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Source: *Science & Society*, Vol. 39, No. 1, Latin America: Aspects of Labor History (Spring, 1975), pp. 3-25

Published by: Guilford Press

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40401828>

Accessed: 28-11-2016 10:14 UTC

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## CHILE: THE MAKING OF A COUP D'ETAT\*

CRISTOBAL KAY

**B**ECAUSE ALLENDE DID NOT RECEIVE an absolute majority in the 1970 presidential elections and because of the Popular Unity (PU) program, the question arose as to whether the Opposition parties and the armed forces would ratify his election. A group of extreme right-wingers associated with the National Party attempted to force the military to intervene by assassinating the Commander-in-Chief of the Army, General René Schneider. Schneider had been the focus of right-wing criticism because of his forthright constitutional position. Since Allende had received only a plurality, it was up to Congress to choose as President one of the two leading candidates. Traditionally the candidate who received the greatest number of votes was chosen.

The National Party, which supported Alessandri, the candidate with the second greatest number of votes, attempted to block Allende's election by proposing a political deal to the Christian Democratic (CD) party. In this deal the CD party would vote for Alessandri in Congress. Alessandri would promptly resign and new elections would be called in which the National Party would support Frei, thereby securing him the Presidency. Schneider's assassination and Tomic's opposition to such a deal prompted the CD party to vote for Allende in Congress, but not before securing a package of "constitutional guarantees" from the PU. By committing itself to these constitutional guarantees, the PU pledged, among other things, not to interfere with the professional character of the armed forces and to respect the Chilean constitution.

Allende's dedication to the *via chilena* meant that the PU had to gain an electoral majority of over two-thirds in order to control Congress and then modify the Constitution. For this electoral strat-

\* This analysis was written in March, 1974.

egy to succeed the PU had to win over most of the middle classes as well as securing the peasant and working class vote.

As soon as Allende took office he introduced an economic policy designed to reactivate the economy. His initial success in achieving substantial economic growth, coupled with a significant redistribution of income, increased the PU's political support; the government coalition gained over 50 per cent in the municipal elections of April 1971. Allende swiftly introduced a nationalization program involving the major banks, the iron and coal mines, the copper mines and the latifundia. Most of these reforms were implemented during Allende's first year, when the Opposition was still in disarray and divided. However, as the Allende government expropriated industrial and commercial enterprises so as to form the social and mixed property areas, the Opposition became increasingly united and militant.

By early 1972 the reserves of productive capacity, stocks and foreign exchange which were used to achieve the spectacular economic expansion of 1971 were depleted, and a period of stagnation and rising inflation set in. The lack of investment by the capitalists, the U.S. blockade of foreign loans to Chile, and the wide-scale reforms which disrupted normal production were responsible for the economic crisis. Black marketing developed, forcing the government to impose administrative controls over the distribution of certain foodstuffs. These controls evoked sharp resistance from the Opposition parties, which viewed them as the first step towards rationing.

However significant these developments were, it was above all the growing organization, the class consciousness and the militancy of the working class that united the Opposition political parties, and spurred them to seek Allende's downfall.

#### *The New Character of the Workers' Class Struggle under the PU Government*

With the advent of the PU government, the workers and peasants saw for the first time in history an opportunity not only to press their traditional economic demands, but to develop new class organizations looking towards the final seizure of power. How did

this qualitative change in the nature of the working class struggle come about?

During the first year of the PU government the class struggle was concentrated in the countryside. Thousands of peasants took direct action and seized hundreds of rural properties. Not willing to wait for the government to fulfill its electoral promises, they seized the landed estates by themselves. The government was against the forceful seizure of landed estates and tried to persuade the peasants through dialogue and education to have confidence that the government would in time expropriate all latifundia and hand the lands over to them. The government feared that the seizures might exceed the PU program and endanger the policy of not antagonizing the petty bourgeoisie.

Since the government was unwilling to use repression against the "illegal" occupiers of farms, it responded by dramatically speeding up its own expropriation process. Within two years no latifundia remained in Chile. As a result of this policy the PU greatly increased its following among the rural laborers, as the March parliamentary elections of 1973 showed. Over half of the seizures occurred on farms smaller than 80 hectares of good quality land. These farms belonged to the medium and small bourgeoisie, a social sector which the PU did not wish to alienate. However, peasant pressure led the government to change its policy and it started selectively to intervene in or expropriate those farms which the peasants had seized. Proprietors of less than 40 hectares of good quality land, or its equivalent, felt increasingly threatened by this move, reckoning that their turn would come next in the escalating expropriation process. In spite of numerous government assurances to the contrary, the medium and small landed bourgeoisie became increasingly hostile to the PU.

