

1909-1973

SALVADOR ALLENDE:

A PERSONAL REMEMBRANCE

In 1968, an elevator operator at the Habana Libre first introduced me to Salvador Allende. I took a down elevator one morning, nodded to a shirt-sleeved passenger, and greeted the operator—whom I knew from three trips to Cuba. The operator said, “Yglesias, don’t you know the Senator?” When I shook my head, he turned to his other passenger, and introduced us with no more self-consciousness than if we were old street-corner cronies of his. Indeed, between the tenth floor and the lobby, and on our way to the exit, we had the kind of relaxed chat that made me wonder if I had been talking to Allende, who was at the time President of Chile’s Senate. Well, that’s Havana, I told myself. It makes democrats of us all.

A year later, in Santiago, I called his office in the Senate Building, determined to get past all buffers to see him. I had no problem: he got on in a second and told me to come over at four. There were a lot of ordinary citizens in the small anteroom—all without appointments but sure they would get to see him. His own office was so tiny that more than one visitor would crowd it. On the walls were framed letters and drawings from Rafael Alberti, Paul Eluard, Picasso. He was pleased with my interest in them, but talked about these men as if they were no more magical than the elevator operator at the Habana Libre.

He was about to embark once more on a presidential election campaign as the candidate of the Unidad Popular, a coalition of all the left-wing parties, and my friends in Santiago were a bit weary of this. They did not believe he could win, but knew that once Allende got underway, they would all rally. His optimism persuaded everyone. Everyone but the young people who were partisans of MIR, el Movimiento de la Izquierda Revolucionaria, a clandestine movement which had launched an urban guerrilla struggle. They scoffed at a peaceful transition to socialism. “If they win,” said one to me, “They had better be prepared for armed struggle.”

He surprised them all. His victory was one that should have been appreciated by American politicians who believe in grass-roots electioneering. Recalling previous unsuccessful campaigns, Pablo Neruda told me that year, “Salvador is indefatigable. We’d all be exhausted, unable to sleep, driving from town to town to speak at meetings. But if Salvador saw three people in a field, he would stop the car, give them a speech, and get back in and drop off to sleep without an effort.”

In 1969 the parties of the Left felt they had to define themselves in relation to the MIR. Communist leaders spoke bitterly about the MIR. “They are the spoiled darlings of the middle class,” one said to me. Not Allende. His nephew was one of its leaders, and he was proud that the secret police was unable to track him down. “If I am elected,” he said, “I expect these young people to join in the building of socialism.” During his first year as President,

they supported the work of the Unidad Popular, but by January of 1973, when I was last there, they were critical of his efforts to woo the middle classes and the armed forces. So were many others of the Left, particularly members of his own party, the Socialist Party, and of the Left Christian Democrats.

Allende himself was never attacked—possibly because he really believed that everyone could be won over. This was a deeply felt policy with him, not a political maneuver as it was with the Communists. The politically sophisticated joked about him. An unhappy Socialist said, “You’ve got to hand it to Salvador—there’s not a rowboat left in the Navy that he has not climbed aboard. And he never appears at a meeting without some general with him.” At the Gabriela Mistral Building, a cultural center established by the Unidad Popular, in a building donated by the United Nations, I heard, while waiting for a friend, applause from a second floor meeting room. I stepped in to have a look and there was Allende, addressing a conference of mothers who had organized to set up child-care centers. In his entourage sat a general, at polite attention, as Allende talked about socialism and women’s rights. The general rested his cap on his knees, and kept his hands on either side of it while everyone else applauded the President.

Allende never lost support of the workers and peasants. They grumbled, especially the more class-conscious, but they united successfully last year to defend the Unidad Popular when the first counterrevolution was launched. At one of the rallies then, one showed up with a homemade sign that became very popular. It said: “This government is shit, but it is my Government.”

In 1969, reminiscing about el Che, Allende said that the possession of which he was most proud was a copy of el Che’s *Guerrilla Warfare* inscribed by him. In it, el Che wrote that he and Allende shared the same goals and that Allende would reach them by another path. I knew that he had saved the five survivors of el Che’s Bolivian band who crossed over into Chile. He went personally to the frontier and escorted them to Cuba. “He did not leave them for a moment,” I was told, “because if he had the CIA would have pounced on them. Those were tense days, and as President of the Senate, he was liable to much criticism, but he did not falter.”

