

U.S. Imperialism Defeats Salvador Allende and Democracy in Chile

by Charles De Jesus and John Heitner

We usually study the American, French, Haitian, Russian and Chinese Revolutions as examples of events which transformed the world. However historically, revolutions are often unsuccessful. Sometimes revolutionaries misjudge the level of their popular backing. On other occasions such as in Chile in 1970, even when there is significant mass support, national and international opposition forces are too strong.

In 1970, the people of the South American republic of Chile elected Salvador Allende Gossens president in an event that was perceived across the Third World as a major democratic and socialist revolution. Allende was a member of the Popular Unity coalition and a Marxist pledged to support the right of unions to organize, redistribute land to landless peasants and the nationalization of foreign-owned private industry, some of which were held by American companies and banks. However, Allende's election was by a narrow plurality in a multi-party race and this left his government vulnerable.

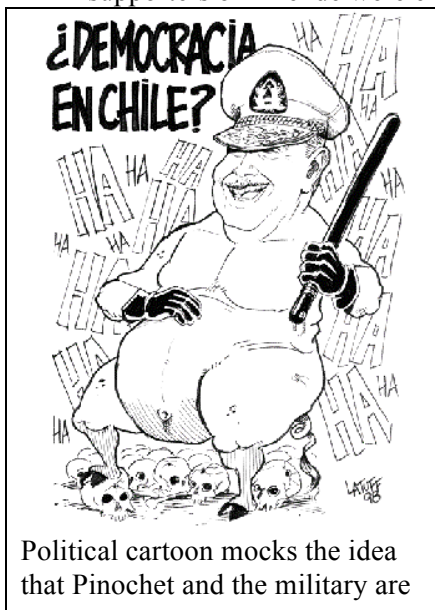
The election of Allende occurred in the middle of the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union. Chile was seen by the U.S. as part of its traditional American sphere of influence in the Western Hemisphere. This sphere of influence that had already been weakened when communists under Fidel Castro came to power in Cuba.

A study by the Central Intelligence Agency warned that Allende's election was a "definite psychological set-back to the US and a definite psychological advantage for the Marxist idea" (9/7/70). Henry Kissinger, the National Security adviser to President Nixon declared, "I don't see why we need to stand by and watch a country go communist because of the irresponsibility of its own people."

On September 11, 1973, a military coup under the leadership of Chilean General Augusto Pinochet overthrew Allende and established a military regime or *junta* in Chile. While fighting to defend his government, Allende was killed. In the weeks that followed, an estimated 3,000 supporters of Allende were either murdered or disappeared.



Salvador Allende (right) with Fidel Castro. Source: <http://canf.org>



Political cartoon mocks the idea that Pinochet and the military are

The coup was probably orchestrated and paid for by the United States with the help of U.S. corporate interests who were afraid that Allende would nationalize foreign companies. At the end of 1968, according to Department of Commerce data, U. S. corporate holdings in Chile amounted to \$964 million and mining corporations averaged 26% profit on their invested capital. While copper companies, principally Anaconda and Kennecott, accounted for 28% of U.S. corporate holdings in Chile, ITT was the largest single corporate investor. At the time, Chilean copper accounted for 21% of the world's copper reserves and was considered of major economic and military importance. To prevent nationalization of this property, the CIA worked clandestinely against Allende in the 1958, 1964 and 1970 Presidential elections and the United States gave million of dollars to assist Allende's political rivals.

General Augusto Pinochet, with support of the United States, remained President of Chile until 1989 and commander of its armed forces until 1998. In 2004, the Chilean Supreme Court revoked Pinochet's lifetime immunity from prosecution for crimes committed during the coup and while he governed Chile, creating the possibility that he will eventually stand trial for his crimes. An open trial would also document the role of the United States government

bringing democracy to Chile.
<http://www.indigenouspeople.net/>

and U.S. corporations in the overthrow of an elected government in Chile.

