

Day 11

“undecima pata” (Eleventh legs)

A thought about the disappeared people.

In South America in the 1970s, especially in Uruguay, Argentina and Chile, began to appear, as a constant theme in the world's press, the cases of “the disappeared people”. This was an institutionalised culture where all concepts related to human rights began to be systematically ignored and abused by bloody military dictatorships installed in these countries, with the help of the United States, the upper classes and the convenient silence of many supposedly respectable institutions such as the Catholic Church and the Judiciary system. The tragedy was not only on the part of those disappeared people but on the part of their relatives too. From Amnesty International's dossier on political prisoners held in secret detention camps in Chile (March 1977) we read that:

“The disappeared prisoners' is the name we give to members of our families who have been taken from our homes, in front of our eyes, or in their work places, colleges and universities, with eye-witnesses or strong proof of their detention. The people who detained them were members of the military intelligence services.

They are being held in secret and all our efforts, such as writs of habeas corpus*, affidavits of kidnapping, and letters and interviews with government officials, have been flung back in our faces with the following answer: ‘this person has never been detained’.

There are variations, such as : ‘He left the country’, ‘He has gone into hiding’, ‘He has been kidnapped by a band of extremists’, and so forth.

“ These replies can be explained by the fact that those who make the arrests are agents of the National Intelligence Agency (Dina) and that this organization has so much autonomy that it overrides the technical and legal institutions, who can only say. ‘ If the prisoners are in the hands of the Dina, we can do nothing’.

“We call on all men and women of good will to make themselves aware of this sinister development. What has happened to Edwing Van Yurick and his wife Barbara, whose detention were acknowledged to the British Embassy in Chile and who have still not been seen since July ,1974? What has happened to the architect Ida Vera whose detention in her own home was accompanied by rifle shots in November, 1974 and widely publicized by the media at the time?

What has become of Maria Ramirez and her son in-law Juan Rodrigo McLeod**, detained when they went to visit Maria Antonieta, Juan's wife, in Tres Alamos detention camp on 30 November, 1974? What has happened to Manuel Carreño, a 56-year-old shopkeeper, and his son Ivan, only 15, after their detention in front of their family on 12 August, 1974 and the many more like them?

“Our questions have always been answered in the same way: ‘Your relations have not been detained; what has happened is that their friends have faked a kidnapping and have taken off to some unknown place, possibly to Argentina’.

They stick to this story even when, as in some cases, the prisoners were ill-treated in front of their own families.

* see on this webpage > Links > “The Judge and the General” , see and hear what Chilean Judge Juan Guzman had to say about it.

** Among the Chileans disappeared there are at least two people whose ancestors are from here in Scotland. Juan is one of those N. Lamont and M. Thatcher were great defender of the fascist dictator in this country at the time of his detention in London in 1998.

Because of all of this, we, the relatives of the disappeared prisoners in Chile, mothers, wives, children, brothers and sisters, call on world public opinion, on groups workers, professionals, artists and intellectuals; we call on all who are capable of thought and feeling to join our cry and take whatever measures are possible so that the Military Junta returns our relatives to us."
Santiago, Chile, June 1975.

La Comisión femenina del Comité Chileno de Solidaridad en Edinburgh

On the 4th of June, 1977, the Comisión Feminina del Comité de chilenos was created as part of Chile Solidarity Committee movement. This was a group formed by around 10 to 15 Chileans women, with the aim of providing a feminine angle to the solidarity work. This was done as a part of a national call among Chileans to provide women with their own voice in the campaign against the dictatorship.

In November of the same year, took place in Glasgow a women conference, with a big party for children and financed by the SCHDC. Activities were also programmed with a view to collecting some money for human rights activities and search for ideas to help women prisoners in Chile. Women had their own meetings every fifteen days and these were to be self financed. Their principal objective was to support all the activities of the Comité Chileno de Solidaridad and *"unity and solidarity concerned with the adaptation, education of women and the development of some abilities to produce handcrafts"*. Women had their own plan of work. From their first meeting, recorded on the 4th of June, 1977, it was stipulated that:

(My free translation)

"Considering the difficulties that women have to face, especially in the first period of their arrival and other special circumstances; the group could carry out some activities in order to simplify these problems.

- 1- Visits or invitations, on a rota basis, to the families just arrived into Edinburgh.
- 2- Visits and help in case of illness.
- 3- To teach how to go about shopping for food and get to know what is available on the market, or where to find the cheapest things.
- 4- Taking into account that the major problems that women will have to face will be their lack of knowledge of the English language, the group could call for and organise English courses, together with the committee.
- 5- Organised talks on topics of interest and cultural themes.

Part of their job was also to provide speakers to local organisations.

Edinburgh University Chile Action Group President of Chilean Women

Dear Sonia,

I am writing to you in your capacity as president of the Chilean Women. As you know, the Chile Action Group has approached different Womens' organizations to ask if they would like to invite a Chilean woman to speak at one of their meetings about the situation in Chile and what Chilean women are doing inside and outside of Chile to fight against the dictatorship.