In Santiago this year, there were many South American revolutionaries escaped from the same kind of men who murdered Allende. He had created a haven for them in Chile. It is now time to create a haven for him in our hearts. The lessons of his death and the military coup are obvious: socialism has enemies who cannot be won over. But we must make room for Allende’s belief that hard work, rationality, and compassion will lead us to social justice. In our hearts he is safe from United States imperialism and the Chilean bourgeoisie.

ting himself off from the only elements in the armed forces who could have saved the people from a bloody massacre. Allende was attempting to conciliate the very people who were to put the gun to his head in a very few days.

Now Allende is dead, trapped in the Presidential Palace where he was placed by millions of Chileans searching for a way out of poverty and exploitation. Allende will always be remembered for the honest effort he made to bring about a more democratic society. His personal bravery and dedication to the cause of social liberation will forever remain a symbol to those Chileans who are emerging to fight against the military dictatorship. For them Allende is not only a symbol of a more just and humane society, but a popular leader of great personal integrity. His final refusal to accede to brute force and his willingness to die rather than surrender will inspire millions of young men and women who carry on the struggle.

How did the military takeover come to pass? During its first year and a half, the Allende Government initiated peaceful but effective change. Large landed estates were expropriated, foreign mines were nationalized, and banks were statified—a measure of social justice long awaited by the Chilean populace. A number of hastily written books and articles were churned out by impressionistic observers hailing “la via Chilena” as a vindication of the electoral path to revolutionary social change. Yet it was too early; the major test was still to come. As the workers and peasants gained in power and authority, demands and pressures increased to extend the process to industry, commerce and services. And it became clear early in 1972 that precisely those amorphous strata described by sociologists as the middle classes would not go along even if a majority of the electorate willed it. “Socialism” was barely tolerable if it affected the foreign and agrarian rich. But as workers began to occupy their factories, and to make efforts to equalize salaries and reduce status differences—as the petit-bourgeoisie saw their illusory hopes of someday becoming captains of industry or commerce smashed by the collective action of workers—they turned with a vengeance against the Government.

It was not any particular decline in income, or loss of material goods, that can adequately explain the intensity of feeling with which these petit-bourgeois sectors threw themselves into action. As a matter of fact it is likely that many of these groups have actually benefited materially from the Government’s redistributive policies. Yet the mystique of property, mobility and ambition was being profoundly violated. As one pro-Christian Democratic professional in Chile told us, “Our way of life is being threatened. What do I care that I am making more money if the *rotos* are going to have their way.” Another middle-sized factory owner exclaimed that, “We are surrounded. In everything we must deal with, there is the Government! We have no security; we will not invest.” These Chilean enthusiasts of the democratic marketplace insisted, “*Nobody* wants him!” ignoring the fact that Allende was democratically elected and was still supported by the working class. Such democrats confused their own desire to retain their privileges with those of “everybody.” From those whose security had been most fragile before, one heard a continual refrain which contains both plaintive yearning and prophetic understanding: “Chile will never be the same.”

In October 1972, the right-wing launched its first major offensive: doctors abandoned hospitals, shops were closed, truck-owners blocked the highways and mobs of middle-class students tried to take over the downtown area. This effort was thwarted as hundreds of thousands of workers occupied their factories and kept them running, set up distribution networks, and prepared for armed combat. The Right extracted some minor concessions from the Government, including military appointees to the cabinet; lost several score factories to the workers; and withdrew, hoping to win in the March 1973 elections what they could not accomplish in the streets during the October days. But in the congressional elections, the Left increased its vote substantially over the 1970 presidential elections. Moreover, the bases of support for both Left and Right were much more homogeneous: in the proletarian quarters, the Left rolled up large majorities, while the Right did the same in middle-class areas. The elections settled nothing; they were a prelude to new and more ominous confrontations.

