

“Student movement influential”

Chilean students are a “barometer”

OTTAWA (CUP) — Democratic reform in Chile may seem inevitable abroad, but the situation for Chileans is much more delicate, according to a Canadian journalist working in the strife-torn South American country.

“It’s said people outside Chile know more about what’s going on there than Chileans themselves,” says Lake Sagaris, a Santiago-based correspondent for the *Times* of London, the *Globe and Mail*, and CBC Radio’s Sunday Morning.

“There is a growing unity among the grassroots level in Chile,” said Sagaris. “But the military govern-

ment is still in power, and holding firmly onto it.”

Sagaris has returned to Canada for an 11-city tour to promote a new book, *Exile Home*, a collection of verse about her early years in Chile.

Sagaris left Canada for Chile in 1981, eight years after a brutal military coup brought Augusto Pinochet to power. Sagaris, who had fallen in love with and was to marry a Chilean, found herself caught in an uncomfortable and challenging environment.

“The book is about the day-to-day struggle to survive in a country

where the economy is falling apart,” she said.

As a student in Canada, Sagaris was politically active in a number of organizations, including the defunct National Union of Students. While being aware of the changing politics in Chile, Sagaris detaches herself from the opposition movement.

“Opposition journalists in Chile are part of that, publishing bulletins and so on. We (outside journalists) don’t participate in the opposition movement, but we do cover what’s going on,” she said.

Sagaris says the Chilean student

movement is one of the most influential in the country. She said the Federation of Chilean Students — the FECH — has historically acted as a “barometer of change in the country” though its own political changes.

Although the FECH was destroyed after the military coup, students managed to rebuild the movement in dramatic defiance of the Pinochet government.

“The government even set up its own organization to co-opt and redirect student energies,” Sagaris said. “But the rebuilding of the FECH, not only physically but psych-

ologically, was an important victory.”

She said anti-government slates have won power in not only the FECH, but also most local elections.

Increased international opposition to Pinochet rule is spurring on internal dissent, said Sagaris.

“Right from the start (of the coup), the military government has been isolated from the international community,” she said. “That isolation has definitely grown. Opposition (abroad) is definitely at its highest point, and this is having a tremendous impact in Chile.”

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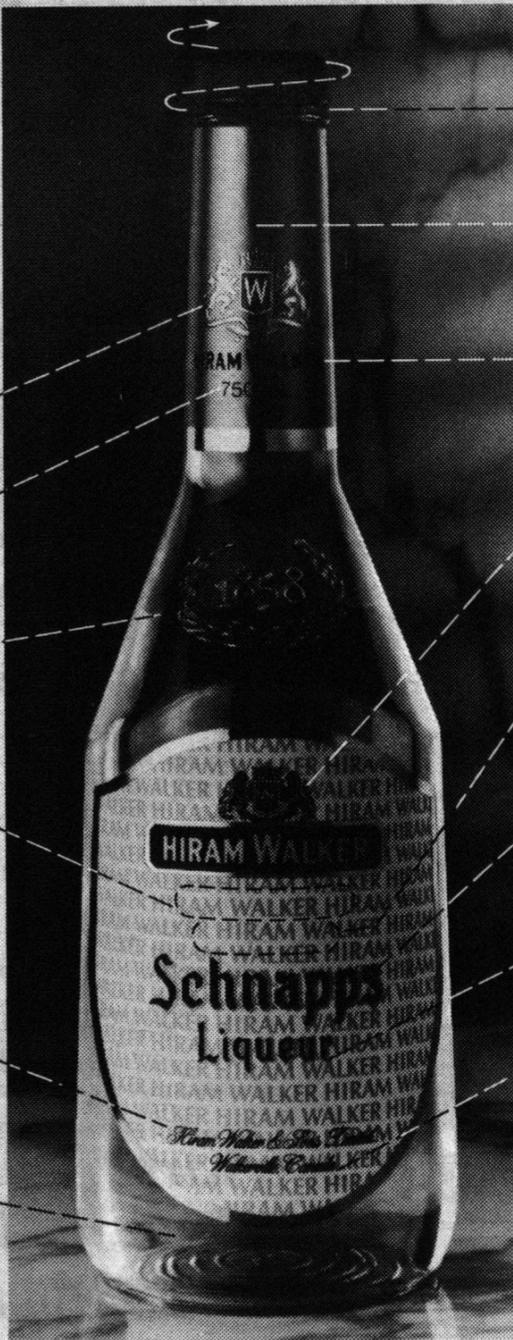
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