So far, we have had a positive response from the Womens' Voice Group, to whom you personally are going to speak as you know on May 20th. We have now been asked by the Women's Group at the University to arrange for a Chilean woman or women to speak at one of their meetings, as they are very interested in Chile...

In solidarity,

Sylvia Crick (secretary)

Women looked very much towards the children's welfare. They organised recreational and cultural activities with them to maintain their sense of Chilean-ness: language, folklore, history, customs and traditions in order *"to avoid problems of maladjustment on their returning to Chile"*.

From the meeting of the 4th of June of 1977, we also learned that among the activities contemplated were to take care of those children whose mothers could not do so for reasons of work, studies, or illnesses. A rota system was suggested among the members to cover for these contingences.

Among the activities planned were: organizing birthdays, Christmas parties, trips and arranging small contests involving drawing, painting and literature. We know that the birth dates of some of the boys and girls were recorded in a book in order to arrange to celebrate their birthdays.

The women's group had a great interest in developing skills in making handicrafts in wood, copper, wool and other materials. In fact, some of these crafts were made and sold at the Miners' Gala, where the Chileans were normally invited to take part, and at the Edinburgh Festival.

In a meeting of the 18th of June, 1977, it was agreed to buy wood to make a loom to be installed in a room belonging to someone that some of the women knew.

The group had other objectives too: to improve their level of education, to do solidarity work with the disappeared, adoption of women relatives of the disappeared and political prisoners, to work hard to make known in this country the situation of women and children in Chile and to express all forms of solidarity towards disappeared women.

They made clothes, blouses and skirts for the Chilean dance group and formed a folk group. The Comisión femenina was even asked to make a dolly dressed as a Chilean to be used a prize in a local raffle organised by the Labour Party.

Cultural activities

Chileans were always preoccupied with their identity in Scotland. We were always keen to organise social and cultural gatherings not only with the intention of raising some money for a particular cause but, with the added aspect of cultivating a sort of identity awareness to show something of our culture to our friends: "the gringos".

Chileans were able to put on good cultural activities involving poetry, music, film events, and folk music and dances etc. The poetical works of Pablo Neruda and Gabriela Mistral, as well as the songs of Violeta Parra and Victor Jara, were always at the centre of any cultural activity.

The Peña become synonymous with "fiesta" among our friends. Typical Chilean dishes and drinks were also prepared by men and women for these social occasions and at the centre of this culinary activity were always "Las empanadas". A type of pastry filled with meat and mixed with onions, eggs, olives, raisin and spices. It is believed that they originated in Spain.

From one of these activities, we know that some women in Edinburgh were asked to prepare: Arroz con mayonesa, papas con mayonesa, ensalada de tomates, de repollo, ensalada rusa, albondigas, arroz caliente, pollo al jugo, pollo al coñac, carne al jugo, empanadas, pollo al horno, torta, kuchen.

From their meeting of the 27th of August 1976 we learned that the Reception Committee noted the arrival of twelve “compañeros” from the “Teatro Popular Chileno”, who were coming to the Edinburgh Festival to put on a play about repression in Chile - and for the activities of the 11th and 12th of September it was proposed to sell crafts made by the Chilean women in Edinburgh.

Madame Allende, President Allende’s widow,

Hortencia Bussi, President Allende’s widow, came several times to Scotland: Glasgow, Dundee, Stirling, and Edinburgh. She used to come to show support with the Solidarity work with Chile in this country.

I remember the visit paid by her to Edinburgh and Glasgow on the 19th and 20th of September, 1979. In Edinburgh, she was at the Regional Chambers at George IV Bridge. Here she met the late Robin Cook, MP for Edinburgh Central, the Convenor of Lothian Regional Council, John Crichton and Ron Brown, MP for Edinburgh Leith. Rebecca Kopel, Secretary of the Edinburgh Chile Solitary Campaign wrote on the 9th of September, 1979 to the News Editor of Scottish Television at The Gateway in Edinburgh to let them know about Madame Allende’s visit:

“At the press conference we expect to be able to provide the first comment from Madame Allende on the government’s recommendations arising from the visit to Latin America of the British Government envoy. There will be also an up-to-date report on the integration of Chilean refugees in Scotland and the refusal of the Chilean authorities to allow five local refugees back in Chile.”

The following was John Crichton’s report, to which Rebecca referred above, and conveyed to Madame Allende.

Report on the situation of Chilean refugees in Edinburgh **Edinburgh Chile Solidarity Campaign**

At present there are 57 Chilean refugees in Edinburgh, 16 families and 6 single people. 75% of the refugees live in Wester Hailes. The single Chileans live in a house rented from Edinvar Housing Association in Drumbrae. (I was one of the Chileans living here. My own note)

A lot of Chileans studied English at Stevenson College when they first arrived. Other courses were run by Edinburgh University and some of the Chilean women attended classes at the Women’s International Centre.

Most of the Chileans in Edinburgh were professionals or skilled workers in Chile. Some of them have taken postgraduate courses at Edinburgh and Glasgow Universities. Most of the others work as cleaners, factory workers or in hospitals. There are two bus drivers. All the Chileans want to go back to Chile but there are great problem:.