In June 1973, an abortive right-wing military putsch was defeated by loyalist military officers. The CIA surely must have laughed at the rebels’ ineptness: their tanks stopped for stop signs and red lights on their way to seize the governmental palace; mass communication networks were overlooked; and when a tank commander requested petroleum and was refused by the gas station attendant (“There’s a gas shortage, you know.”), the putschists abandoned the tank. Nevertheless, 21 people were killed before the rebels were put down, and U.S. military advisers must have resolved to correct their “inadequacies” in the future. The well-coordinated uprising of the Chilean armed forces on September 11 was nothing if not a professional operation.

The petit-bourgeois offensive which sought to paralyze the country provoked a historic counter-offensive among the Chilean working class: *Poder Popular*—Popular Power. The very concept was antagonistic to the bureaucratic control of the Government apparatus. “The people are fighting, creating Popular Power,” became the new cry.

Factories, stores, offices and farms were occupied, owners and counter-revolutionary managers were expelled, and the workers themselves assumed the administration and defense of the means of production. As *Alerta!*, a daily wall paper of October 1972, proclaimed, “Chile is to be found producing normally from Arica to Magallanes, in the city, in the mines and in the countryside.”

The accounts of the initiative and determination with which the workers responded were varied; when the Revlon textile factory was found closed, the workers, all of them women, met, organized, persuaded their vacillating *companeras*, and single-handedly set the industry operating again. When public transportation halted, workers trudged miles on foot to assume their posts at work. Even the children of the working-class municipality of San Miguel organized to clean the streets of the *miguelitos*, the bent nails scattered by rightists to disable the workers’ vehicles.

Networks of direct distribution were established: using vehicles requisitioned from the factories, workers brought their products—dishes, shoes, sugar—straight to the neighborhoods to be sold or exchanged for foodstuffs brought

by peasants from the countryside. In the words of a Socialist in Concepcion—both a CUT leader and a leader of an industrial *cordon*—“The potential for Popular Power already exists in the consciousness of the workers, . . . but a large part of converting this into a concrete reality will depend on the vanguards.”

What began as a “defensive measure” soon took on a meaning of its own; new forms of class mobilization, organization and struggle emerged. Industrial belts (*cordones industriales*) were organized from below, linking all factories within an area to co-ordinate the workers’ resistance to a rightist-military coup. *Comandos comunales* (municipal councils) spontaneously emerged, joining factory workers, neighborhood assemblies, women’s organizations, slum settlers—all the popular forces within a geographical area—and providing a vehicle for direct action. These comandos bypassed the traditional Left leadership and the established trade union apparatus, whose capacity for instant mobilization was found wanting.

In describing the success of the cordones, one leader pointed to the fact that, “communists as well as socialists, MAPU, FTR, PR and independents worked together united in the tasks of the cordon.” The leaders of these proto-soviets were described by one Allendista as “insolent young men”—aggressively independent young militants whose class instincts distrusted the wheeling and dealing going on in the Moneda (the governmental palace). They trusted in their own power, that of their *companeros* and their workmates. When Allende called on the factory workers to march on the palace to defend the Government against the June putsch, some militants are reported to have told Allende to come to the cordones to be defended.

[AUGUST 1973—THE PRELUDE]

The cordones and comandos reached their peak in the October 1972 crisis and confrontation; and then, lacking resources and practical tasks, they began to ebb, their members attracted back to the CUT, which organized marches to defend the Government. After initially failing to register the significance of the cordones, the CUT moved to link them more directly to their organization.

The center of the struggle has been in the urban centers, which contain over 70 percent of the labor force. The peasants, while not irrelevant, were an important *auxiliary* force in the struggle between workers and bourgeoisie. The peasants provided logistical support—supplying foods and raw materials.

By August the economy had begun to deteriorate because of the intense social and political conflict. The short-

ages of essential food items had begun to adversely affect the standard of living in working-class districts—where Government and popular distribution methods failed to function with the efficiency of October 1972. The lack of raw materials had caused important industries to function at less than full capacity, and construction of desperately needed public housing halted as building supplies ran out. Bread lines in working-class sectors were commonplace, while hoarding, black-marketeering and speculation had become a way of life in the *barrios altos*, the upper-income neighborhoods. Run-away inflation rates averaging a 15 percent monthly increase during June, July and August were further dislocating and undermining the economy. Inflation, shortages, and their consequences even more exacerbated the conflict between social classes.