Salvador Allende's Last Speech to the People of Chile (September 11, 1973)

Source: <http://www.tripod.com/~Mictlantecuhtli/Allende/ultdisi.html>

Questions:

1. Why is Salvador Allende giving this speech? To whom is he speaking?
2. What is Allende's message to the people of Chile? What is Allende's message to the people of the world?
3. In your opinion, was the overthrow of an elected Marxist government by a pro-western military legitimate? Explain.

This will surely be my last opportunity to address you. The Air Force has bombed the antennas of Radio Magallanes. . . . I shall not resign!

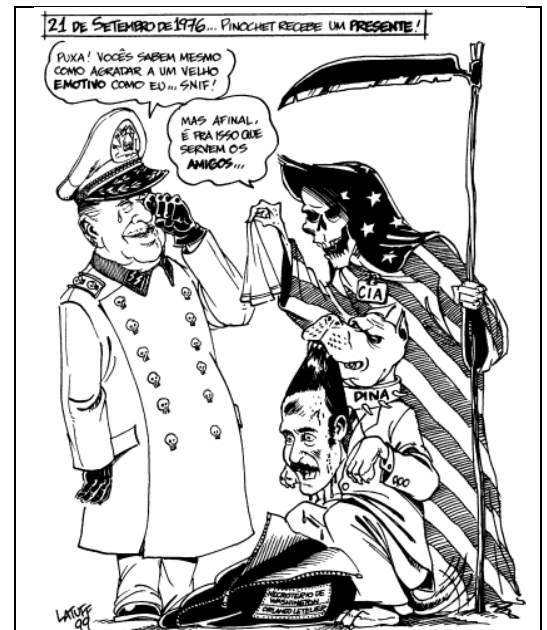
Standing at a historic point, I will repay with my life the loyalty of the people. And I say to you that I am certain that the seed we have surrendered into the worthy conscience of thousands and thousands of Chileans, will not be able to be reaped at one stroke. They have the power, they can make us their vassals, but not stop the social processes, neither by crime nor by force. History is ours and is made by the people. . . . In this final moment, the last in which I will be able to address myself to you, I want you to take advantage of the lesson: foreign capital, imperialism, united with reaction, created the climate for the Armed Forces to break their tradition, . . . victims of the same social sector that today will be expecting with an alien hand to reconquer the power to continue defending their profits and their privileges.

I address myself to you, above all to the modest woman of our land, to the campesina who believed in us, the mother who knew of our concern for the children. I address myself to the professionals of the Nation, to the patriotic professionals who continued working against the sedition overseen by their professional academies, classist academies that also defended the advantages of a capitalist society.

I address myself to the youth, to those who sang and who brought their happiness and their spirit to the fight. I address myself to the man of Chile, to the worker, to the campesino, to the intellectual, to those who will be persecuted, because in our country fascism has now been present for several hours; in the terrorist assassinations, blowing up the

bridges, cutting the railways, destroying the oil and gas pipelines, in the face of the silence of those who had the obligation to behave. . . . I address myself to the man of Chile, to the worker, to the campesino, to the intellectual, to those who will be persecuted, because in our country fascism has now been present for several hours; in the terrorist assassinations, blowing up the bridges, cutting the railways, destroying the oil and gas pipelines, in the face of the silence of those who had the obligation to behave. . . . The people ought to defend themselves, but not sacrifice themselves. The people ought not let themselves be subdued or persecuted, but neither should they humble themselves.

Workers of my Nation, I have faith in Chile and its destiny. Other men will go beyond this gray and bitter moment when treason tries to impose itself upon us. Continue to know that, much sooner than later, we will reopen the great promenades down which free men pass, to construct a better society.



La Falsa Democracia Bajo Pinochet
(Fake Democracy under Pinochet)
Source: <http://www.angelfire.com>

Questions:

1. Who are the characters in this cartoon?
2. What is the message of the cartoonist?

Long live Chile! Long live the people! Long live the workers! These are my last words and I have certainty that my sacrifice will not be in vain, I have certainty that, at the least, I will be a moral lesson to castigate felony, cowardice, and treason.