

Sweat of the Sun, Tears of the Moon

The **Chilean coup d'état of 1973** is a landmark in the history of Chile and the Soviet-American Cold War. On 11 September 1973, the government of President Salvador Allende was overthrown by the military in a coup d'état.

The coup occurred two months after a first failed attempt, the *Tanquetazo* — Tank putsch — and a month after the Chamber of Deputies (with an Opposition majority) condemned President Allende's alleged breaches of the Constitution. President Allende died during the coup; the cause of his death remains disputed.

U.S. intervention in Chilean internal politics and support of right-wing opponents of President Allende — including presidential assassination — are documented in the declassified (1998) documents about Project FUBELT. The Soviet Union was sympathetic to Allende, but did not assist him because they believed he was "weak" for refusing to use force against the opposition.^[1] General Augusto Pinochet assumed power after deposing President Salvador Allende, establishing an anti-communist military dictatorship that ruled until 1990. This right-wing military deposition of an elected Socialist president by a U.S.-sponsored *caudillo* — Man on a White Horse — licenced the U.S.S.R. to retract from Russo-American détente in pursuit of foreign policy ambitions in the Third World.

Chilean politics before the *coup d'état*

When Salvador Allende Gossens won the 1970 Chilean presidential election, Chilean society was wracked by politically intractable economic difficulties; slow growth, inflation, unequal income distribution, and the concentration of economic power to the few. Most of the populace were poor.^[citation needed] The first year of the Socialist Allende Government registered economic improvement; the GDP increased 8.6 percent, inflation decreased from 34.9 percent in 1970 to 22.1 percent, and industrial production increased 12 percent.^[2] Mr Allende's Socialist socioeconomic government agenda was opposed by the rich and the U.S., which exerted diplomatic, economic, and covert pressure upon Chile's elected socialist government.^[3]

At the end of 1971, Cuban President Fidel Castro visited Chile in a four-week state visit giving credence to the Right Wing *belief* that the *Chilean Way to Socialism* placed Chile *en route* to Cuban Socialism, i.e. soviet Communism.^[4]

In 1972, the monetary policies increasing the amount of circulating currency, adopted by economics minister Pedro Vuskovic, devalued the escudo, provoking inflation to 140 percent in 1972 and engendering a black market economy.^[2] The Allende Government acted against the black market with organised distribution of basic products. In October 1972, Chile suffered the first of many socially confrontational strikes — led by the Chilean rich — openly supported by U.S. President Richard Nixon via the CIA.

On 9 October 1972, as part of the U.S.'s *September Plan*, a truck-owners strike (funded with US\$2 million), began; it was led by the ^[5] Confederación Nacional del Transporte (The National Confederation of Transport), presided by León Vilarín, also the leader of the far-right-wing paramilitary group Patria y Libertad (Fatherland and Liberty).^[5] The Confederation, comprising 165 truck-owners' trade unions of 40,000 members and 56,000 vehicles, declared an *indefinite* strike to paralyze the country.

Soon, small-scale businessmen, some professional unions, and student groups joined the strike. Its leaders — Vilarín, Jaime Guzmán, Rafael Cumsille, Guillermo Elton, Eduardo Arriagada — expected to so depose the elected government. Other

than damaging the national economy, the principal effect of the twenty-four-day strike was drawing Army head, Gen. Carlos Prats, into the government as Interior Minister, an appeasement to the right wing. ^[2] Gen. Prats succeeded Gen. René Schneider after his assassination on 24 October 1970, by the groups of Gen. Roberto Viaux and Gen. Camilo Valenzuela whom the CIA financed and logistically supported. Moreover, Gen. Prats supported the legalist Schneider Doctrine and refused military involvement in a *coup d'état* against President Allende.