During the first year the industrial proletariat only sporadically seized industries or called for their expropriation. More frequently they limited themselves to wage and other economic demands. In some cases the government actually encouraged labor conflicts in those industries in which it wished to carry forward expropriation, as this was often the only legal way to take over enterprises. The government not only expected to gain control over the economy by weakening the economic base of the urban bourgeoisie; above

all, it wanted to create a working class vanguard. The government saw the workers of the social property sector (SPS) as their strongest supporters. This confidence was confirmed when the bosses' strike broke out in October 1972. The proletariat of the SPS led the way in keeping the industries and the distribution of supplies running.

During the bosses' strike the industrial proletariat developed *cordones industriales* (industrial belts). The *cordones* linked together various factories on a territorial basis, under the leadership of the factories of the SPS. The latter had more financial resources, better political leadership, and in some cases had recently carried through the fight for expropriation. They also had the experience of workers' participation and control. In the private sector, the CUT (Trade Union Council) helped to organize *comités de vigilancia* (vigilance committees), which guarded the factory against acts of sabotage, or attempts to dismantle machinery or close the factory. Many factories were taken over by workers in order to keep them running; subsequently the workers demanded their incorporation into the SPS. Although some of the factories were later returned, many were expropriated by the government because of this grass roots pressure.

The approaching March elections and the growing concern with wages and shortages of consumer goods demobilized some of the *cordones*. However, they dramatically came to life with the attempted coup d'état of June 29, 1973. Additional *cordones* were organized, chiefly in the provincial capitals, such as Valparaíso, Osorno and Concepción. Following CUT instructions, workers occupied factories as a demonstration of their willingness to defend the constitutional government of Allende. Rumors circulated that some *cordones* had received arms in preparation for a possible armed confrontation with the *putschists*.

After the June coup attempt, workers called for stronger measures (*mano dura*) to be taken against the conspirators. The CUT even put forward its own political platform to deal with the political and economic problems besetting the country.

Apart from the *cordones industriales*, another new working class organization emerged, the *comandos comunales*. These were grass roots organizations which sought to unite the industrial proletariat, the shanty town dwellers (*pobladores*), and the local peasant coun-

cils in areas surrounding the industrial belts. The MIR (a revolutionary organization outside the PU) viewed these *comandos* as independent class organizations constituting the basis of *poder popular* (popular power) and at a later stage destined to form the backbone of the popular assembly which would eventually replace Congress. In reality, however, few *comandos* existed, and those that did functioned mainly as coordinating bodies for local health services, food distribution, etc., with little power of their own.

After the October crisis, and particularly after the June events, these new grass roots organizations put forward political platforms demanding a new people's revolutionary state. The proletariat showed increasing willingness to govern the country by establishing a workers' democracy. This increasing working class militancy pushed the small and medium bourgeoisie more decisively into the Opposition's camp, making the *via chilena* of Allende and the UP no longer viable (if it ever had been).

*The Role of the Opposition Political Parties and the Gremios in the Making of the Coup*

Systematic preparations for a coup d'état to overthrow the Allende government began in mid-1972 with the Plan Septiembre and the October strike. From this date onward the two major Opposition parties—now formally linked together in the CODE (*Confederación Democrática*)—both worked, although in different ways, to bring about the downfall of the PU. The National Party was the first to adopt the *golpista* (*putsch*) strategy. The CD, on the other hand, hoped to block the PU's program and nullify its policies by the use of legal means. When the CODE failed to achieve a two-thirds majority in the March parliamentary elections, thereby ruling out the possibility of impeaching Allende, the CD also adopted a *golpista* strategy. Moreover, the CD strategy differed from that of the National Party in that the former looked toward an institutional coup. This meant that Allende might be allowed to continue as President, but the administration of the State would be in the hands of the armed forces. If this approach failed, the CD would then support a full-scale military coup—but on the understanding that elections would be held shortly afterwards and Frei could then stand as Presidential candidate.

Let us examine the actions taken by the Opposition as they sought to implement their *golpista* strategies. The Opposition carried out its offensive on various levels: the economic; the institutional; mass mobilization; and ideological. All were directed at one clearly understood aim—to prepare the way for the armed forces to intervene and put an end to the PU.

a. *The economic offensive*

The inability of the Opposition forces to provoke intervention by the armed forces in September 1972 and the growing economic difficulties of the country provided the background for the decision of the National Confederation of Truck-owners to stage a mass strike action against the government. Using a tentative government proposal to nationalize the transport system in Aysen as an excuse, the truck-owners' association declared a national strike on October 11, 1972.

The strike action escalated, and two days later the associations of shopkeepers closed down their shops. Shopkeepers made vociferous demands for increased supplies from the social property factories of the state wholesale system. Above all, they wanted the abolition of the JAPs (*Juntas de Abastecimiento y Precios*)—neighborhood supply and price control committees—which they termed “illegal” associations threatening the “legal” activities of established commerce. Later various professional associations joined. Industrialists who tried to close their shops were prevented by the firm action of the workers, as described above. Strike action was ineffective in the countryside, except for the provision of free food by landlords to the encampments of truck-owners.

