

## LATIN AMERICA

## In Chile, no one talks to strangers

By Anne Maria Mergier

SANTIAGO, CHILE

**B**EYOND LIMA THE PLANE IS ALMOST empty—20 people are continuing on to Santiago. The animated talk ceases—my first contact with Chilean silence. Glances are exchanged. Everyone wonders why the others are going.

In Santiago airport everyone asks for outside newspapers and wants to know what people abroad say about Chile. Such direct questions strike me as suspicious. I am making my apprenticeship in mistrust. The first thing you learn is that you never know to whom you are talking. Days later a Chilean of the opposition would tell me: "That happens to us all. You learn to censor yourself 24 hours a day. If you do nothing against them you feel like a coward. If you commit yourself in any way, physical and spiritual fear enter you. A fear that never leaves you in peace even if you fight."

On the surface, all seems normal. Few police, and they reply amiably to requests for directions. No soldiers. Everything correct and clean. But soon one begins to feel something false. The stores sell cheap shoes and clothes on monthly installments. Many peddlers offering garbage bags, cheap toys; few people entering the stores. So much for the purchasing power of the middle class. In the Plaza de Armas, hard to find a place on a bench. Not only older people, but many 30-35 years old, sit there immobile for hours with closed and worried expressions. No work.

In cafes and public places no one will talk to a stranger. In two weeks I have seen only five inscriptions on walls, two saying "Junta Shit," the others just "NO."

Desire to hear the Chilean people's voice becomes an obsession. After four days, partly by luck, I found some who would talk in places I can't name for security reasons. Such contact is dangerous. I can't prove I'm a journalist—maybe I'm secret police. Some contacts are made on a half-trust, half-distrust basis. Impossible to get used to the terrible reality of

human relations in Chile. "They isolate us," says B., a student. "It's their most powerful weapon."

In the outskirts, hundreds of dirt-and-dust streets, deserted and suffocated in silence. Not a sound emerges from the precarious wooden hovels. But whole families live in them. They have no water but generally electricity. With a "safe contact" I manage to enter one: prostration, silence and despair within. Unemployed like thousands of Chileans, the man barely answers my questions. There are moments and places where words become indecent. Sometimes there is only the woman, who doesn't know where her man is. Father T. of a working class parish explains: "Some of the unemployed choose to abandon the family, but most of them disappeared for political reasons, and stay in hiding for the same reasons."

In the morning many women and girls take the bus to the center, looking for work they don't find. After many turn-downs they end up as prostitutes. They swarm everywhere, and a Brazilian on vacation confides that "that's one of the charms" of Santiago; "they're very cheap and really pretty." A Frenchman at the Sheraton says the same.

Surprisingly, in lower-class areas, fewer children than I expected. My escort takes me to A.'s house. She explains that since her last child two years ago she hasn't got pregnant. Many other women made the same confession to me. "They operated on us," said one with hatred. In Chile, sterilization without the woman's agreement is an alarming fact.

While TV and press hymn the "spectacular improvement," a sector of the Church has taken sides. They are insulted in the papers and the target of constant threats—one priest showed me over 100 anonymous letters couched in almost sick violence—and denounced by other religious people as "Marxist priests" or "bad Christians." Their fortnightly bulletin *Solidaridad* publishes critical information. It is not clandestine but appears on no newsstand—it is sold in churches. Not only Catholics read it. In the Chilean silence it is considered an important source of news. It reports fully

Wide World



General Augusto Pinochet at polling place during the Jan. 4 Chilean plebiscite he staged to gain a vote of confidence.

on the struggle of the Families of the Disappeared. In December it called on workers to break the silence. The same call to action and solidarity is heard in Sunday church services. In working-class areas the churches are full, and the pastor's words are heard with deep attention—always seeking a way to relate the Gospel with Chilean reality. The people are clearly incited to act: "We must not cross our arms saying we can't do anything. We must denounce injustice and the breaches of man's fundamental rights."