Five have applied to go back or to renew their passports so far. All these applications were made a year or more ago to the Chilean Embassy in London and there have been no written replies at all, although

one of the Chileans was told orally that the authorities have no intention to allow him back into his country.

It is quite disgraceful that the Embassy should simply disregard applications from its own citizens without even having the courage to turn them down which is obviously what they intend to do.

Following the visit to Edinburgh by Madame Allende, Rebecca left us a press release as a testimony of Madame Allende's visit. Rebecca unfortunately passed away some time ago and this is a tribute to her hard work on behalf of the Chile Solidarity Campaign in Edinburgh:

Press release

A renewed plea against the re-appointment of an ambassador to Chile – the last British ambassador was recalled in December, 1975 following the imprisonment and torture of Dr Sheila Cassidy - was made today by Madame Hortencia Bussi de Allende, widow of the last President of Chile before the military coup in Sept., 1973. Such a re-appointment, stressed Madame Allende, was highly likely following the return of a special envoy to Chile sent by the British Government.

Indications of a softer line by the British Government to the Chilean junta were strengthened when Lord Carrington, the Foreign Secretary, received his Chilean counterpart during the latter's "private visit" to London recently.

Madame Allende also appealed for the continued ban on British arms sales to Chile and expressed her thanks to the Rolls Royce workers at East Kilbride who for many years prevented the shipment of aero-engines to Chile.

Tomorrow Madame Allende will meet, amongst other community leaders in Scotland, the Archbishop of Glasgow, Thomas Winning.

During a report about the present situation of Chilean refugees in Lothian Region, it was disclosed by John Crichton, the Convenor of Lothian Regional Council, that five refugees who had applied to return to Chile had waited for more than a year for a reply from the Chilean Embassy in London.

"It is quite disgraceful that the embassy should simply disregard applications from its own citizens," added Mr Crichton, "Without even having the courage to turn them down, which is obviously what they intend to do."

Ends

Diplomatic relation with Chile

The decision of the Tory Government to re-open diplomatic relation with Chile and referred in the press release above was badly received by the Chilean Solidarity movement with Chile in Britain and, of course, in Scotland.

The Stirling and Solidarity Committee in the name of its chairperson, Rowand Sheret, and also Hugh McLung make sure in January of 1980 that Harry Ewing MP, Dennis Canavan MP and Martin O'Neill MP (worked hard with the solidarity with Chile) could write to Lord Carrington about the decision taken by his government.

Tory Government policy: the closing of the special programme for Latin-American Refugees

Also The Solidarity Committee in Stirling asked these MPs to ask Willie Whitelaw (6 Dec 1980) about the closing down of the special programme for Latin-American Refugees bound to affect the Chilean refugees that, according to Timothy Raison, 3000 were already been granted refugees status in Britain.

“It is clear that a special refugee programme is only justified if a special need exist. Such a need arose in the case of Latin-America in 1973 and the government responded accordingly. The special nature of the problem with Latin America refugees has diminished and with it the justification for the maintenance e of a Latin American Refugee programme” ...

How true it was that during the period of 1980s human Rights issues were improving in Chile.

There are many evidences to suggest that it was not the case. During the 1980's, arrests, physical violence shooting and deaths became common during the national protests which emerged and gained strength during the period*. It was thank to these demonstration that in the 80s Chilean had the opportunity to get rid of the dictatorship so dear to the Tory Party in Britain. Britain did very good business with Pinochet by selling them a variety of weaponry.

The Stirling Chile Solidarity Committee wrote on the 11th of March 1984 to Sir Geoffrey Howe about arms sales to Chile.

On the 24 of March 1984 Baroness Young replied to The SCHSC saying:

“We maintain normal relations, including trade and defence links, with Chile. But our policy continued to be to refuse an export licence for any item which, in our judgement, is likely to be used for internal repression”

In April 1984 Dennis Cannavan MP and others attended a demonstration outside the Chilean Embassy in London and handed in a petition of behalf of the Stirling Chile Solidarity and the Chile Committee for Human Rights. He also wrote to the Chilean ambassador about matters concerning the welfare of three Chileans. Francisco Orrego V. The Chilean ambassador to Britain soon wrote back to Dennis Canavan in English the following letter on the 4th of May 1984

* See on this website: MEMORIES > “See video Documentary about Carmen Quintana”. This is a video I made in Edinburgh in 1989 about Carmen Quintana, a young student burned by soldiers in a demonstration in Santiago in 1986. Over 60 percent of Carmen's body was burned. She survived the ordeal.

Embajada de Chile

Dear Mr Canavan,

Further to your letter of the 3rd April last concerning Señores Morales, Barcelli, Lopez and Moreira, I am pleased to acquaint you with the following information received from Santiago.

Señores Morales and Lopez are on trial for entering the country clandestinely, for being in possession of forged identity cards and for issuing subversive pamphlets.

Senores Moreira and Borcelli are on trail for providing weapons subsequently used in criminal acts and for taking part in subversive activities.

