

# CHILE

## A nation still bleeding

by Bill Doskoch

A nice thing about being a student in Canada is that our universities and student unions are not controlled by the military.

We don't face lifetime expulsion from school for advocating ideas like free elections.

When we anger authority, we would probably not get tortured, exiled or executed.

According to one Chilean exile, though, these are some of the risks facing students in Chile in their struggle against the junta that has ruled their country since 1973.

Rene Leivas has lived in Canada since 1976 and is presently employed with the computing science department on campus.

He said "Students and trade unionists have always been the first to react against repression."

Their task is a dangerous one.

Over 30,000 people have been executed and tens of thousands have either been imprisoned or sent into internal exile.

1.5 million people out of a population of 12 million are currently in exile abroad.

One specific case Leivas mentioned was that of Segundo Cancino Fernandez, a leader in the Small Farmers Federation.

In 1983, Fernandez was arrested, beaten and tortured with electric shocks for his anti-junta activities.

Determined to see democracy and social justice return to his country, Fernandez resumed his organizing activities upon his re-lease.

On Friday, Nov. 9 of this year he was arrested again with 20 other trade union leaders.

This time the government denied detaining him and the others.

Leivas said "This was very serious because it meant the government intended to kill them."

Upon hearing of their plight, various concerned Canadians, including Dave Werlin, president

of the Alberta Federation of Labour, asked the Department of External Affairs in Ottawa and the Canadian Embassy in Chile to investigate.

The men were freed within a week.

"This shows the importance of solidarity," said Leivas.

He added "When the government feels international pressure, it is less repressive."

The economic situation has fueled much of the current unrest.

The annual inflation rate is 25 per cent, unemployment averages 30 per cent and 60 per cent of the working population must work for the minimum wage of \$47 (U.S.) per month.

Professionals such as teachers earn \$165 (U.S.) per month and a senior engineer can earn up to \$825 per month.

University tuition is \$1500 (U.S.) per year and financial aid is almost non-existent.

In the *campamentos* or slums, only one man in four had a permanent job.

There is no social safety net such as welfare or unemployment insurance.



The poorest people cannot afford to send their children to school. Instead they have them beg or pick through garbage cans to gather food.

Prostitution involving children as young as 10-years-old is a serious and growing problem.

What role does the United States play? What would happen if it applied the same pressure on Chile to return to democracy that it currently applies to Nicaragua?

With a chuckle tinged with bitterness, Leivas answered: "If it did, we would not just have democracy there, we would have paradise!"

He pointed out the role the U.S. played in provoking the overthrow of the Allende government in Chile and said the latest "state of siege against Marxist insurrection" coincided with Reagan's re-election.

"Pinochet is braver because he knows he has a friend," said Leivas.

He added that in September, a French priest, Father Jarlan, was murdered by the Chilean secret police and the Catholic Church broke off all relations with the government because of the increase in repression, yet "the American news media and government are silent."

He compared this with the furore over the murdered priest in Poland and asked "How do you explain this?"

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Randy Dawson, executive assistant to Advanced Education minister Dick Johnson, disagrees with Donaldson, "I think she's reaching," he said.

Dawson said the White Paper process is not finished.

"We've finished the public hearings, but a variety of sectorial and cross-sectorial papers will be published on the White Paper next spring and summer."

Post-secondary education will definitely be mentioned in some of these sectorial papers, according to Dawson.

"Individual institutions are not being targeted yet," said Dawson.

Dawson also said that broad based education will not suffer at the expense of job skill training and "special funding (for technological projects) will be up and over operating grants being given to the educational institution."

As for Donaldson's allegations about the Westerra institution, Dawson said, "Westerra will not be the one institution that will be spearheading the White Paper recommendation."

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