This sector of the Church has installed many children's dining rooms in working class areas, serving oatmeal, pasta and powdered milk. From 60 to 80 percent of the children are undernourished. When I entered one dining room a little girl fainted beside me. Infants of two and three, completely decalcified, have to be carried in. Children with grave psychic problems are beyond counting. They too eat in silence. A mother told me: "Two years ago I helped get the dining rooms

started. My husband had work then. I never thought that one day I'd need them for my kids." This is another part of the Chilean reality: the impressive impoverishment of the middle class. Said one of the organizers: "Sometimes we have to fight against the parents' pride. They used to live decently without being rich. Only when the first child dies do they send us the others."

Those who dare fight against the terrible police-bureaucracy of Chile need steel nerves to resist the humiliations, threats of jail, blows, blackmail and lies. Señora P., after touring all the jails in the country from north to south for three years, searching for her husband, has gone hopelessly insane. We visit her at home on this hot January evening. Thin, almost without hair, prostrate, she stares at me with empty eyes. Suddenly her body shakes and she lets out a terrible cry: "Manuel!"—her husband's name. She calms herself, returns to her prostration, and half an hour later begins to scream again.... ■

## Nicaraguan priest joins the guerillas

*SINCE THE ASSASSINATION LAST JANUARY OF PEDRO JOAQUIN Chamorro, newspaper editor and conservative leader of the Union Democraia de Liberacion (UDEL), protests and general strikes have swept Nicaragua and the UDEL has established closer ties with the Frente Sandinista de Liberacion (FSLN) guerilla movement (ITT, Dec. 14, 1977 and Feb. 8).*

*Sacred Heart priest Gaspar Garcia Laviana is among those who have joined the Sandinist armed struggle. His call to arms (excerpted below), circulated widely in Nicaragua, is translated by Blase Bonpane, a professor at California State University, Northridge, and a Maryknoll priest in Central America until his expulsion from Guatemala in 1967.*

I came to Nicaragua from Spain, where I was born, to be a priest as a missionary of the Sacred Heart. I have served in this capacity for nine years. I threw myself into this apostolic work with great eagerness.

Soon I discovered that the hunger and thirst for justice of the poor and oppressed people I served as priest demanded the counsel of action rather than the counsel of words.

As an adopted Nicaraguan, I have seen the bleeding wounds of my people. I have seen the foul exploitation of farmworkers crushed under the boot of landowners diligently protected by the National Guard, that instrument of injustice and repression. I have seen how a few enrich themselves obscenely in the shadow of the Somoza dictatorship. I have been a witness to the subjugation of lower-income youth in filthy carnal traffic, thrown into prostitution by the powerful. I have seen directly the vileness, deception and thievery of the Somoza family.

They have been deaf to corruption and unmerciful repression, and they continue being deaf while my people are locked in each night in fear. My brothers and sisters suffer torture and prison for asking what is rightfully theirs: a country free and just in which robbery and murder disappear forever.

Just as the finest young people of Nicaragua are at war against oppressive tyranny, I too have determined to join them as the lowest of the soldiers of the Sandino Front. I do this because it is a just war, a war which the Holy Gospels call good and in my conscience as a Christian it is good. I do this because it repre-

sents the struggle against conditions which are hateful to the Lord, Our God. I do this because the documents of Medellin, written by the Bishops of Latin America, taught, "Revolutionary insurrection can be legitimate in the case of prolonged tyranny which gravely affects the fundamental rights of persons and endangers the common good of the country." ...

To any sincere officials or soldiers of the National Guard who through fear or necessity serve the cause of Somoza, I say that now is the time to get on the side of justice, which is the side of Our Lord. To you businessmen who have not participated in the corruption, to you decent farmers, to the technicians and professionals who reject the chaos and despotism of Somoza, I say for everyone there is a place of struggle on the side of the Sandino Front to bring dignity to our country.

To my brothers and sisters in the factories, in the shops, artisans, forgotten homeless people, those without jobs, those in the slums, the farmworkers, the lumbermen, cane cutters and migrants—to all those who have been robbed of opportunity in this land—I say it is the hour to enter the ranks of the Sandino Front. Let us unite our hands and our arms. The sound of our rifles cry justice in the mountains, in the cities and towns, and this sound is the sign of approaching redemption.