In great part, the deterioration of the economy was the result of the political opposition both internal and external, and not the incompetence and bungling of socialist ideologues, as reported by the U.S. press. Under the pretext of objective reporting, anti-communist journalists like Jonathan Kandell of the *Times* and Norman Gall white-washed right-wing terror, U.S. aggression, and Christian Democratic sabotage, presenting the same picture as the rightist press in Chile: leftists threatening democracy while leading the country to anarchy and chaos. Such reporting created the political atmosphere for the “tragic” but inevitable overthrow of the Government.

In the struggle for control over increasingly scarce resources in a polarized class situation, each side demanded more radical solutions. The workers in the factories insistently sought rationing, workers’ or governmental ownership of transportation and retail distribution, and a *mano dura* (hard hand) against the speculators, profiteers and opponents who were sabotaging the economy. Some cordones proposed to seize the trucks of the private owners whose main goal was to bring down the Government: the truck lockout was accompanied by hundreds of rightist anti-Government terrorist incidents, particularly by the fascist Patria y Libertad. Over 500 such attacks between mid-July and August alone were launched against bridges, railroad tracks, power facilities, oil pipe lines, stores, homes and trucks. Meanwhile, the legal opposition parties blocked all reform legislation, used the courts to free terrorists, dispatched the army to disarm factories, prevented any legislation on sanctions against speculation and blackmarketeering, passed a congressional resolution calling on the government to resign because of incompetence, launched impeachment proceedings against members of the Cabinet, and openly urged the military to take over key posts in the Government. In addition, routine sacking of the economy occurred in the private sector (disinvestment and running

Watercannon against Santiago demonstrators



SAM MILLER

Truck-owners' strike idles thousands of vehicles



WIDE WORLD

down of machinery), and bureaucratic sabotage in the public sector.

The intensifying anti-Government activity within Chile was carefully co-ordinated with U.S. policy designed to further weaken the economy. Loans and credits from public, private and international banks were cut off and shipments of essential parts for U.S.-produced machinery were inexplicably "delayed." On the direct-action front, U.S. financing of opposition activity—especially the truck owners' lockout—was evidenced by the large influx of dollars which recently stabilized for over a month the price of the dollar on the black market.

The U.S. Embassy in Santiago was well-qualified to provide assistance to those plotting against the Government. Ambassador Nathaniel Davis is a veteran with practical experience in eliminating leftists; during his ambassadorship in Guatemala, several thousand working-class and peasant militants were gunned down. Davis surrounded himself with a team of key operatives—"professionals" with long experience in the ways and methods of subversion. Their efforts were cloaked in utmost secrecy; only the results were obvious. Their credentials speak for themselves: John W. Isaminger, political section of the embassy (1942, Army Intelligence; 1951, Intelligence for the Pentagon; operations in La Paz, Guatemala and Washington); Daniel Arzao, Political Council, U.S. Embassy (1943, Army Secret Service; 1951, State Department; 1953, CIA; operations in Phnom Penh, Montevideo, Bogota and Washington); Raymond Warren, office of the First Secretary (1943, U.S. Air Force; 1954, State Department and later CIA; operations in Caracas and Bogota); Frederick Lastrash, First Secretary (1943, U.S. Marines; 1948, Naval Intelligence; 1956, State Department; operations in Calcutta, New Delhi, Amman, Cairo and Caracas); John Tipton, Second Secretary (CIA and State Department; operations in Mexico City, La Paz and Guatemala).

The first specific indication that Washington was involved in the actual preparations for the coup was found in a Reuters dispatch from Washington, apparently leaked by dissident State Department officials. According to the report, Washington knew the time and date of the coup 48 hours before it occurred. An Associated Press dispatch of Sept. 12 observed, "Ties between [the U.S. and Chilean] military establishments seemed to have flourished" over the recent period. There was a large influx of unannounced U.S. officials operating in Chile. The official State Department register listed only 89 functionaries in Chile. Yet a *New York Times* report on Sept. 12 claims there were over 1100, including "dependents."

