

The Scotsman and the coup in Chile

Our presence in Scotland can be explained by the following story reported in The Scotsman of the 12th September, 1973 and by a string of other British newspapers.

ALLENDE SUICIDE REPORT AFTER MILITARY COUP

"Tanks blasted the presidential palace after air forces jets attacked the building a dozen times with rockets. Dr Allende, supported by members of his presidential guard and civilian police, held out for more than two hours against heavy fire... Thousands of vehicles were marching on the city from the north a few hours after sporadic resistance by armed supporters of Dr Allende had been crushed" **The Scotsman also reported the bombardment of Allende's home and his bodyguards mounting resistance here.**

"EXIT ALLENDE"

The Scotsman editorial of Wednesday 12th September.

"Just about midway during his six-year term of office, President Allende has been deposed by Chile's armed forces. In almost any other country Latin American country, without the constitution and democratic traditions of Chile (to which he paid scant attention) military intervention would have occurred much sooner. Indeed the generals first of all tried to avoid direct military action against the president by agreeing to co-operate in his government, after its effort to drive Chile too far and too fast along a rough Marxist road had produced economic chaos and the growth of violence forces on both Left and Right. Even as recently as the end of June, the military leaders intervened to stop an attempted coup by some units against the President.

The military leaders can scarcely be accused of acting precipitately, although they have prevented Dr Allende from revealing his latest plan - perhaps including a plebiscite to decide on his continuance in office. It was rather late in the day for Dr Allende to present himself as the reconciler of his dangerously divided nation; for he had insisted (egged on by his extremist supporters) that socialist measures should take priority over the general consensus in Chile. A Marxist President, having been (unusually, and on a minority vote) elected, has a duty to pay attention to the wishes of the electorate. Dr Allende did not, and even those who deplore the existence of the middle class, should expect it to resist the wholesale undermining of its economic position - "divide and rule" may be a sound maxim for a country's conquerors, but a policy of "rule and divide" inevitably and rightly has led to Dr Allende's removals. A coup is unfortunate, but a civil war, which was looming, would have been worse. The social divisions which were opened up by Dr Allende will take a long time to heal."

My critical reactions about the above Scotsman report

What happens when a United States' government does not like a Latin American president? They just do their best to remove him. What happens when a Latin American President works hard on behalf of the underprivileged? The bourgeoisie tries its best to destabilise him until its government is removed. The social class division in Chile was not a creation of Dr Salvador Allende. The social division always existed as a part Chilean society and it was a political design of the ruling class which allowed our country, with its vast natural resources, to privilege a few well known families and permit American multi-national companies to exploit Chilean natural resources to the advantage of their shareholders in the United States. Allende was elected in 1970 as president of Chile with an express mandate from its people: to reverse this situation. Allende was a constitutionalist by tradition who tried his best to use the constitution to

create a more democratic society. In the 1970s Chile was far from being a democratic one. Chilean history shows that the bourgeoisie always used the apparatus of the state to their advantages. Undeniably, many errors were committed in the area of the economy by the Allende 's government, however, any British historians will have evidences to suggest that this economic chaos was also the result of dirty work on the part the bourgeoisie and the US government, to which the Chilean economy was closely linked.

The growth of violence among the right-wing people resulted from their desperation in seeing that, by 1973, President Allende was gaining more and more support, despite all the difficulties. Dr Allende had been elected in 1973 with 36.3% of the electorate and by 1973 his support was close to 43.9%, which might be thought to suggest an opposition of 56.1%. However, part of this latter percentage may include people who were undecided whether to vote for the Allende's coalition UP or the opposition. Victor Jara, murdered by the Junta, wrote a famous song about these people. It was called "Ni chicha ni limoná" - roughly, neither one thing nor the other. What is sad is the undeniable fact that, in the plebiscite of 1988, 43% of Chileans voted for the Pinochet regime. That is to say, almost half the population unashamedly supported the Pinochet regime and its bloody actions.

Since The Scotsman highlighted the fact that Allende had been elected in 1970 with a minority vote, we should note that, in 1958, the right-wing candidate Jorge Alessandri won the presidential election with 31.6% against 28.95% obtained by Salvador Allende. Alessandri won by a very narrow margin of around 33.000 votes. A priest by the name of Antonio Zamorano ("el cura de Catapilco") took 41.000 votes. In 1964 Eduardo Frei Montalva, a Christian Democrat, not only beat Allende with the help of the CIA but his government received a lot of "economic aid" from the United State through the Alliance for Progress - estimated at around US\$720 million between 1961 and 1970. This was the largest amount, on a per capita basis, given to any Latin American nation*. The Allende government, on the other hand, did not receive economic aid from the US.