The participation of everyone in this insurrection will result in new light, and end the darkness of the Somoza dynasty.

And to my brothers and sisters who are Sandinistas in the northern front of Carlos Fonseca Armador, and in the northeastern front of Pablo Ubeda, and in the southern front of Benjamin Zeledon, and to the urban-resistance sectors in our cities, I send my firm conviction that we are going to build a day of triumph through the sacrifice of our fallen heroes. They personify the will of our people to struggle. This struggle is with revolutionary dedication and sacrifice which we make together with the national leadership of the Sandinistas: Henry Ruiz (Brother Modesto), Daniel Ortega (Brother Enrique) and Tomas Borge (Brother Pablo), who is now in the Somoza slaughterhouse.

The system of Somoza is sin. To liberate ourselves from oppression is to liberate ourselves from sin. ...

A free country or death!

—Gaspar Garcia Laviana

This letter was printed in the *Los Angeles Times*, Feb. 2, 1978.



## Special report from India

## The new Indian regime must deliver

Wide World

By Mervyn Jones

**E**VEN A SHORT VISIT TO INDIA in early 1978 is heartening. After going through Indira Gandhi's Emergency regime, which held the country in a dictatorial grip from June 1975 to March 1977, Indians have returned with zest to the practice of democracy.

Why Gandhi ordered the 1977 election is still a matter of conjecture. It can best be seen as a kind of Napoleonic plebiscite; after securing a vote of confidence, she intended to make her authoritarian rule yet more intolerant. Others say that she needed to appear as a democrat for reasons of respectability (the advent of the Carter administration was a factor) and didn't want to be upstaged by Pakistan, then holding the first election in its history.

Undoubtedly, she reckoned to win. Opposition parties were in disarray after 18 months of virtual illegality, their organizations decayed, their funds zero, and their leaders jailed throughout the Emergency. Released just in time for the campaign, they had no chance to plan a strategy. The state radio, vital in a largely illiterate country, was a government propaganda weapon. The dice were so loaded that many opponents of the regime seriously considered boycotting the election.

Instead, they joined hands hastily in the new Janata (People's) party, a fusion of four parties ranging from left to right. The single slate was an advantage, indeed a necessity. Weeks before the vote, Gandhi was deserted by one of her key ministers, Jagjivan Ram, who aligned himself with Janata. The Indian people did the rest. Over most of the country, and most emphatically in the north-central "Hindi belt" which is India's Midwest, they went for Janata in landslide style.

## India's Watergate.

The major factor, everyone agrees, was the forced sterilization drive. There's overwhelming evidence that men in towns and villages were picked up off the streets or yanked from buses, marched into tents, chloroformed, and compelled to undergo the operation.

Naturally enough, the record still embarrasses Gandhi. When I asked her about it, she said that she heard some reports of coercion while she was in power but they seemed to be rumors. She claims that members of Jan Sangh (an opposition party) infiltrated the sterilization teams and used coercive methods to discredit her government. That version, somehow, lacks credibility.

The later stages of this extraordinary woman's career can only be called tragic. She became dominated by her son, Sanjay, a cheap racketeer who enriched himself mightily during the Emergency, notably by using state money to start an auto factory that never produced a single car, and by sheer extortion. It was Sanjay, too, who bears the guilt for what are now called "the excesses"—forced sterilization, torture of political prisoners, and demolition of poor people's homes in areas projected for grandiose redevelopment.

A Commission of Inquiry, headed by a retired Chief Justice of India's Supreme Court, is now investigating the crimes and scandals. Watergate inevitably comes to mind as Sanjay's cronies—the Haldemans and Ehrlichmans of India—wriggle under the questioning of skilled counsel. For drama and for entertainment, the commission amply matches the Ervin committee. It isn't on television, but the stories are getting around on India's myriad grapevines and are building up a massive education in the dangers of arbitrary power.