These cases are being dealt with by the Judiciary in strict compliance with the procedures and legislation in force in Chile. Therefore, the accused enjoy the same rights as any Chilean citizen faced with similar trial and are free to seek assistance from their respective lawyers whenever required. The laws concerned with these cases were passed by previous Chilean Governments.

I do hope that this will help to clarify matters.

Sincerely yours,

Francisco Orrego V. (Ambassador)

Of course, Professor Francisco Orrego Vicuña*, tried its best to provide Mr Canavan a civilised answer to his queries. We all know, however, that “the government” he represented in Britain, during this period, was far from being civilised: “the government” was a bloody dictatorship showing very little regard for human suffering, human rights, the law and the truth. We all know by now, the poor role played by the Judiciary during this bloody and sad period in the history of Chile. **

Madame Allende in Glasgow

On the 20th of September, 1979, Madame Allende was in Glasgow. Here she was on a platform by the river Clyde, along with the late Labour MP for Lanark, Judith Hart and other prominent Scottish politicians and trade unionists. In this political rally for Chile, I met and talked for the first time with the Figueroa twins, who were living in Edinburgh. I was interested in these teenage girls because they were good musicians and singers. But I also remember them because, the following week, after the rally in Glasgow, I was told that one of them had, unfortunately, died and, as if it were important, I wanted to know which of the two had been the unlucky one. It was Beatriz Figueroa Nicolas, whose father, mother and elderly brother had been detained and tortured - and they had only been in Scotland for a month. She, with her twin sister, had also been detained in Chile. It was a terrible blow for her family and the community of Chileans in exile in this country.

* He has an impressive curriculum, among many things he is a Ph.D. (International Law), London School of Economics and Political Science, University of London. Was a member of the editorial board of the right-wing newspaper El Mercurio (1979-1983) . El Mercurio, a pro Pinochet newspaper, played a mayor role in bringing down the elected government of Salvador Allende in 1973.

** * see on this webpage > [Links](#) > “The Judge and the General” , see and hear what Chilean Judge Juan Guzman had to say about it.

From this visit of Madame Allende, I also remember meeting a remarkable Chilean lady by the name of Anita Croveto Grey Nieto. What I remember of her is her smile, her cigarette in her mouth and her strong political commitment; as The Herald put it in an article about her death on the 27 of October, 2003:

"Anita Nieto was a wee person, not quite reaching 5ft in height, but what she lacked in stature she compensated for in personality and determination".

The following was the article written in The Herald by Rowland Sheret and Patricia Pizarro:

"Anita came to Falkirk in 1975 where she and her family had to set about building a new life. This they did and now son, daughter, grandchildren, and great-grandson are settled in the area. Anita Croveto Grey was born in Chile 1923.

Anita became the organiser of the womens' movement in Valparaiso for the Socialist Party led by President Allende. She and her husband, Ricardo Nieto Stiven, had to go into exile after General Pinochet and his military dictatorship started arresting, torturing, and murdering activists of Allende.

In 1975, Anita, Ricardo, and their son Luis came to Scotland under the refugee scheme in place at the time. Their daughter, Alejandra, and her husband, Jaime, joined them in 1976. They were provided with a house in Falkirk but spoke little English. From the start Ricardo was determined that having always worked in Chile they would work in their new country.

Ricardo and Jaime worked in the foundry in Falkirk. Anita, speaking no English, and never ever learning this new language, set about building a firm foundation for her family. She was always the force behind the family, never admitting defeat whatever the difficulties.

She would persuade the local butcher to cut meat just the way she wanted. Neighbours knew her well as always having a cheery face, and even latterly she was chatty with the nurses and apologising for not being able to make them a cup of tea. Sadly, Anita's husband, Ricardo, died and after the foundry was closed down, Jaime joined Luis in running a small business in TV and radio which the son had set up.

From the start, Chilean refugees in Falkirk and Stirling had worked closely with the Trades Councils and an active Chile Solidarity Campaign kept the issue of Chile on the political agenda of the local area.

Anita was always there and, even four years ago, when Pinochet was arrested in Britain, she was at the forefront, taking the bus to London to take part in the demonstration, and demanding he stand trial for his crimes. Anita fell ill from cancer but she battled on through the past summer to reach her 80th birthday in September, allowing her sister time to come over from Chile. She died peacefully in her home.

When much is made of asylum seekers, Anita and her family show how a generous hand held out to those in need can be rewarded in so many ways. There can be no doubt that the battling spirit of Anita has not only enriched the life of her family but also that of the community around her. She was a mother figure to many refugees in Central Scotland and an inspiration to many younger people."

Music

In any group of Chilean refugees there were always people who could play guitar and other instruments. In Glasgow as in Edinburgh there was this type of people. In Aberdeen lived for a while Ricardo Yocelevezky a member of a well known Chilean folk group “Los Curacas”. He was with famous Angel Parra in a prison camp in the north of Chile. I met him a couple of times before he left for Mexico.

In my case, apart from singing and playing guitar, I also wrote songs: Lyrics and music. Since early age I loved doing this! The following were a couple of my songs which I used to sing often in solidarity events during the 80s. Both were written in Glasgow.