Most Chileans never accepted a political class which held more than three quarters of the population under economic and social submission. By the late 1960s, this was about to change because there was a strong desire among the people for a different political class, able to work hard in pursuit of justice for the underprivileged. It was inevitable that deep economic changes, to give the poor a chance, were seen as almost the equivalent of a declaration of war by the bourgeoisie and the U.S. As soon as Allende was elected President, a war against him and his government was initiated by these forces. The fist important act of violence by the bourgeoisie was the assassination, in 1970, of the Chilean Army General; Rene Schneider because he refused to cooperate in the overthrow of President Allende's elected government.

How wrong was the Scotsman to suggest that in the Chile of Allende a Civil war was about to take place. Chile of the 1970s was not the Spain of the 1930s. There was only one group of people who had the weapons to initiate a massacre in great scale in the Chile of Allende and this group was the Armed Forces who used everything in their power to kill thousands of lefties in atrocious circumstances during and after the coup. Pinochet the "saviour of Chile" ended up as an infamous dictator heavily committed to carry out the worse abuse of human rights in the history of Chile. Pinochet while in power accumulate, without the knowledge of his supporters, and in American banks, an incredible fortune termed in millions of dollars.

*(A History of Chile 1808-1994, Simon Collier, William F. Sater, Cambridge Latin American Studies, Cambridge University press, 1996,p.310)

US KNEW OF CHILEAN COUP IN ADVANCE

The Scotsman, September 13th, 1973.

".....but a US spokesman stressed that the Administration who often in the past made clear their dislike of President Salvador Allende, were not involved in the coup, either in support of or against the Chilean Government...The administration sources indicated that members of the military Junta, who seized power on Tuesday, have been in touch with official or unofficial American representatives before the coup in which Dr Allende died"

My critical comments about the above Scotsman report

We all know by now that the US was involved in the coup and we know that the new rulers of Chile were already knocking at the door of the Nixon administration to get the all-clear. Nixon and Kissinger backed Pinochet.

AFTER ALLENDE

The Scotsman editorial of Wednesday 14th September 1973

"The overthrow of Dr Allende has aroused great and perfectly understandable indignation in certain quarters, such as the Soviet Union and Cuba, where the road to, and the maintenance of, socialism did not depend upon the ballot box".

My critical comments about the above Scotsman report

The Scotsman began its editorial by using the coup, a terrible tragedy for the Chilean people, to attack the Soviet Union and Cuba. In the development of the article The Scotsman displayed a venomous desire to use the Pinochet coup to attack not only these countries but also President Allende, Che Guevara, communism, etc. and to condemn with disdain the whole Chilean proletariat for daring to elect a Marxist as President. The coup is portrayed as a consequence of Chileans daring to elect a socialist president open to the communist world of the time. What we know is that, immediately after the coup, the whole world, including Scotland, was to condemn the coup and the horror brought upon the people by the evil Junta and its chief, General Pinochet. We refugees, who managed to leave Chile in 1974, were able to see immediately the ferocity of the coup and its terrible consequences. We could also see, with a certain satisfaction, that in most western countries there was instant outrage against the Junta and their backers, the Government of United States.

In this extensive editorial the Scotsman newspaper clearly justified the coup - as it had done in its editorial of Wednesday, 12th September. As a Chilean democrat, I am left with a sour feeling. What if the coup had taken place in Scotland and democracy and freedom of the press had been abolished, as happened in our country? What if thousands of Scots would have been tortured, then murdered and then made to disappear? Two days into the coup and, in Chile, most of us knew that mass murder was already taking place. It was common knowledge that the Mapocho River in Santiago was already being used as a dumping site for corpses riddled with bullets.

