

Marxist experiment overthrown, Chile now faces violent civil war

By JIM DAW

The government of Chile's Salvador Allende went out with a bang Tuesday when it was forcefully overturned by a military coup.

And many observers agree that his three year attempt to make major changes in Chilean society peacefully and constitutionally was a failure.

The major failure was his inability to solve the country's economic problems. His only major success has probably assured that the country will be torn further by complete civil war.

Basic social reforms and democratization achieved during his first term gained him more support among the working class of Chileans but that not only aggravated the paranoia of the middle-class but probably ensured that the poor will not stand to be governed by the unconstitutional military junta.

Heightened armed conflict is imminent.

According to Michael O'Sullivan of the University of Saskatchewan, who spent 1972 in Chile and who was interviewed by the CBC Tuesday, the March elections indicated there was widespread support for the government of Allende.

"His support increased substantially since he was first elected despite the fact that in March the economic situation was quite bleak. Inflation was out of hand, shortages quite severe and other economic inconveniences were intervening in the lives of the citizens.

"But the working class people realised that the government was moving in a direction that was beneficial to them, and despite economic turmoil, they adhered to the government strongly and the government picked up support.

"The right has got desperate since March because they could see this happening. Despite their strategy to block the government from increasing its support they were failing, and they had to take drastic measures to get the government out of the way.

"Chileans are... ungovernable"

"Chileans will probably be ungovernable. I suspect right now factories as a consequence are occupied. Workers will have been forcibly removed from there. And the workers are armed, although its hard to say to what extent.

"Military is such that they will not allow a government which they do not see as being legitimate govern. So I think you do have a civil war situation at this moment."

One of the world's leading authorities on Chile, James Petras, a professor of social sciences at the State University of New York was also interviewed by the CBC Tuesday.

He had just returned from Chile and told the interviewer that it was evident a week and a half ago a military coup was coming, and that a civil war may come out of it.

He said that there was a very polarized political and social situation in Chile, and enumerated several factors which showed there was a coup on the way.

"The army, after it was given a green light by the Congress controlled by the opposition party began to use a law for the control of arms to attack workers in the factories in search of arms," he said.

"These raids on the workers were acts of a military operation. Workers were brutalized and a number of them were injured, even killed.

"Second: You have a purge of the navy — over 100 enlisted men who refused to support their commanders in their efforts to overthrow the government were tortured most hideously by the navy commanders.

"Thirdly: You have the military in the government refusing to attack the right while condoning a number of these search missions by the military.

"Fourth: you have a number of strikes going on with no economic goals. The sole purpose, even explicitly stated by the so-



Ousted Chilean President Salvador Allende.

called strike leaders, the truck owners, was the overthrow of the government.

"You had several hundred terrorist incidents; violent assassination reminiscent of Nazi Germany in the Thirties and Italy in the Twenties. Attacks on workers and parliamentary representatives of the left were virtually unprotected by the police and the military.

Obstructionist policies

"Along with this, The Christian Democrats, who are neither Christians nor Democrats, were engaging in action on behalf of the illegal forces.

Petras also predicted a civil war and suggested two possible kinds.

He pointed out that workers have had a taste for power through running factories. They have been organized into what he called municipal council and self-management organizations, which he believes will be the basis for resistance.

Provided the military is able to control all its units, the workers with their small arms will be no match.

In this case, he suggested, resistance will continue over a long period of time and result in an insurrection in the future.

"If the workers are armed today, you will see a civil war. If they are not, they will resist to the utmost closing down production, and I think out of that resistance will grow an armed group."

Petras suggested there are certain "indirect indicators" that "a good deal of financial support, some of the logistical planning and certainly a good deal of political encouragement came from Washington" for the overthrow.

Charges of outside opposition to Allende's government are not without history.

In 1972, Allende addressed the general assembly of the United Nations, charging that he had documents detailing a plan by the International Telegram and Telegraph Company in conjunction with the U.S. government to help overthrow the government.

Allende told the assembly: "It was proposed that there be a strangling of the economy, a sabotage of our diplomatic position, sewing social disorder and panic among the population so that when the government is overthrown, the armed forces would be impelled to break the democratic system and impose a dictatorship."

He called this plan imperialist intervention.

"The battle to protect their natural resources is part of the broader struggle being waged by the countries of the third world to overcome underdevelopment," he said.

When interviewed by the CBC Tuesday, O'Sullivan said that Allende fell into a constitutional trap by trying to remain within the

confines of existing legalities and refraining from using what power he had to repress internal opposition and violent disturbances.

"He should have broken the back of this seditious movement when he had a chance," said O'Sullivan.

Socialism or fascism

It is reported that a Socialist Party leader, Carlos Altamirano, argued after returning from a trip to Moscow in the early summer that the country faced a choice between "socialism and fascism." He criticized the government for not using all the power at its disposal, out of fear of a direct clash — and for thus encouraging a counter-revolutionary situation, according to Pierre Kalfon, writing for the Guardian in the July 14 edition.

Kalfon obviously did not attribute Allende's shaky position to his handling of opposition from the middle class, but to his mishandling of the economy.

This point was made by other journalists in Toronto daily newspapers this week.

An article from an unidentified source in the Tuesday Toronto Star under the heading Economic Disaster Made Coup Bid Inevitable In Chile described graphically the economic hardship of Chileans.

"Bread is disappearing, as are milk, meat, sugar and butter, in the economic disaster that is Chile today. The country reels from an annual inflation rate of more than 300 per cent, stunted agricultural and industrial production, daily acts of violence and paralyzing strikes. The central bank has no funds and the currency has no value," stated the article.

The writer allowed that "in any other Latin American country, a situation so desperate would have provoked the overthrow of the government long ago. But the Chileans have endured."

But he continued: "Allende's experiment in Marxism has brought economic disaster and ideological polarization. The country has lurched from crisis to crisis. By all estimates 55 per cent of Chileans want the brakes put on this rocky road to socialism, and they have been calling for Allende's resignation."

The writer spoke of a deadlock of all levels of society, and indirectly implied that it was in fact the steadfast opposition of the middle-class which was gumming up the works.

The article admitted that the working class was still standing behind Allende despite inflation and short rations, and quoted one hospital worker as saying: "He is dividing things up equally. From now on if there is bread, there is bread for all of Chile, not just for certain classes. And if there is no bread, there is no bread for anyone."

An article in Wednesday Globe and Mail linked Chile's problem with increased unemployment and fast rising inflation rates to apprehension of foreign and Chilean investors.

Another example of the obstructionist policies of the middle-class was the nation's truck strike, when owners pulled their 45,000 vehicles off the roads in what became "a direct battle between socialism and free enterprise, and which plunged the whole country into economic chaos."

But now, apparently, the Chilean armed forces, no longer satisfied to defend Allende's right under the constitution to govern, have "united to initiate the historic and responsible mission to fight for the liberation of the fatherland from the Marxist yoke, and for the restoration of order and constitutional rule."

After bombing Allende's palace until he reportedly shot himself, the military is now in power.

The first Marxist government to be freely elected in the Western Hemisphere, a government that undertook a revolutionary transformation within the structures of "bourgeois democracy", forswearing the use of violence is gone.

A violent, unstable future faces Chile.