Una nube Blanca (a white Cloud)

*Una nube Blanca
Tengo frente de mí
Ella me acompaña
En mi soledad gris*

*Busca al igual que yo
Recorrer la inmensidad
Libremente ella lo hará
Vagara y vagara*

*Yo en cambio no puedo hacerlo
Me ata la tierra y su sociedad
Me ata el metal del fusil armado
Que mata mi pueblo y su libertad*

*Nubes nubes nubes blancas
Que ahora son negras
Con sangre de mi pueblo.*

Mike Gonzalez, a member of the original CHSC in Glasgow, did a free translation of the song to be sung in English:

*There a small white cloud
Floating before my eyes
She goes everywhere with me
Sharing my loneliness too*

*Like me she looks for ways
To travel towards the sun
She will do it freely
She will wonder over time*

*But for me there is no road forward
I am tied to the people
Those of this world
I am tied to rifles
The bullet that kills
Robbing my people of their liberty*

*Clouds, clouds, free white clouds
Today they are black
With the blood,
Of my people.*

Son solo palabras

*Son solo palabras
Que me trae el viento
Palabras de cantos de tierra de ríos de hombres nacidos.
Me dicen mil cosas
De una tierra herida
Que no está dormida sino que despierta
y grita, libertad
Quiero ser libre
Quiero ser libre
Grita el cobre, la gente, el salitre en el Chile de hoy.
Palabras de hierro
Quisiera escuchar
Que lleguen a mi alma y rompan mi silencio
Y me hagan gritar:
Quiero ser libre
Quiero ser libre
Grita el cobre, la gente, el salitre en el Chile de hoy.*

English

They are only words (My free translation)

*They are only words
That the wind brings to me
Words to sing songs about our earth, our rivers and people being born
Words that tell me a thousand things:
Of a wounded land which is not asleep
but awake, and shouting freedom!
I want to be free!!, I want to be free!!
Is the yell of our copper, our people, our nitrate,
In today's Chile*

*Words built in iron
I would like to hear
to get them through into my soul
to obliterate my silence
I want to be free!!, I want to be free!!
Is the yell of our copper, our people, our nitrate,
In today's Chile.*

Among Chilean musicians in Edinburgh, I also remember a charango* player called Adolfo. It was he who told me for the first time what had really happened to my friends from JOC. He has seen them alive in prison and that “*the Mercurio newspaper was lying*” in relation to their death. Professor
Other musicians were: Angelica (released from a prison camp), Claudia and Daphne Figueroa. All of them were very good singers and musicians. Claudia went in the 80s to integrate the folk band called Quimantu and then another called Incantation.

As soon as I arrived in Edinburgh, I organised a musical group called The Manuel Rodriguez folk group with Zunilda and Ramiro Aróstica, my wife and Gabriel Travesani who built himself a charango in order to learn and to play it in our group.

* a “wee” Bolivian ten strings instrument originally made with the shell of the back of an armadillo. Gabriel’s was made in wood.

Our first public, but informal, performance was at Sandy Bell's Pub in Edinburgh where we met the actress and Gaelic singer Dolina MacLennan who liked our songs. Dolina, a lovely person, was used to take part in cultural activities for Chile. This well known Edinburgh pub was also the local one of the great Hamish Henderson* who used to take part in activities for Chile.

About this time Tereza, from Treviso in Italy, became our driver and generously used to take us in her car to different locations for our performances: Newcastle and Durham to be precise. Here there were very active groups of Chileans doing a great deal of solidarity work with the local English committees for Chile. Among these people, I remember the Fenix family a large family I fact.

About this time, a talented young Chilean musician called Galvarino Cerón** became to play in our event. He lived in Dundee where many Chileans refugees had been settled. Galo became a classical guitarist, a very good friend of mine, and a founder member of the acclaimed "Salsa Celtica" band. Galo's father had been a prisoner of Pinochet in the notorious torture centre called Isla Dawson, a remote, cold and windy island in Chilean Patagonia. These days (March 2009) we still play together. We have been presenting successfully, in Edinburgh, a programme with the songs of Violeta Parra and Victor Jara.

Many times Chileans have been interviewed for specialist publications

In 1989, Polygon published "Moving Worlds: 'Personal recollections' of twenty one immigrants to Edinburgh" by T. Edensor and M. Kelly. José is one of the subjects of the book in which he declared that:

'We've lost one battle but not the war'.

"Like many others, his support for the Allende government forced José Emilio to become a political refugee from General Pinochet's military regime in Chile. He, his wife and his four children found housing in Scotland with the help of Scottish miners"

José came from Argentina where life was very difficult:

"We were in a refugee hotel and the police at that time were very strong and they had a very close relationship with the Chilean police. Many Chileans disappeared or went back to Chile. That is why we had to be very careful in what we were doing and who we contacted. That is why I left. ...

We arrived in London. All the Chilean people waited in a refugee hotel for a month. We received an offer from Scotland, from the miners, because my area is a mining area. The Scottish miners were very good for solidarity with Chile. They had a house for my family and myself in Cowdenbeath.