It is unacceptable for a newspaper to suggest the view that a coup may be appropriate because it was used to get rid of a Marxist government. It is as if a coup were legitimate because it took place in South America. Chile was not a typical South American country, populated throughout its history by bloody right-wing dictators, supported by the United States. For the Scotsman it was legitimate to depose by force a democratically-elected president, using

the argument that Allende had, after all, been elected on a minority vote. I have already argued above that we must be careful when attempting to argue that Allende came to power in 1970 with only 36,3% of the vote (there was a high turn-out in this election). Tony Blair, in 2005, was elected as a British Prime Minister with a much smaller percentage than this, and with a low turn-out:: "JUST 22% OF THE ELECTORATE BACKED TONY BLAIR: HE WON WITH 36% OF THE VOTES CAST" *

By 1973, Allende, despite many difficulties, still continued to hold on to one-third in the congress: "Given the high rate of inflation, the food shortages, the long lines outside shops, and the rampant black market which were now part of the everyday scene, many outside observers assumed that the UP would lose heavily. A maxim of Chilean politics held that no government party did well during a period of high inflation...The UP won 44% of the vote"***

The above result was a failure for the opposition. A coup was the only way to get rid of Salvador Allende. The Scotsman, however, recognised that Allende's predecessor Eduardo Frei Montalva has:

"failed to live up to expectation with his programme of more moderate, liberal reform and his failure encouraged some Chileans to think that more drastic measures offered by Allende were required."

Eduardo Frei failed in the eyes of the Chileans proletariat because his economic policies tended to benefit the middle classes and the American multinationals exploiting our vast natural resource such as the copper mines.

My view is that the Chilean working class was never part of a grand design in Chilean politics and the great merit of Salvador Allende was to try hard to incorporate the working classes in the national life of our country. The working classes, by the desire of the high classes, had been segregated in Chilean society. More than thirty years have passed since the death of President Allende and the country's working classes are still waiting to have opportunities to develop economically as the middle classes and upper classes have done with their export business. We see that Chilean wines, produced with cheap labour, populate the shelves of British supermarkets such as Sainsbury's, who sell a Merlot, Viña Maipo Reserve, at only £2, 99 (The Guardian, May 19th, 2005)

It is very easy to govern a South American country by carrying out moderate economic policies beneficial to the bourgeoisie and the American multi-national companies, and to lead a type of government which is the beneficiary of open credits from the United States. In South America, a president was traditionally "allowed" to govern freely if they received the blessing of Uncle Sam. For the Scotsman, Salvador Allende was an incompetent president. But could the Scotsman name the competent presidents in Chilean history? As far as the Chilean working classes are concerned, there have been few competent presidents in Chilean history and Salvador Allende was one of them.

The Scotsman also wrote "it is romantic nonsense to imagine the proletariat has benefited from the Allende era". I have no doubt that the underprivileged were glad to have finally a government looking their interests. I was a proletarian so were millions of Chileans and all of us could see how in three years Allende was focusing in bringing us, the proletariat, into life.

* The independent's front page of the 17th of May, 2005.

** A History of Chile 1808-1994, Cambridge University Press, 1996

We were exited with reasons. The Allende socialist government distinguished for favouring the underprivileged and, in doing so, his government was faced with incredible hostility from the bourgeoisie and the United States. The carnage in Chile, in 17 years of dictatorship, was the result of Allende taken a firm stance on behalf of the poor and a firm attitude against the bourgeoisie, including the landowners, and the United States' multinational companies. For the Scotsman, everything seemed to be in a mess during the presidency of Allende. Yes - insofar as the economic decisions were ultimately taken by the Allende government. It is very difficult, however, to sustain the view that "the mess" in 1973 was the sole creation of Dr Allende's economic policies. The Chileans poor were able to see the hostility emanating from all fronts, including the CIA channelling money to the opposition to bring down Allende. The role played by the bourgeoisie and the United States in this "mess" was clear and comprehensive and it helped to create the misery of almost all of us Chileans. It was easy for the Edinburgh newspaper in those days to structure Chilean history using as a point of departure a biased right-wing stance.

JUNTA IN COMPLETE CONTROL OF SANTIAGO

Said a tiny article which appeared inside the Scotsman of the 15th of September, 1973.

CONDEMNATION

"The Junta which has dominated a military-dominated Cabinet have already begun another battle- to win recognition in the face of worldwide condemnation of the coup. Early success on the home front came yesterday when the Christian Democratic Party and the National Party, who led a congressional assault against Dr Allende, announced their support of the coup. Only two right-wing South American military regimes, Uruguay and Brazil, have so far recognised the new government..."