According to some observers, the coup was probably planned and coordinated by a joint team which included U.S. military personnel and CIA operatives, headed up by U.S. Ambassador Davis, the Chilean military staff, and key political figures, including Eduardo Frei. Once the plan was consummated, Davis flew to Washington the weekend before the coup, reported on final preparations, and obtained further instructions. He then returned to Chile the day before the coup to be on the spot for its execution. The coup thus was neither solely the product of the CIA nor the result of purely Chilean forces, but a combined effort resulting from the shared interests of both the U.S. and the Chilean bourgeoisie and its military allies.

A measure of natural dislocation accompanies any transitional period involving fundamental social change: there were administrators directing industries who still lacked the full experience to do so; there was general laxness in disciplining absentee workers; and, as one U.S. technocrat commented, there was an "excess" of democracy in running enterprises. This was in some sense a necessary development. After hundreds of years of exploitation, the workers had a lot to say to each other and a lot to learn—as they were the first to admit. But what was most impressive was the way in which the workers were learning to control their destiny: over one-third of the employees in the metal-machinery sector of industry attended training schools to learn new skills; courses in accounting and budgeting (both prerequisites to efficient management) were overflowing; the national plan, including priorities on allocation of resources, was discussed intelligently and freely at workers' assemblies in the plants. The short-term costs of this "excess" democracy were perhaps more visible, but less relevant, than the long-term gain: in this direction, it seemed, lay socialism with a human face. And it was the workers we spoke to who were most aware of their own shortcomings, as well as those of the Government.

Obviously, the economy could not continue performing for long in this way. Yet the deterioration of the economy could not have been resolved in the manner proposed by the Communist Party or Allende. No efforts at increased productivity and planning had a chance to succeed while the question of political power remained undecided. Increasing productivity or controlling inflation would not have occurred as long as the material means to realize these goals were controlled in part by an opposition whose singular goal was the destruction of the Government. For example, this winter (June to August), the Communist Party made a gigantic effort to increase the areas of land to be sown and succeeded—until the truck owners' strike paralyzed the delivery of fertilizers and seeds, as well as leaving peasants with no means to deliver their products to the city. But Allende's complaint that he lacked the "constitutional" means to prevent the destruction of society was no encouragement to the Left—least of all to working-class women who stood three and four hours in line for oil and bread, when it was available. No wonder when thousands of militant proletarian women sought an audience at the Moneda, they demanded the Government confiscate the trucks removed from use by their owners—who had refused all settlement offers, except, as one typical owner put it, "one based on the departure of this Government."

By September there was a great and widening division in Chile—a polarization of class forces in which everyone was almost obligated to take sides. Not everybody on either side was clearly aware of the refinements of underlying ideologies, or all of the consequences inherent in the political position with which they were allied. In part, the lines were drawn according to class loyalties and sentiments—a mixture of social solidarity and antagonism to those who threatened to impose an alien way of life.

For a moment the working class' newly-won role as protagonist of a new society engendered a rejection of

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Women's Self-Help Movement*

**Or, Is Happiness Knowing Your Own Cervix?*

To begin with the personal—that is the first lesson of the Women's Health Movement. What are the mysteries and bogeys of our own past, the myths of our own experience? Sex education? *Intercourse is an activity mainly performed by caged hamsters.* Advice about contraception? *The first time, have him use a condom, though he'll tell you it's like taking a bath with his socks on.*

Abortion? *A horror that happens to other people —and then, mostly in potboilers or torrid movies.* The point, of course, is that all of us have bogeys of our own like these and the energy of the burgeoning Women's Health Movement derives from just that fact: its potential to speak to the needs of all women, regardless of age, race, or economic background. It is vital enough to influence many more than the white, middle-class, professional women who all along seem to have been reaping most of the benefits of Women's Liberation. Knowledge about our own bodies and control over them, thus power to live full and healthy lives, should be as accessible as the nearest speculum, as natural as a conversation between two friends about what ails them.

Such at least is the dream shared by large numbers of women's health activists all around the country, and they

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by Elizabeth Fishel