Apart from what might be considered legitimate demands (such as guaranteed supplies of spare parts, greater importation of trucks, higher tariffs, etc.), the truck-owners also put forward political demands, such as the non-expropriation of the private paper monopoly and the reopening of a radio station which the government had temporarily closed for seditious broadcasting. As the strike spread and continued over a period of four weeks, the Opposition parties tried to take over the movement and give its demands an overt political character.

Although working class action held down losses, the bosses' strike

of October seriously disrupted the economy. The PU estimated a loss of over three billion escudos and three hundred million dollars. The truck-owners' strike prevented the normal flow of inputs to industries, many of which were barely running by the end of the strike. Crucial seed and fertilizer supplies for the spring sowing were delayed or halted, seriously affecting agricultural output. The second truck-owners' strike, which took place almost a year later, had an even more crippling effect on the economy.

Another major political attack on the economy came from the Congress, which systematically refused to make appropriations for the government budget, thus forcing the government to rely on deficit financing instead of taxing the rich. This had disastrous consequences by heating up the inflationary spiral.

On the international front the United States government denied crucial foreign exchange resources to the Chilean government. Not only did it block direct North American aid but it also used its influence in international banks and development corporations to stop loans from other sources. This economic blockade by the USA had serious consequences for an economy which depends to a large extent on imported raw materials, spare parts and capital goods for its normal functioning.

Because of the unstable political situation and their lack of confidence in the Allende government, entrepreneurs stopped investing even before Allende took power. In the two months between Allende's election and his taking office, many millions of dollars were transferred abroad. Industries ran down their capital equipment and stocks, fearing that the government or the workers would take them over. As shortages developed, many capitalists diverted their profits from productive investments into speculative fields. Scarce goods fetched high prices in the black market and quick profits accrued to those investing in this market. Hoarding of goods became part of the speculative game, reinforcing and creating scarcities and pushing up black market prices still further. Hoarding was almost universal in households that had high enough incomes to stock foodstuffs in their homes.

In the initial stages the UP's economic offensive directly involved only a few thousand landlords and the few hundred industrialists who were expropriated. However, when the economic battle shifted



into the market and distribution network, practically every household was involved. More dangerous still, it affected many thousands of small shopkeepers and petty traders—a social group which the government wanted to win over or neutralize. Those shopkeepers who did not join the black market were faced with a more difficult situation than under monopoly conditions. That is why so many thousands of shopkeepers joined in the October strike, closing down their shops, which by this time did not have much to sell. The government tried to control the black market by increasing prices—which soon proved to be ineffective—and by establishing JAPs, the neighborhood distribution committees. The JAPs were extremely popular in the poorer areas because they secured supplies at official prices. However, they were fiercely attacked by the bourgeoisie and a considerable number of shopkeepers who feared that they constituted the first step towards a rationing system. Shopkeepers opposed the JAPs both on political grounds and because they were afraid that the socialization process might go one step further and incorporate the whole distribution system down to the smallest shop in the neighborhood.

*b. The institutional crisis*

The Opposition, this time under CD initiative, tried to eliminate the legal loopholes which the PU was using to transform the economy and society, particularly in expropriating and intervening in private enterprises. For this purpose a proposal for constitutional reform was presented towards the end of 1971; its purpose was to limit the scope of the social property sector, transforming the socialist enterprises into capitalist cooperatives in which the workers of each factory would become the main shareholders. A year later the CD presented a second constitutional reform project. This time the target was land reform; its purpose was to limit the land reform process by preventing the construction of a socialized agriculture in the “reformed” sector, i.e., on the expropriated estates.

With these projects the CD could claim to be the champion of the middle class, protecting its interests by setting very definite limits to the expropriation process. Although the government, not wanting to antagonize the petty bourgeoisie, was willing to

accept some of the CD proposals, it could not accept the full constitutional amendments, which clearly were aimed at blocking the socialization process and reversing some of the advances already made by the government. Above all, the PU could not accept the capitalist spirit embodied in the amendments. Thus the Opposition was able to present itself as the real protector of middle class interests and the government was made to appear the enemy of the "hard working" small proprietor.

The parliamentary and political debates on these two constitutional amendments extended over a period of months and years without any compromise being reached. The struggle came to symbolize the institutional conflict between Congress and the executive. The CD argued that in order to become law these constitutional amendments needed the approval of only a half plus one of the votes in Congress (which they had). The Executive, on the other hand, argued that unlike ordinary laws, constitutional amendments needed a two-thirds majority to be approved (which the Opposition lacked). The executive referred the issue to the Constitutional Tribunal, which had been especially set up under Frei, to solve problems of constitutional interpretation. Significantly, the Constitutional Tribunal declared itself incompetent to pronounce on this issue, not daring to take sides in such a fundamental political debate.