## Congress party split.

Congress, the party that ruled India from the coming of independence in 1947 to



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the 1977 debacle, is today in ruins. It has split into two factions, one loyal to Gandhi and the other seeking to shrug off the evil legacy. Yeshwantrao Chavan, leader of the latter and a minister during the Emergency, is talking in a manner reminiscent of Khrushchev in 1956, pinning all possible blame on Gandhi personally. "We must say frankly that the emergency was never justifiable and Congress will never repeat such an action," he told me. Two southern states remained loyal to Congress in the 1977 poll, and State Assembly elections are due there on Feb. 25. The split Congress vote, it's expected, will lead to a Janata victory.

## Communist victories

The Janata government can afford to neglect opposition from Congress but has to negotiate seriously with India's Communists. The Communist party of India has been divided since 1961. The right-wing group, keeping the original name, gradually became a hanger-on of Congress and ended up supporting the Emergency. The Communist party (Marxist) kept better contact with workers and poor peasants, notably in the important state of West Bengal. The CPI is now deep into self-criticism and is trying to build bridges with Socialists who are represented in the Janata government. There is also some possibility—if years of bitterness can be overcome—of reuniting the Communist movement.

In state elections, held last June, the CPM won a clear majority in West Bengal and formed a government. Some work has been done in securing minimum wages in the Calcutta industrial zone and in guaranteeing the sharecroppers of the rural areas a fair share of the harvest. In a smaller north-eastern state, Tripura, the

CPM has recently scored a landslide victory; with allied groups, it holds all the Assembly seats, neither Janata nor Congress having won a single district.

The indigenous people of this state are racially non-Indian and known officially as "tribal." Half the population, however, are Bengalis who settled there over the past 50 years. The CPM won by championing the interests of the tribals, who had been despised by all other parties, and building an alliance of poor people of both races against exploiting landlords.

## A strange government.

What are the Janata government's policies? This is the wrong question, as I found when I put it to the party president, Chandra Sekhar. (He is a left-wing democrat, formerly on the progressive wing of Congress, jailed throughout the Emergency.) "The policies are fine," he said impatiently. "Mrs. Gandhi's policies were always fine too. What matters is performance."

He continued: "We're in office because of a tremendous upsurge from the rural areas. The elections showed that poor, illiterate people know how to assert themselves and judge a government. We must absolutely meet their demands—and that means that the rich must make sacrifices."

But what a strange government it is! Morarji Desai, the 82-year-old Prime Minister, belongs to the Nehru generation of Congress leaders and split away from Indira Gandhi in 1969, when his stand on the issues of the period placed him on the conservative side in relation to her. Other key ministers also come from the 1969 "Opposition Congress" group, while some were in Gandhi's government even during the Emergency and deserted her only when the election was called. Two

ministers, including Foreign Minister Vajpayee, belonged throughout their political lives to the Jan Sangh, a reactionary and Hindu-chauvinist movement. (Vajpayee himself, however, is reckoned a liberal in the Jan Sangh spectrum.) On the other extreme, three ministers are socialists. Among them is George Fernandes, the radical leader of the railroadmen's union who organized active underground resistance during the Emergency; he was caught, arrested, and would have faced a show trial but for the 1977 liberation.

## Crisis now.

Fernandes, now Minister of Industry, has launched an economic program aimed at checking the power of India's large capitalists and of the multinationals whose investment has grown steeply in recent years. Under this program, expansion in a large range of production spheres—textiles, most chemicals and drugs, paper, many specified manufactured goods—will be permitted only for small-scale enterprises located away from the big cities. The aim is to cut into unemployment, which has reached frightening proportions and is basically a question of villagers surplus to agricultural needs; also to halt the growth of the big-city conurbations with their ghastly slums and restore a healthy balance between urban and rural areas.

I found Fernandes in a cheerful mood, driving ahead with his plans and so far meeting no political resistance. He must know, however, that pressures will some time be exerted against him and that the channel for these pressures will be some of his colleagues. The question, ultimately, is whether the restored democratic system will prove resilient enough to meet the demands of which Chandra Sekhar spoke. An Indian journalist remarked to me: "The Emergency was not the crisis of democracy—it was an aberration. The crisis of democracy is now." That judgment will be worth remembering.

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