It was a real surprise for me and a very emotional moment when the people gave me the keys of my house.- then I saw everything furnished, there was everything in the house- it was really very good...we arrived on the 23rd of May. We stayed maybe nine months but we'd started English classes at Stevenson College and we needed to travel early every morning to Edinburgh...We got a house in Broomhouse and then moved to Wester Hailes."

* See on this website > "Culture" > and Hamish Henderson

** See on this website > "Music" > "live music archives" > "Rincon Chileno" > Galvarino Ceron Carrasco.

The following is an article which appeared in the Scotsman of the 23rd of Oct, 1998 and written by the columnist Jack McLean

“Glad rags from Pinochet's Chile to primitive Sighthill”

“We went to meet the Chilean refugees off their train at Waverley Station. We expected peasants, complete with hats, ponchos, and olive skins, we who had seen the dispersed persons of war-torn Europe. Back then, refugees had caps, old clothes, old people near death. That's what lefties and Communist Party members thought we were meeting off the train at Waverly in 1973. The dispossessed. Most of us were students, to be honest-student leathers, including myself, mature students with a few dupes alongside us. But what we met were Europeans who looked such, in leather blouson jackets which must have cost half the price of a jet engine. Their suitcases were pigskin: so much for bundles of rags. They sported sunglasses of a price which would have kept a family in Wester Hailes for a week.

They all had perfect English, spoken in that pedantic way very well educated foreigners rather irritatingly possess. We had a party organised that night for the Chileans. I was in the National Union of Students (at that time a radical and very influential organisation) and Scottish organiser for Chilean Relief. The NUS, with Scottish students to the forefront, become the leading body for helping the thousands of the Chileans intelligentsia who poured into the UK..

The party that night for the Chileans was magnificent. It was held in four separate flats in Sighthill, a considerably impoverished “scheme” area of Edinburgh. Our Chilean guests, whom we had imagined coming from Aztec villages of the tenth century, found the environs primitive and kept on asking where the other bathroom was and could have been asking for the butler.

The Chileans, in short, were not only upper-class they had been rich in their own country, where the gulf between rich and poor-no matter how Marxist you were-was as wide as perhaps it had been in Britain before the First World War. It was a good party. For the next week we had to go around our pals and comrades demanding back the leather jackets and costly furs our refugee Chilean guest had deposited in the bedroom for the party.

The truth was that the dispossessed comrades of Santiago were a sight richer than the dispossessed comrades of Scotland. The Chilean people I worked with were bloody awful. There was a girl who was the assistant to the Chile-Scotland Relief association. I remember her because she was not terribly competent as a secretary but horribly able as a sexual companion.

Her boss was a doctor (of philosophy) called Emilio, who was understandably driven by the fact that his entire family had been incarcerated in Santiago's football stadium.

His father had been shot out of hand. Three months later he discovered that his mother and grandfather had been executed too. Emilio was difficult to live with. We'd given him a room for an office in the Scottish NUS offices in Dublin Street and he didn't seem to realise how important student grants, concerts in union halls, football tournaments, were.

Emilio was ungrateful, we thought. His wife had been an aide de camp to President Allende. She was killed in the assault on the Moneda Palace. He had two daughters and he has never seen them again. Few remember now that it was, of all people, the truckers, the long-distance

lorry drivers, who brought Salvador Allende's government down and gave the excuse for the Falangist General Pinochet to move in.

Britain's dockers would have done the same and indeed tried it back in the Enoch Powell days. Actually, Allende's government was hardly Marxist at all, more New Labour really. But who could fail to be moved by the last photograph of Allende, the rather dreamy but courageous president and poet, running to the last barricade in the presidential palace with a hopeless rifle in his hand?

It is 25 years on and few remember; the young people don't. The United States recognised Pinochet's coup within days. Mrs Thatcher was an admirer of this man who oversaw the murders of over 100,000 of his people. As it happens I met Emilio in Paris last year. He didn't mention his mother and father, his wife, his lost daughters. He mentioned Victor Jara, the poet and folk singer who was executed in the national stadium after having his hands chopped off publicly."

You will not play your guitar after this," said his tormentors. The quote from Jara which Emilio gave was: "Tyranny has no home: it dwells in the darkness of the heart." Let us hope General Pinochet shall soon discover that."

It is true that the people of Scotland treated us well. It is also true that the press in general were sympathetic towards us Chilean exiles and towards the atrocities taken place in Chile under the Pinochet's dictatorship. At times, however, it would appear that the same media was also quite prepared to stab you on the back by publishing nasty, racist and cruel comments which could amount to a hostile campaign. This is how I feel about Mr McLean's article which I would call, a cheap piece of journalism:

1973, upper classes, the dispossessed, They all had perfect English spoken in that pedantic way very well educated foreigners rather irritatingly possess. The NUS with Scottish students to the forefront become the leading body for helping the thousands of the Chilean intelligentsia who poured into the UK, Emilio, the Chile-Scotland Relief Association, horrible able sexual companion.

After reading Mr McLean's article, I was left with the feeling that he did not have the will to show, objectively, our case. Mr McLean badly managed to put, in my view, a piece about Chileans refugees in Edinburgh.