This institutional conflict constituted the centerpiece of the dialogue between Allende and the CD party. A meeting on the issue was held in mid-1972 but ended with no positive results. Allende invited the CD leadership to a second dialogue a year later in July 1973, after the abortive coup d'état of June 29. This second dialogue took place in the midst of a critical political situation in which, as we know, sectors of the CD party were already actively engaged in preparing the coup. The dialogue was hampered by a series of conditions laid down by the CD. Senator Aylwin, as head of the CD party, not only demanded that both constitutional projects should be promulgated at once, but that the government should call in the military to apply the arms control law to disarm the "illegal" popular power. More fundamentally, Aylwin made it clear that he would seriously consider a dialogue only after Allende provided guarantees that any agreement reached would be carried out. For the CD leadership this meant the institutional incorporation

of the armed forces into Allende's Cabinet with full powers, such as the ability to nominate subordinates who could be military officers. The Communist Party quite rightly referred to this condition as a *golpe en seco* (dry *putsch*) or a *golpe institucionalizado* (institutionalized *putsch*).

Although some points of agreement were reached, the CD leadership unilaterally called off the dialogue. Allende, realizing that this was the last chance to settle the conflict without an armed confrontation, wrote the following letter to Aylwin:

I do not want to dramatize, but I have the duty to remind you of the overwhelming responsibilities which you and I have in these difficult moments in which the country is living and of the historical implications of our decisions. For this reason and for the overriding interest of Chile, we should continue the dialogue. I formally invite you to continue our conversations.

The CD leadership never replied to this letter. For the first time it became clear that the CD was not seriously interested in a dialogue but was preparing other solutions to the grave institutional crisis.

A week after the dialogue was broken off, Allende did in fact appoint a second military cabinet, incorporating the heads of each branch of the armed forces and the head of the police force. With these appointments he made a gesture to the CD party, which was not acknowledged. On the contrary, the institutional conflict was sharply intensified. The Chamber of Deputies, taking a provocative stance, declared that the government had violated the constitution and had thereby become illegal. The duplicitous game of the Opposition became clear when it warned the armed forces that their presence in Allende's cabinet compromised their professional character. The CD, after pressuring the government to appoint the armed forces into the Cabinet, was now trying to turn the armed forces against Allende by accusing them of being associated with an illegal regime. With this declaration, the Opposition went beyond the institutional limits of the conflict; it was now inviting the military to stage a coup d'état to solve the political deadlock.

Allende, still adhering to the rules of bourgeois democracy, replied the only way Congress could declare his government illegal was via a constitutional accusation, which needed a two-thirds ma-

majority to be approved. This legal argument of Allende was correct, and that is why the Opposition, knowing that they could not legally impeach the President, turned to the preparation of a coup as the only means of bringing the government down.

Little remains to be said about the institutional conflict after the seditious action by the Chamber of Deputies, except to point out that the conflict between Congress and Executive was by no means the only institutional conflict, although it was the most important. The Executive was continually challenged by those institutions which the bourgeoisie controlled, i.e., the judiciary and the Comptroller General.

### c. *Mass mobilization*

The Opposition forces responded to the increasing mass mobilization and organization of the working class by mobilizing their own social base—the upper classes and the petty bourgeoisie.

The first sign of rebellion by the middle class occurred with the tragi-comic march of the empty pots in December 1971. This demonstration was organized by well-off middle class women as a protest against food shortages and the hunger they were supposedly suffering.

Less than a year later, the bosses' strike broke out. Middle class sectors, such as truck-owners, shopkeepers, public transport owners, white collar workers and professionals, were the main protagonists of the October strike. These middle class groups were well organized in *gremios* and professional associations.<sup>1</sup> The *gremios* tried to counterpose the *poder gremial* against the *poder popular*. The October strike was not only a conflict over legitimate economic demands, but had a clear political purpose—the halting or reversing of the revolutionary process. The political rebellion of the middle classes, expressed in the *poder gremial*, started with a certain independence of the activists from their traditional political representatives. They even expressed distrust of the political parties which did not fight strongly enough for their interests but instead often en-

<sup>1</sup> *Gremios* are a cross between trade union and corporate organizations. In some cases they put forward wage or tariff demands to the state; in other cases, they put forward claims of a propertied class, such as higher prices for products or services, lower taxes, etc.

tered into political compromises to preserve party interests. Not surprisingly, it was later revealed that some of the *gremialista* leaders were sympathetic with or belonged to the fascist organization, *Patria y Libertad*.

After the October crisis, Opposition parties mobilized middle class neighborhoods against government distribution policy. The neighborhood associations (*Juntas de Vecinos*) of the *barrio alto* (the upper middle class residential area) were particularly militant in whipping up support among their local residents against the JAPs. The *Juntas de Vecinos* accused the government of trying to introduce rationing via the back door and of practicing a discriminatory distribution policy in which food was channeled exclusively to the poor. They also charged the government with hoarding, thereby creating, as well as profiting from, the black market.

The Opposition's next opportunity to mobilize their base came when the government presented an educational reform project (ENU), which threatened the ideological domination of the bourgeoisie. Basically the government's aim was to democratize the school system by eliminating some of the existing class biases and linking schools more directly with the practical problems of the country. The middle class student association, FESES, and the association of parents (*apoderados*) marched through the city center, creating disturbances. They even tried to involve the Church by arguing that ENU was perverting and Marxifying the minds of the schoolchildren. Confronted with this mass mobilization, which enjoyed the full backing of the Opposition parties, the government shelved the ENU project.

