

# Chile . . . .

om Chile's  
dents and  
created a  
consciousness

workers,  
s to the  
was tre-  
dents and  
ls in the  
' strike.  
were es-  
oods and  
otage. In  
and the  
ss joined

forces to keep the country going in the face of a direct challenge to the revolutionary process.

Most of this activity occurred in response to the situation rather than as a result of formal governmental initiatives. The government had taken one key initiative; the organization of committees of price control and supply in neighbourhoods. The committees were designed to protect the daily welfare of the Chilean working people and the poor. As workers' real wages had increased and demand for everyday needs arose, prices rose as well, and scarcities became acute. Everyday necessities were subject to hoarding by merchants and the rich scalpers abounded.

The minister of the economy's initiative of neighbourhood committees found support from the networks of the various coalition parties making up the government, particularly the Communists.

Working class neighbourhoods established committees which went to merchants and invited them to co-operate by charging official prices. If they co-operated neighbourhood residents would patronize them, and the state distribution agency would give them priority in the delivery of scarce items. If they charged speculative prices, they would not receive those scarce items (from the state anyways) and the neighbourhood women would organize a boycott of the stores. These actions gave a large measure of power, backed up by the state authority, to ordinary people in their everyday lives. Housewives, previously unorganized and largely powerless, gained a new control over their lives.

During the October strike, neighbourhood committees, together with other neighbourhood associations — mothers' centers, community health councils, community centers, experienced a tremendous heightening of class consciousness and gained new

skills and competences. The necessity to come to grips with the wide-ranging problems that confronted them gave the working class a society-wide perspective, and a sense that the country's destiny and material welfare was in their hands. They found they had the ability to decide and choose and they grew in the spirit of self-reliance.

What happened in October 1972 couldn't have occurred two years previously. Heightened consciousness and better organization had developed before and during the strike. The former consciousness of the Chilean workers and peasants, which focused on trade-union organization and traditional legislative channels, was changing. It was giving way to a broader class-consciousness perspective; new social relationships were emerging within and beside the shell of the old forms of social relations.

A similar growth in consciousness occurred in rural Chile, where peasants and landless workers were organizing into new co-operative farming units. The truckers strike played havoc with the deliveries of supplies essential for spring planting.

Once again, confronted with the difficult realities of their situation, the people realized their capabilities. They also focused an increasing amount of support for the Allende government. While the Christian Democratic party had formerly counted on large segments of the peasantry for support, in the elections of March 1973, the peasants showed a definite swing to the socialist parties, which in several areas were supported by the Movement of the Revolutionary Left, a group which had originally not supported Allende and viewed him as too conservative. The Socialists, given this new support, doubled their representation in the Chamber of Deputies.

In the factories, a process had begun which was virtually irreversible. Autonomous workers' defense committees, 'Cordones Industriales', were set up in plant after plant. They grew out of the workers' attempts to maintain production when the employers used lock out tactics in October. They emerged as rank and file organizations which mobilized

sectors of the work force that had formerly been unmobilizable, particularly in smaller industrial centres and in the south.

In June, when an army unit attempted a coup, workers occupied factories in response to the government's call to defend them. These 'Cordones' gained new force and took the process beyond the traditional forms of political party organization.

This process was particularly threatening to the Christian Democrats who were very proud of their strength (slightly less than one-third of the Trade Union Federation votes) in the labor movement. The Christian Democrats had been prone to use calls for local workers' control and participation as a way of attacking the government's need to maintain some central control over production.

In June, this process began to back fire. If Christian Democrat workers could join their Socialist and Communist brethren in occupying factories, they saw little reason to return those factories to their owners—often prominent Christian Democrats.

The base of the Christian Democrats was being eroded.

The polarization was occurring at such a rate that the right wing of the Christian Democrats—around Eduardo Frei and Patricio Alwyn—saw their road to power blocked. An increasingly articulate and conscious majority of Chileans were committed to stand in the way.

Summer '73: Many Routes,  
One Coup, Operation Ripe Pear

The basic strategy of the right continued all summer: create economic chaos, throw in a bit of sabotage and terrorism, let nothing pass in Congress except attacks on Allende's constitutional legitimacy.

In the armed forces, the political polarization broke through the rhetoric of loyalty to the constitution and pledges of political neutrality. A tank battallion attempted to initiate a coup in late June, attacking the presidential palace, and hoping for support in the navy and air force. General Prats, leader of the moderates or constitutionalists within the armed forces crushed the attempted coup, undertook a purge of 100 seamen, accom-

panied with torture and brutality.

Army men and police undertook searches for arms among factory workers and left wing militants, one worker was shot dead in an arms search in the southern city of Punta Arensa.

Meanwhile the germ of insurrection was spreading in the armed forces as officers and men of upper-class backgrounds and conservative sympathies conspired to undermine Prats' moderate constitutional leadership.

These rightist elements in the armed forces were increasingly in touch with like-minded elements in the Christian Democratic and Nationalist party leaderships. Eduardo Frei spun a complex web of careful but subservice with a multitude of officers.

The 'democratic' legislators from the Christian Democrats and National parties passed a resolution in Congress, August 22nd, calling the Allende government "illegitimate" and suggesting that the military men who had re-entered the cabinet in early August should separate themselves from Allende and his coalition.

Allende made a direct, and what now seems a prophetic reply to this campaign. He said that the resolution symbolized the abandonment by certain sectors of the civic values most essential to democracy. To propose that armed forces carry out government functions outside the direction and political control of the President is to promote a coup d'etat, he said.

That is precisely what Frei, the Nationalists and their allies were doing. As one member of the National Party put it to journalists on August 28th, "Even if we must kill twenty thousand enemies in order to liquidate the government, we must be ready to do it."

The game of confrontation played by these elements was leading to a further shearing away of their support. Radomiro Tomic, the Christian Democratic candidate for President in 1970 refused to support Frei's strategy and was joined by other prominent Christian Democrats, including the former president of the party. Tomic pointed out that it was reasonable for the

Continued to page 19