

Chile, Allende & Canada

by Roger Metcalf

Canadian bewilderment when faced with the overthrow of Salvador Allende and its aftermath seemed to be the theme of a discussion on March 10.

The reason for the discussion was a tour of the region by Father Buddy Smith who recently spent two weeks in Chile observing the Canadian government's role under the auspices of the Canadian Catholic Conference and the Canadian Council of Churches. Alberto Kurhal, a Chilean refugee who has been in Canada for nine months, accompanied Father Smith to add another dimension to the discussion.

Those present heard how, since the Spanish conquest, South America has existed to serve others, rather than exist for its own good. As Spain declined the new dominant powers, such as the United Kingdom, moved in. Even the revolutions leading to independence were largely a matter for the local aristocracy.

Apparently the only period of real prosperity in South America was the Depression, when outside influence weakened. Local reserves and industry were built up, but the new hopes were crushed when the post-war strength of North America led to renewed domination.

Father Smith, using his twelve years in the Dominican Republic and some study of South American history, stressed that the events in Chile since 1970 should not be viewed in the comfortable framework of left versus right, Communist versus free enterprise. Instead it was an attempt by Chileans to throw off outside domination from all sources, and to build a free society of their own.

Chile is a rich country so it has suffered more than most from outside exploitation. It has the second largest foreign debt, next only to Israel. The American corporations that pushed for American intervention were making 200 per cent profits in Chile. As an example, Anaconda has 16 percent of its operations in Chile, yet those operations produced 88 percent of the company's profits.

Father Smith asked whether Allende fell because the system of exploitation was just too good to change. He said that Canadians should look at the situation by asking why the poor of Chile suffered so much. Smith clearly felt that Kissinger's "destabilization" was a direct response to diversion of wealth from the centers of power to local society.

Turning to the Canadian response, it was pointed out that Canada is unique as an exploited country which enjoys freedom at home. Father Smith urged that Canada build a society according to Canadians' consciences, rather than continue in thoughtless subservience to the dominant powers.

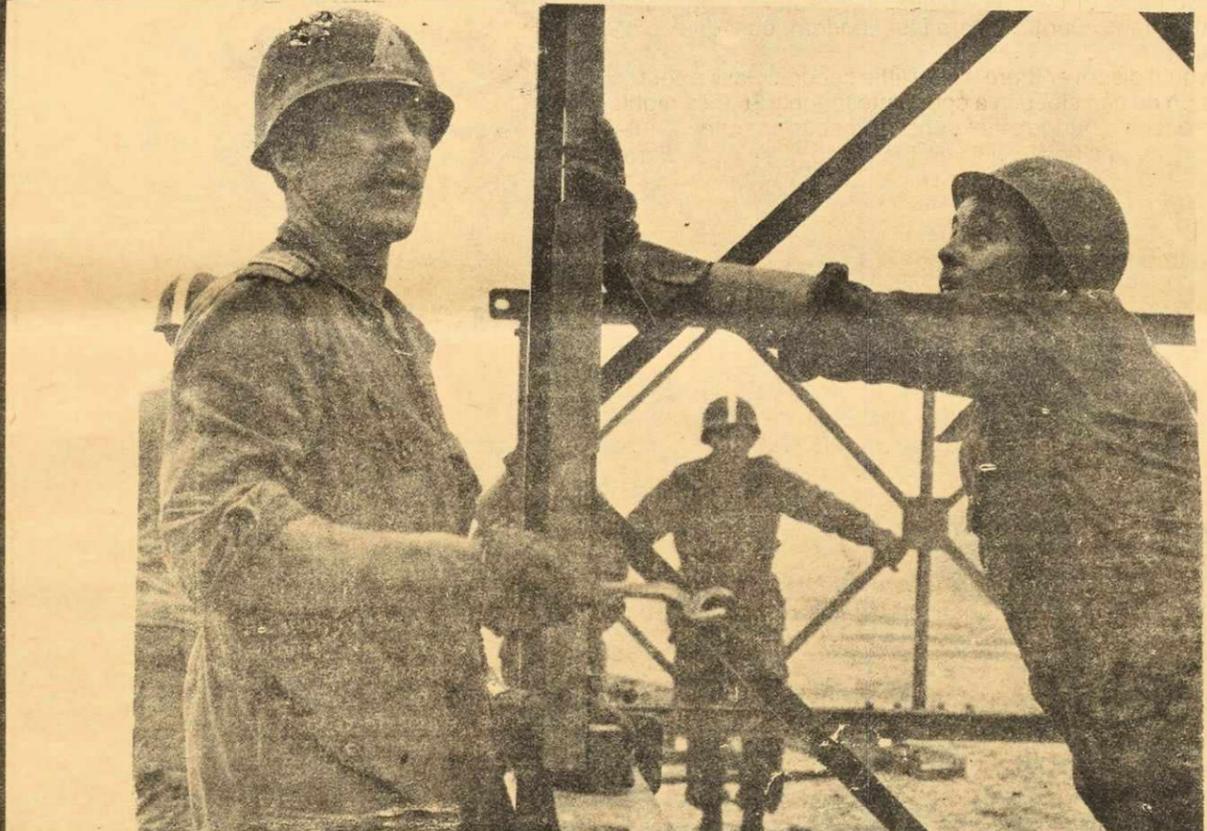
It was stressed that Chile is a scandal for the entire world, with Chilean refugees in almost every country. As a result the Chilean economy has suffered from a complete drying up of foreign investment and international reluctance to be associated with such a brutal government. Current easing of Chilean policies (for example, deportation instead of torture) is viewed as a response to international pressure.

Those present at the meeting came to no conclusion about the meaning of the exploitative system and its results. A Cuban refugee who is now a Canadian pointed out that many countries, including his own, suffer domination and exploitation. He and others reminded those present that while Canada has a good record in welcoming refugees, it is also one of the exploiters. Before Castro the insurance and

banking companies in Cuba were under Canadian control.

Some felt that free enterprise was a good system presently run by bad people, while others saw the meeting as tending to be another North American attempt to impose North American terms and success upon a foreign culture.

There was little evidence of determination to have Canada fight domination of other countries while throwing off domination of our own country. Many people are happy to offer help when domination goes to extremes as it did in Chile, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Hungary, etc. Few go beyond that to an attack upon the cause of the extremes. Perhaps, as some said at the March 10 discussion, Canada is lazy, irresponsible and fat - wide open for overt domination instead of the present polished approach.



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