At the end of April 1973, the Christian Democrats mobilized a section of the working class against the government by supporting a strike at the El Teniente mines. The strike was called mainly by *empleados*<sup>2</sup> (less than half the labor force), who demanded extra pay on top of the general salary and wage readjustment which all workers had obtained in March, thus seeking to put themselves in a privileged position with respect to the rest of the working class. The government did not give in, upholding the egalitarian princi-

<sup>2</sup> *Empleados* in Chile include not only white collar workers but also certain sections of the working class.

ple of its wage policy and pointing to the political nature of the strike. The Opposition parties jointly organized a rally in Santiago to welcome a miners' delegation to the capital. Although the level of political consciousness of Chilean workers is high, the El Teniente action caused some confusion among the working class. Nevertheless, the El Teniente copper workers did not succeed in obtaining support from other copper mines. The strike lasted over two months and was called off only after the abortive coup d'état of June 1973.

Periodic mobilizations by the Opposition of women, youth and middle sectors, in the streets of Santiago and some provincial capitals, created disorder, skirmishes with government supporters, arrests, and led to the impeachment by Congress of the Ministers of Interior, of Works, and of Education. The united Opposition also organized a few mass rallies in Santiago against government policies, involving several hundred thousand people. The government responded with its own demonstrations, easily outnumbering its opponents' rallies in frequency and size.

A month after the abortive coup of June, the truck-owners began a second national strike, again supported by the *gremios* that had participated in the October strike. This time the strike action was coordinated with terrorist action—blowing up bridges, railway lines, oil pipelines, and attacking the homes of prominent government officials and UP leaders. Truck-owners who continued working and shopkeepers who joined JAPs were also targets of terrorist action. The terrorist acts were organized by members of *Patria y Libertad*, who had close links with the *gremios*, particularly the truck-owners. Terrorism reached its height with the assassination of Allende's navy adjutant on the balcony of his Santiago home. It is very likely that National Party youth also participated and some navy officers seemed to have helped plan acts of sabotage and to have given technical advice on explosives. The Opposition parties did not condemn the acts of terrorism, and even seemed to endorse them with their silence. They accused the government of being unable to keep law and order. Thus terrorism became an additional political weapon used by the Opposition against the government.

During this second strike the *gremios* demanded stronger action

by the Opposition parties, calling on them to denounce all the "illegalities" committed by the government. This, as we have already mentioned, the Chamber of Deputies later did. The wives of the truck-owners occupied the Congress gardens to make sure that their points were heard; they even sent a letter to the head of the Chilean Catholic Church attacking him for being pro-communist and for not supporting the struggle of their husbands.

The *gremios* were more determined than ever to fight to the end—particularly the truck-owners. Terrorism and violence was stepped up and the economy was more extensively disrupted. At first the strike appeared uncoordinated, since not all *gremios* struck at the same time, but this was deceiving. Some, like the shopkeepers, called their strike actions on and off depending on how negotiations with the government were going. It soon became apparent that the seemingly uncoordinated actions were in fact a successive wave of strikes calculated to demoralize the government and its supporters. The provinces took a more militant position than the capital, at one point even defying an order of the shopkeepers' association to return to work. This was probably due to the more favorable relationship of forces, for in many provinces the bourgeoisie was more powerful than in Santiago and not confronted by the *cordones* and the CUT. The provincial *poder gremial* also had very close links with the provincial military authorities.

During this strike the *poder gremial* took on an openly subversive character. Leaders began demanding not only the impeachment of ministers but the ousting of the President. Some *gremios* (among them a number of lawyers) declared that Allende was mentally unfit to govern the country, and the professional associations and *gremialista* wives collected signatures for Allende's resignation. A few days before the coup some leaders openly called on the armed forces to fulfill their patriotic duty. Undoubtedly the *poder gremialista* had successfully escalated the struggle, having learned their lesson from the October dress rehearsal. They had forced or convinced the traditionally democratic parties, such as the CD, to take a *golpista* position alongside the already willing National Party. *Poder gremial* was also instrumental in building bridges with the armed forces, designed to offset Allende's persuasive ability (*muñequero*), which had won him a tactical victory in October.

d. *The ideological offensive*

The ideological struggle was a powerful element in the Chilean class struggle, and one in which the Opposition clearly took the offensive. The ideological campaign of the Opposition was directed towards the middle class and the armed forces, the social sectors that had to be convinced and mobilized for a coup against Popular Unity. The Opposition cleverly used its control over the mass media to agitate the middle classes into action and to channel discussions within the armed forces. It sensationalized the economic and institutional crises the country was experiencing, and it hinted broadly at drastic solutions.