Mr McLean showed, however, how our community of Chileans at times was living in a hostile world and we did not realize it. Mr McLean's article did not show knowledge about Chile. It showed the type of misconception associated with ignorant people. I was not surprised here!

"our Chilean guests, whom we had imagined coming from the Aztec villages of the tenth century"

Anyone can write about our country, however, anyone wanting to write a decent piece about our country had to delve a little bit into the subject called "Chile". Mr McLean showed that he had little knowledge about our country, its People and the Chilean refugees.

Some of the facts mentioned in Mr McLean's piece were wrongs. Chileans refugees arrived in Scotland in September of 1974 in Glasgow and Edinburgh and not in 1973 as it is suggested. Of all the Chileans who came to Scotland no one was upper class refugee: working class yes!!, middle class yes!! at time stinky middle class yes!!, some of us stupid people yes!, some of us clever people yes!! but Chilean upper classes refugees definitively not!! No millionaires found in our community of Chileans refugees in Scotland either.

The great majority of Chileans refugees arriving anywhere in Britain had little English. Most did not speak the language at all! By the 60s and 70s French was very popular in education in our country. French was the language of the bourgeoisie and the intellectuals. In the case of Edinburgh, few Chileans refugees mastered the English language at the level suggested by my Mr McLean.

The suggestion that the NUS, with Scottish students to the forefront, was at the centre of the solidarity work with Chile is a travesty of the truth. The NUS definitely was not the leading body for helping Chileans in Scotland or in the UK. The NUS was part of a vast solidarity movement with Chile in Britain. I recognised, as true, that many students helped Chileans in this country. Gordon Brown, the Primer Minister (2009) was part of this group when he studied at Edinburgh University. I remember well that some students in Glasgow provided accommodation to some refugees there.

Very few Chileans coming as refugees into Scotland were part of "the intelligentsia". No many poured into the UK either. There were some who we may call them intellectuals, and went to study for their Ph.D. at UK universities with WUS bursaries.

Thousands of refugees* came to Britain? Is it not a fallacy? (Many went back to Chile).

The people, who came to Britain, by any standards, were not as many as McLean suggested in his story about us.

In letters dated the 22nd and 24th of January, 1980 and sent by Timothy Raison to: Martin O'Neill MP and Mr Dennis Canavan MP, we read the following extract:

"...Since the fall of Allende Government in Chile in 1973 almost 3,000 such refugees have arrived here...the number of outstanding applications which fall to be decided under the terms of special Latin American programme was 125 at the 31st October, 1979 and this will be finalised as soon as possible under the former guidelines"

This letter from Mr Raison came as a result of some enquires made to the above Scottish MPs by Mr H. McClung, The Secretary in 1980 of the Stirling & District Chile Solidarity Committee, concerned that the Tory Government planned the closure of the Latin America Refugee Programme.

Mr Canavan in his letter of the 1st of February of 1980 and sent to Mr McClung said, in a hand written statement, that:

"I shall continue to campaign for fairer treatment for Latin American refugees, including those from Chile."

* Under the Join Working Group Refugee Programme from 1974 until 1977, 2049 individuals arrived in Britain. Diana Kay, "Chileans in Exile", private struggles, public lives, The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1987

Many Chileans refugees in Edinburgh?

Mr John Crichton's report, already mentioned, and presented in 1979 to Madame Allende about the situation of Chilean Refugee in Edinburgh, showed that in Edinburgh there were 57 Chilean refugees: 16 families, six single people and that 75% of them lived in Wester Hailes. My understanding is that the total number of Chileans refugees living in Scotland at any given time was less 500 people. Many went back to London and to Chile.

It is interesting to mention that some of those who decided to stay in Scotland,(2009) are highly professional people doing a variety of jobs. There are Chileans doing good work in the community: I know, for example, J. Recabarren, for years doing good work with the homeless people in Edinburgh. One of her daughter is a doctor.

“The dispossessed” ones

I cannot recall that we, Chilean refugees, regarded ourselves as “the dispossessed” ones.

The political struggle in Chile during the Allende period (1970s) was about to allow, “the dispossessed ones”: the working classes, the poor living in the “poblaciones” and the shanty towns, to possess something in the society they lived: a decent place where to live, proper education, a proper job, a proper National Health Service, money to afford a good dentist - in sum, to have proper human development.

In the broader picture the “dispossessed ones” wanted the Chilean State to recover the copper mines in the hands of the American companies. In this national commitment the working and many middle classes people (who did possess in Chile good education and material things) agreed to put up a struggle, at the ballot box, to allow their dreams to come true. The United States, General Pinochet, the upper classes, put an end to this dream in the name of “freedom” and the so called Cold War.

I cannot recall that there was in Scotland an organisation called The “Chile-Scotland Relief Association” as part of the Solidarity movement with Chile. There is an entry,however, in an Edinburgh Chile Solidarity Committee financial report, year 1976, about a loan made by the committee to the “Chile Relief Fund” of £ 83.90.

The loose comment made by Mr McLean about the girl he called “*horrible able as a sexual companion*” was a nasty one. I think that what the Chilean girl did with her body was her own business and not Mr McLean's.

