also true that the splits in the Christian Democrats which produced the Christian Left and MAPU strongly reinforced the left, without involving compromises. The question, therefore, is whether to consider such an alliance with the party as a whole, with its dissident fractions, or with none of it – and on what terms?

The option commanding the widest support is now the second, of some relationship with dissident Christian Democrats, on terms whose general basis lies in the difference between the experiences of the 1930s and 1960s: and this is that the latter involved a winning over of much of the Christian Democrats’ base to clearly socialist objectives. For this to be possible now, however, requires some tangible advance in the position of every party. The usually clichéd ‘lessons of Chile’ will have to be seen as lessons for all, not just for ‘reformists’ or ‘ultra-leftists’. Whilst the ‘new left’ in Latin America since the Cuban revolution has failed to build a mass following for its analysis, much of it valid, the weakness of the Communist parties has been the reverse: the lack of a new analysis to make its undoubted base effective. No less important than the danger of a full-blooded bourgeois alliance is the fact that any ‘vanguardism’ without a massive popular base, and the tactical compromises entailed, affords no real prospects of power in the Latin American circumstances. Hints of this have come both of what clearly remain the ‘two sides’ of the left. The Communist and Socialist parties have recognized their lack of an answer to the problem of the military’ in the Popular Unity period. The other parties do now seem prepared to conceive of relationships, if not alliances, with new forces. However, this is one thing at the level of general declarations. It still remains to translate these advances
into practice, in the form of a concrete programme for Chile which goes some way beyond ‘anti-fascist’ positions.

Insofar as these problems are reflections of those of the international left, it may be naive to speculate on purely Chilean advances. However, it is also true that revolutions have been made by revolutionary practice, rather than debates in exile, whose significance is exaggerated by their being more conspicuous than concrete developments in Chile. That these involve few dramatic events is partly a measure of the left’s success in working for reorganization and effective propaganda, rather than rapid confrontation. Two things stand out in the consequently scant information on the opposition to the junta – a new degree of cooperation between grassroots activists of different parties like those whose stories feature here; and widespread popular resistance to current policies, despite the penalties. For instance, all the left-wing parties are regularly producing and distributing clandestine news-sheets, presumably with a new generation reliving Gregorio’s childhood experiences (chapter I) of this sort of political work. Even in gaol new bonds have been forged on the common anvil of the repression between activists with different experiences and political positions. Resistance committees also exist in many places of work and residence – and whilst the Chilean left in exile may disagree as to their merits, many of them are in fact inter-party. Rate strikes are occurring in shantytowns, stoppages in the copper mines, go-slows in the factories and ports. Wall slogans are reappearing – sometimes just ‘R’ for ‘Resistencia’.

All these of necessity involve substantial organization and awareness. They also suggest the experience and will of a new political generation committed, in some of Allende’s last words, to new and appropriate forms of struggle.

WHAT TO READ ON CHILE

A surprisingly difficult question. The coup has produced a spate of books and pamphlets, but little in English with any depth or originality. Most of them, like Helios Prieto’s *Chile: The Gorillas Are Amongst Us*, (Pluto Press. 1974) are superficial and sectarian, of the ‘told you so’ variety. The one comprehensive study in depth of the Popular Unity and its background is *Chile: the State and the Revolution* by Ian Roxborough, Philip O’Brien and Jackie Roddick (Macmillan, 1976, paperback edition). This also has a comprehensive bibliography of books and articles in French and Spanish, as well as English. Otherwise, the most readable items published since the coup are probably *Revolution and Counter-revolution in Chile*, edited by Paul Sweezy and Harry Magdoff (Monthly Review Press, 1974) and Michel Raptis’ book of the same name, sub-titled *A Dossier on Workers’ Participation in the Revolutionary Process* (Allison and Busby, 1974). The first is a collection of articles written before and after the coup. The second includes valuable documentary material on the various popular organizations such as the industrial cordons, but not enough, whilst the author’s comments, like most on the subject, are largely an affirmation of faith.

In these circumstances, the most vivid reading dates mainly from before the coup, though much of this is also one-sided. A prime example is Kate Clark’s *Reality and Prospects of Popular Unity* (Lawrence and Wishart, 1973), which virtually ignores the controversy over the PU’s strategy. Read together with Prieto it is a fair measure of how far Chile was a problem not just of imperialism, but of the sclerosis of the whole left, and not just in Chile. On the positive side, *The Chilean Road to Socialism*, edited by Ann Zammit (Institute of Development Studies, Sussex, 1973) includes discussions which remain live, however dated, and also the Popular Unity programme. Regis Debray’s *Conversations with Allende* (New Left Books, 1971) is lively, despite Debray’s arrogant moments. Allende’s speeches are also vivid, seen in their context and with hindsight – *Chile’s Road to Socialism*, Salvador Allende, ed. Juan Garces (Penguin, 1973). Sadly, though, the best books – those which argue issues openly, or