The bourgeois press blamed the economic crisis on the government, which, they said, was hoarding goods so as to sell them in the black market. The JAPs were made to appear Machiavellian devices to introduce political dictatorship through the control of people's stomachs. The economic crisis was interpreted as deliberately created by the government so that in the ensuing chaos the communist forces could seize complete power.

The government was painted as both illegal and totalitarian, restricting freedom of movement (because of the limitations on foreign exchange) and suppressing the freedom of the press. The UP was charged with compromising the professional character of the armed forces and creating a parallel army amongst the workers. The *cordones* were pictured as heavily armed and engaged in paramilitary training. Frei charged that *poder popular* was *poder armado*. This campaign helped to undermine the top levels of the military hierarchy and cleared the way for the application of the arms control law.

*The Role of the Armed Forces in the Making of the Coup*

As the 1970 elections approached, the head of the army, General Schneider, felt it necessary to make an explicit statement that the armed forces would respect the decision of the electorate and, in the case of no absolute majority, that of Congress. Since then, and particularly since his assassination, his views on the subject have been known as the "Schneider doctrine." Schneider reaffirmed the professional role of the army and its subordination to the Consti-



tution. The armed forces, he believed, should not take part in political affairs, which are the province of such institutions as Congress and the Presidency.

From the beginning, the PU government tried to win over or neutralize the armed forces by offering them a role in the national development of the country, by ensuring them material and technical resources, and by improving their standard of living. Allende made it a personal policy to cultivate good relations with the armed forces. He was frequently present at military ceremonies, and made numerous speeches acclaiming their professional and institutional character. For a time Allende was able to neutralize the *putschists* by exalting the figure of General Schneider and giving top management posts to army officers in order to incorporate them into the development process. Allende utilized many military men in their technical capacity as experts in mining, steel and atomic energy.

Allende was no doubt carried away by his initial success. Arguing against the extreme left in his first message to Congress on May 21, 1971 he stated: "Furthermore, it has been emphatically claimed that the armed forces and the Carabineros, the supporters till now of the institutional order which we shall overcome, would not agree to support the will of the people in their decision to build socialism in our country. But they do not take into account the patriotism of our armed forces and of the Carabineros, their traditional professionalism and their submission to civil authority." In this way Allende contributed to spreading the myth of the apolitical role of the army.

The first opportunity to test the professional character of the armed forces came during the October strike in 1972. Although the working class had come out strongly in support of the government, Allende relied mainly on the military to break the strike, which lasted 25 days. By appointing military men into his Cabinet, Allende showed the Opposition his willingness to guarantee the March elections. The military declared that their action was not political, that their entering the Cabinet did not mean that they supported the PU. Their allegiance was to Constitutional government, which was under subversive attack. They saw their task as collaborating with the Constitutional government in securing "social peace"; they were

thus only defending law and order under the Constitution.

The military's position was strongly attacked by the Opposition parties. The armed forces were accused of becoming accomplices in perpetuating the "illegalities" which the Allende government was committing. General Prats, Commander-in-Chief of the army, replied to these attacks, saying:

Whilst the rule of law exists, the forces of public order must respect the Constitution and not attempt to judge a priori whether the State respects or infringes it. To do so, by the power of force and by bypassing those Constitutional bodies set up to decide such controversies, would paradoxically mean throwing the Constitution out of the window.

Prats was thus upholding the "Schneider doctrine," which stated that it was not for the armed forces to say if a government was respecting the Constitution or not. Furthermore, Prats considered that the President had the right to use public force against those who "threaten public order, whether this be by seditious or subversive acts or by trying to forcefully paralyze the country."

Thus, as a foreign journalist put it, Allende was still able to "ride the tiger." He had been able to turn the "bosses' strike" to his own tactical advantage. The Opposition was confused and dismayed when it saw the armed forces apparently backing the Allende government. However, Allende had taken a dangerous political gamble; by drawing the military into politics, he was opening the door to exposing the armed forces to increasing politicalization from the right as well as the left.

As economic difficulties increased, Allende always made sure that the crisis did not directly affect the armed forces. Although the government budget showed a deficit, the military appropriation was not cut. Contracts for purchasing war equipment went ahead in spite of the mounting foreign exchange crisis. Garrisons received special food supplies and Congress approved a special wage scheme for the armed forces to protect them from inflation. Nevertheless, the economic crisis did affect the middle class officer corps. Once they stepped outside the garrison, they heard the grumbles and complaints of relatives and friends who had to obtain essentials at exorbitant prices in the black market. Durable consumer goods—the

dream of the middle class—were unobtainable on the retail market, since they were distributed to government-controlled industries and wholesalers, who channeled their merchandise to the JAPs. With the developing economic crisis, the officer class saw little chance for their sons and daughters to achieve economic and social success by entering or marrying into business.