My recollection of the Chilean refugee in Scotland is that, among our community, there was not a single prostitute knowing so well, that these women, their families, the homosexual people suffered the Pinochet repression as well as anybody else.

The Chileans refugees' moral and political conduct in Scotland

What I know is that Chileans had, in their personal, social, cultural and political behaviour, their own individual agenda in relation to themselves, in relation to their new social standing as political refugee in Scotland and in relation to the surrounding world.

I always had my own agenda to face my condition of exile in this country. My agenda consisted of a set of moral and political standing to enable me to portray a good and honest left-wing refugee image. What image I am talking about? Salvador Allende perhaps encapsulates this image: to stand, with integrity, until the end for those values that are not in detriment of the working class people.

I as many Chileans in this country, always refused to be an easy blank for the right-wingers, the idiots and the ignorant! I have always been aware that my moral and political standards are important to avoid harming the good work being done by so many: the Chileans and the members of the Scottish - British Solidarity Campaign for Chile in Britain.

We have a good knowledge about ourselves.

We, Chileans in exiles in Scotland, knew well our strength and our weaknesses in relation to each other and our external surrounding. Based on this knowledge, we all knew that some of us were not very nice people. In fact, we all knew that among us, there were some very nasty people. I am in agreement with Mr McLean on this score.

Our own knowledge, however, allows us to say categorically that in our small community of Chileans exiles, less than a hundreds in Edinburgh at any one time, the great majority were honest and nice people who tried hard to forge good relationship with the Scott in the best manner possible.

My website is trying its best to portray in the best possible manner the Chilean Refugee community in Scotland. The “best possible manner” does not mean trying to accommodate a story about us in order to conceal wrong doing in our community. I am not interested in doing this.

The act of being a refugee

Chilean “political refugee” arriving in Scotland was the direct result of a Chilean drama with international ramification: The 1970s government, its agency like the CIA, of the United States in the persons of Richard Nixon and Henri Kissinger has a lot to do for this drama.

To become a Chilean “political refugee” in Scotland was an unnatural choice forced upon us by violent means by military men belonging to our own nationality. All of us, refugees, reacted to this cowardice of the Chilean army in the way we thought appropriate:

The girl referred to in Mr MacLean’s article decided to fuck people, other decided to be hostile to the surrounding world: let us wear leather jacket and show the gringos that we are not a bunch of Indians. (Chileans hates it, when a foreigner thinks that Chile is about Indians). These idiots tend to forget that our country’s heritage is, in much respect, Indo-American.

There were Chileans who came to Scotland as refugee along with me and decided to forget everything about their refugee status. They did it by suspending all contact with

fellow Chileans refugees and the solidarity Campaign movement. I respect their passive attitude!

There were other Chileans who could not tolerate their condition of exile and committed suicide. In Scotland we do not have this type of experiences but it happened in other countries. *Who is in a position to blame these people?*

My experience of knowing a good number of Chileans refugees in Scotland tells me that most of them were genuine political exiles, behaved decorously in this country and lived with dignity, their condition of “lefties-political exiles”. There were some Chileans in Scotland who regarded themselves as apolitical – Not political commitments at all with the repression in Chile.

Left-wingers and on top: bourgeois, snobbish and elitists?

To be a left-winger, in our community of refugee, did not mean necessarily to be Indian, poor, working class, in good Chilean language: “la última chupá del mate”.

As Mr MacLean, I too have the opportunity to observe that a good number of Chileans refugees who came to Scotland were “left-wingers–bourgeois”. Some of them were a bunch of snobbish and elitists. I had already discussed my own experiences with some of these people in my story about Chilean exiles in Scotland.

We should note that Salvador Allende was “a bourgeois” and so were some million who supported him and his socialist government. It came, therefore, as a not surprise to me to discover that many of those who came to Scotland as “left-winger political-refugee” were not at all working class or “pobres diablos” like me.

Many Chileans refugees who came to Scotland had good standard of living in their own country. I did not! And so were many other Chileans.

It was not a disappointing experience for me or other Chileans to confirm that we were a bunch of refugees separated by: political party affiliations. I and other Chileans were perhaps a little bit disappointed to see that we were separated by our social backgrounds.

We were not disappointed to see that the Chilean in exile were white, Indians and Mestizos*. Like it or not this is Chile: a mixture of people where the white element of our heritage always controlled our existence.

Were we victims?

Yes! We were victims of a very specific circumstance dealing with an oppressive regime in our country. In Scotland we found that some “Chileans-lefties” were double victimized. It was the case of Manuel Lopez**, a forestry communist engineer refugee who lived in Aberdeen and Glasgow. In this city he lived in Drumchapel. Manuel took his will and his knowledge to Nicaragua to help in the 1980s the political and economic revolution taken place in that country. Manuel wanted to help with the agrarian revolution. He was killed in Nicaragua by the US backed “Contras” in an armed attack. I remember Manuel as a gentle person married to Rosita.

* A term widely used in Latin-American to refer to people of mixed race, in this case white and Indian.

** See my webpage > “MEMORIES” > Manuel Lopez., “Click here for M. Lopez Gallery”.