My critical comments about the above Scotsman report

By this time the newspapers began to recognise that condemnation of the coup was occurring not only in the Soviet Union or Cuba but throughout the world. Here we have a democrat, Eduardo Frei's Christian Democratic Party, supporting the atrocities of the coup instead of condemning it.

Early Scotsman accounts suggested that Chile under Allende was a nest of armed men from the right and from the left; however, in the same article quoted above, we learn that the Junta was in complete control four days after the coup. Resistance against Pinochet was almost inexistence. There were pocket of resistance throughout the country as far as I am concerned. The parliamentary Chilean left was never prepared or armed for any type of confrontation with anybody. Armed resistance throughout the country against the Junta was poor. If the Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria (MIR) represented, for some, the extra-parliamentarian forces of the left with extremist views, then we have to say that their extremism was confined to small actions using firearms. The MIR in the 1970s was not in the same league as the Tupamaros in Uruguay or the Montoneros in Argentina. Allende was one of those resisting at the presidential palace with a gun given to him as a present by Fidel Castro but, those in La Moneda, were in a losing battle against the powerful Chilean Armed Forces. The Coup of 1973 produced delight in Washington and sadness throughout the world. (Sadly is to say tot in the offices of the Scotsman) Nixon and Kissinger were behind the Chilean tragedy.

I have to say that what happened in New York and Washington on the 11th of September 2001 produced in me a natural ironic smile, together with a sincere sadness for the many innocent

people who died in that terrorist attack. Washington instigated the terrorist attack on "la Moneda" and Washington itself was the scene of a terrorist attack by Pinochet's men - the killing in 1976 of Allende's former ambassador to the U.S., Orlando Letelier, by a car bomb which also killed Letelier's American assistant, Ronni Moffit. Pinochet brought a terrorist attack to the heart of Washington and yet never was Pinochet asked by the American authorities, to appear in front of an American judge and I ask why not? Because you do not bring to trial a terrorist that is a friend.

HOW ALLENDE WAS MURDERED

The Morning Star headline of September 15th, 1973.

This headline was followed by a long article, written by Jorge Timossi (a journalist and writer born in Argentina but a Cuban citizen) about the military assault on La Moneda, the Government Palace, on the 11th of September, 1973.

'It is right on to the end. Allende is shooting with a machine-gun. This is infernal. The smoke is suffocating us. President Salvador Allende fell defending the government palace and his convictions after demanding guarantees for the Chilean Working Class in the face of the fascist military coup. "I will never leave la Moneda - I will not resign from my post and I will defend with my life the authority given to me by the people", he said on the morning the coup began.

"A group of reporters who reached La Moneda were forced by the rebels to 'clear out' at the double with their hands in the air.

At 9.15, I succeeded in calling in the palace. One of Allende advisers said: "You say that we'll die right here, that we will resist to the end."

At 9.30 communications with the rest of the world were brought to an end. Entel-Chile, the state telecommunications agency, was occupied by the army and at 9.45 the notorious ITT cut off a news agency call to Paris.

Tanks moved on the Moneda, three planes continued low flights while scattered shooting began to intensify. It grew deafening at times. At 11, the coup makers issued their ultimatum. Allende had three minutes to surrender. But in his third speech the president once again declared that he would remain in the palace. "This will be the last time I speak to you," he told the people of Chile.

Infernal

The smell of explosives, oil and burned flesh reached our office on the 11th floor. The noise was steady, concentrated and produced by all kind of weapons, from rockets and 30mm shells to the artillery of a Sherman tank plus the authentic weapons of the army. Streets were deserted. Some parked cars began to be used as parapets or else become heaps of scrap under the tank treads.

At 1:52, I received a phone call from La Moneda . It was Jaime Barrios, a presidential economic adviser, who was fighting from one of the windows in front of the building. It is right on to the end. Allende is shooting with a machine- gun. This is infernal.

The smoke is suffocating us. Augusto Olivares* is dead. "The chief sent Fernando Flores and Daniel Vergara to speak with them. He demands a written guarantee for the working class and the gains that have already been made. As soon as he gets an answer he'll decide what to do."

*Augusto Olivares was one of the best known journalists in Chile and a friend of President Allende
I myself heard the above-mentioned strident noises of the bombardment of "La Moneda" and we "Santiaguinos" were terrified by it.