After the March elections the increasingly militant character of the class struggle and the deteriorating economic situation must have been the subject of many private discussions and debates at the top level of the military hierarchy. Although as time went on the press carried more and more discussion of the role of the military, public consciousness did not become fully aware of the new military presence until one morning, at the end of June 1973, the Presidential Palace was surrounded by armored vehicles. Colonel Souper, in command of the attacking regiment, tried to precipitate a coup by the armed forces. However, due to the quick and decisive response of the Constitutional generals—headed by Prats and Sepúlveda—the commanders with *putschist* sympathies did not come out in support of Souper, who was soon forced to surrender. Souper had been provoked into his isolated action as a last desperate move. Two days before a plot had been uncovered by General Sepúlveda, Commander of the 2nd Division, to which the mutinous regiment belonged. It later became known (although the full facts have never been made available) that the aeronaval base of El Belloto and the navy units of Talcahuano had held meetings in which they decided to come out in support of Souper, but implementation of their decision was probably thwarted by the quick overthrow of the *putschists*. Apparently General Leigh of the Air Force, who later became Commander-in-Chief, had also expressed sympathy with Souper. When the attempt to topple Allende was put down, all the prominent leaders of *Patria y Libertad* took political refuge in foreign embassies, thus revealing their involvement.

At the time the government appeared strengthened by this unsuccessful coup, not only because of the massive spontaneous support demonstrated by the workers in the factories and in the streets, but also because the armed forces had clearly and quickly come to the support of the Constitutional government. On the evening of June 29th many *cordones* and revolutionary groups demanded the

closing of Congress (for having failed to condemn the *putschists*), and, even more important, the purging of the armed forces. But the government failed to take decisive action.

The abortive coup pointed to several lessons, and undoubtedly the *golpista* generals took note. First, in order to ensure success the three branches of the armed forces and the police force had to act in a united and coordinated fashion. The police force, because of its paramilitary strength, had to be won over, or at least neutralized. Second, those generals and commanders who had come out in support of the Allende government had to be purged. Third, mass support and legitimization of a coup would be facilitated if the Opposition political parties indicated their willingness to support the coup, and used legal institutions—such as the Judiciary and Congress—to declare the government illegal. If this were done, the armed forces could be made to appear to be fulfilling their “patriotic” duty by removing the PU government from power. Finally, it was necessary to know how much military force had to be deployed to win the battle. For this purpose it was necessary to find out to what extent *poder popular* was in fact *poder armado*, and how prepared the working classes were to fight in defense of the Allende government. As we shall show, these four preconditions for a successful coup were gradually met and action towards their achievement began immediately after the “failure” of the June coup.

Less than a week after the attempted coup units of the armed forces started applying the arms control law throughout the country. The armed forces began raiding factories belonging to the social property sector, especially those known for their workers’ control and militancy. Party headquarters of the PU parties and public offices were also raided. A massive military operation involving the combined forces of army and air force was carried out against the peasants in the coastal Mapuche region of Cautín. This Mapuche area was known for its militancy, as many seizures of latifundia had taken place there and Mapuche peasants had organized themselves in cooperative farms. Hundreds of soldiers took part in these searches and great publicity was provided by the Opposition mass media. Workers were searched for arms at gunpoint and mistreated. With these *allanamientos* (searches) the officers tested the morale of their troops and the reaction of the workers. Soldiers carried out orders

with discipline and became familiar with the setup of the factories, their locations and the possibilities for their defense. These *allanamientos* provided a dress rehearsal for the anticipated armed confrontation between workers of the social property sector and the soldiers.

Although right-wing terrorism became widespread, the *allanamientos* were never directed at lawless reactionary elements, but were limited exclusively to active government supporters. As the political nature of the searches became clear, the CUT, plus some of the PU parties, demanded the modification of the arms control law. They saw that the armed forces were abusing the law, applying it unilaterally and often without meeting all the legal requirements. The MIR, the MAPU, and later the Socialist Party, demanded its repeal.

At the beginning of August internal purges within the armed forces began. Twenty navy men, many of them under-officers of the Valparaíso and Talcahuano bases, were arrested and tortured because they had opposed meetings in which officers had expressed support for a coup. The arrested were accused of planning a mutiny by means of which they would take control of two warships. Navy commanders charged that the mutiny was directed by MIR, MAPU and Socialist Party leaders, and instructed the navy military tribunal to institute courts-martial. This purge within the navy showed the strength of the *golpistas* and the limited power of the government. It also successfully created a picture of "extremist" elements within the PU conspiring to split the armed forces by inciting the lower officers and rank and file to mutiny. The actual fact, of course, was that *putschist* officers were introducing the class war into the armed forces. However, the navy purge was a minor one. More crucial targets for the *golpistas* were the top men in the armed forces who by their Constitutional stand had blocked the coup. Above all, their attacks were aimed at the Commander-in-Chief of the Army, General Prats, and of the Navy, Admiral Montero.

The second bosses' strike and the failure of the dialogue with the CD obliged the government to call the armed forces into the ministerial Cabinet again. Allende was aware of the risks involved in incorporating the armed forces for a second time, as many political factors had changed since the preceding November. Allende

saw his new military Cabinet as the last chance for the country to avoid civil war, and he named it the Cabinet of National Security. However, this time the incorporation of the armed forces into the Cabinet did not deter the *gremios* from strike action. The government gave in to many of the truck-owners' demands but failed to secure their return to work. This obstinate and insurrectionist attitude of the *gremios* revealed that they were determined to fight until Allende was dismissed. It also showed that they must have had close contacts with the *golpistas* in the armed forces, and had obtained assurances that force would not be used against the strikers.

A week after the military Cabinet had been appointed, the Commander of the Air Force, known for his sympathies with the *golpistas* (if he was not directly involved himself), resigned from the Cabinet, arguing that the government had not given him sufficient powers as Minister of Transport to solve the truck-owners' strike. Allende then forced him to resign as Commander-in-Chief. This action almost precipitated a coup. Some air force units left their bases in support of General Ruiz, demanding that he should be reinstated. However, the *golpistas* in the Air Force, realizing from the Souper attempt that they could not stage a successful coup by themselves, decided to postpone their action. Since Ruiz's replacement, General Leigh, was known to be unsympathetic to the government and to be a possible *golpista* himself, the government gained little. The Opposition demanded that the remaining Commanders-in-Chief resign in solidarity with Ruiz. Women demonstrated in support of Ruiz and demanded the resignation of Prats.

Under mounting pressure from the Opposition press, and knowing that he had little support among the other generals, Prats resigned from his ministerial post and as head of the army. Two other generals, Sepúlveda and Pickering, who were also anti-*golpistas*, resigned with him. A few days later the navy secretly and illegally purged the Commander-in-Chief of the Navy, Montero. Thus the final obstacle to the coup had been removed. The economy was partially paralyzed, the *gremios* were in a state of insurrection, terrorism was widespread, the arms control law had provided the dress rehearsal for combating resistance, and the Allendista generals had fallen.

*Conclusion: Was the Coup d'État Inevitable?*

The Chilean experience can be viewed as vindicating the theory of the "extreme" or "revolutionary" left which maintains that it is impossible to initiate a transition to socialism by working within the bourgeois institutional framework. The Chilean case can also be considered as substantiating the theory which holds that when the capitalist system is undergoing an acute economic crisis and is being challenged by proletarian power, the petty bourgeoisie and middle classes will veer towards the extreme right and look towards a corporate solution.

According to the first theory, military intervention against Allende was indicated as soon as Allende received his first plurality in the 1970 Presidential elections. However, at this time the *putschist* groups within the armed forces and the political opposition were a minority, and they became even more discredited after assassinating General Schneider. As time passed, however, the *golpista* forces were strengthened by the incorporation of the majority of the middle classes, a large section of the CD party (the largest party in Chile) and by the middle class officer corps.

Among the reasons for the growth of the *golpista* forces and thus the increasing likelihood of a coup d'état are the following: First, the determination of the PU to implement its revolutionary program. Unlike so many other governments in Latin America, the PU was determined to fulfill its electoral promises. The expropriation of the US-owned copper mines, the latifundia, and most of the industrial and commercial monopolies met with the fierce resistance of these interests. The class war had begun. However, by themselves the ruling class sectors were not strong enough to bring about the downfall of the PU government: they lacked a mass base, which later the middle class would provide. Second, the working class organizations became increasingly radicalized and began to threaten to undermine the bourgeois state apparatus. Third, growing electoral support for the PU coalition in the face of the intensifying economic crisis blocked the legal road to the impeachment of the Allende administration, and increased the possibility that the left might gain an absolute majority in the 1976 presidential elections. Fourth, the expropriation or intervention process began to affect

or threaten some sectors of the petty bourgeoisie, particularly in the countryside and in the commercial distribution system. From mid-1972 onwards, the economic crisis deepened and adversely affected the middle classes' standard of living

These factors, taken together, explain the fierce opposition of not only the big bourgeoisie, but also the majority of the middle classes who through their grass roots organizations—the *gremios*—adopted an insurrectionist attitude, calling for military intervention to overthrow the PU and repress the working class movement. The subversive character of the Opposition was heightened by the weak response of the Allende government, which was unable—and partially unwilling—to use the weight of the repressive apparatus against them. Nor was the Allende government willing to rely upon and mobilize those forces outside the State—the organized working class—to confront the counter-revolutionary forces. They feared that such action would provoke a civil war. The chain of developments from 1970 to 1973 revealed the weakness of the PU government and its lack of effective control over the State system, the economy and society.

The Chilean case indicates that the seizure of power by the revolutionary forces must *precede* and not follow the revolutionary transformation of society. It also serves as a reminder to liberals and social democrats that the so-called bourgeois “democratic” system is not so democratic as to allow a drastic, even if not revolutionary, democratization of its economy, society and polity. Chile was the most advanced bourgeois democracy in Latin America, but as soon as far-reaching democratic changes were introduced, this same democratic order turned overnight into a quasi-fascist military dictatorship.

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