Despite the declining economy, President Allende's Popular Unity coalition increased its vote to 43.2 percent in the March 1973 parliamentary elections, however, by then, the informal alliance between Popular Unity and the Christian Democrats ended. ^[6] The Christian Democrats allied with the right-wing National Party, oppose Allende's Socialist government; the two right-wing parties forming the Confederación Democrática (CODE) (The Democratic Coalition). The internecine parliamentary conflict, between legislature and the executive branch paralyzed practical government. ^[7] To destabilise the Allende Government, the CIA paid some U.S.\$8 million to right-wing opposition groups to "create pressures, exploit weaknesses, magnify obstacles" and hasten President Allende's deposition. ^[8] The CIA report released in 2000 records some U.S. \$6.8 million spent for the deposition. ^[8]

29 June 1973, Colonel Roberto Souper surrounded the La Moneda presidential with his tank regiment and failed to depose the Allende Government. ^[9] That failed *coup d'état* — known as the Tanquetazo tank putsch — organised by the fascist Patria y Libertad paramilitary group, was followed by a general strike at the end of July that included the copper miners of El Teniente.

In August 1973, a constitutional crisis occurred, and the Supreme Court publicly complained about the Allende Government's inability to enforce the law of the land, and, on 22 August, the Chamber of Deputies (with the Christian Democrats united with the National Party) accused the Allende Government of unconstitutional acts and called upon the *military* to enforce constitutional order. ^[7]

For months, the Allende Government had feared calling upon the Carabineros (Carabineers) national police, suspecting them disloyal to the Constitution. On 9 August, President Allende appointed Gen. Carlos Prats as Minister of Defence, who was forced to resign both as defence minister and as the Army Commander-in-chief on 24 August 1973, embarrassed by the Alejandrina Cox incident and a public protest of the wives of his generals before his house. Gen. Augusto Pinochet replaced him as Army commander-in-chief the same day. ^[7]

Military coup d'état

On 11 September 1973, by 7.00 A.M., the Navy captured Valparaíso, strategically stationing ships and marine infantry in the central coast and closed radio and television networks. The Province Prefect informed President Allende of the Navy's actions; immediately, the president went to the presidential palace, *La Moneda*, with his bodyguards, the *Grupo de Amigos Personales* (GAP) (Group of Personal Friends). By 8:00 AM, the Army had closed most radio and television stations in Santiago city; the Air Force bombed the remaining active stations; the President received incomplete information, and was convinced that only a sector of the Navy conspired against him and his government.

President Allende and Defence minister Orlando Letelier failed to communicate with the military leaders. Admiral Montero, the Navy's commander and an Allende loyalist was rendered incommunicado when his telephone service was cut and his cars

sabotaged before the *coup d'état*, ensuring he did not thwart them. Leadership of the Navy was transferred José Toribio Merino, planner of the *coup d'état* and executive officer to Adm. Montero. Augusto Pinochet, General of the Army, and Gustavo Leigh, General of the Air Force, did not answer President Allende's telephone calls to them. The General Director of the *Carabineros* (uniformed police), José María Sepúlveda, and the head of the Investigations Police (plain clothes detectives), Alfredo Joignant did answer President Allende's calls and immediately went to the *La Moneda* presidential palace. When Defence minister Letelier arrived to the Ministry of Defense, controlled by Adm. Patricio Carvajal, he was arrested: the first prisoner of the *coup d'état*.

Despite evidence that the treason encompassed all of the Chilean armed forces, President Allende hoped some remained loyal to the government. He was convinced of Gen. Pinochet's loyalty, telling a reporter that the *coup d'état* leaders must have imprisoned Pinochet. Only at 8:30 AM, when the armed forces declared their control of Chile, and that President Allende was deposed, did the President grasp the magnitude of the military's rebellion, yet refused to resign the presidency to which he was elected.

By 9:00 AM, the armed forces controlled Chile, except for the city centre of the capital, Santiago. President Allende refused to surrender, despite the military's declaring they would bomb the *La Moneda* presidential palace if he resisted deposition. The Socialist Party proposed to Allende that he escape to the San Joaquín industrial zone in southern Santiago, to later re-group and lead a counter-*coup d'état*; the president rejected the proposition. The military rebels attempted negotiations with President Allende, but he refused to resign, citing his constitutional duty to remain president, in the palace. Finally, President Allende gave a potent farewell speech telling the nation of the *coup d'état* and his refusal to resign his elected office under threat.

Annoyed with negotiating, Gen. Leigh ordered the presidential palace bombed, but was told the Hawker Hunter jet aeroplanes would take forty minutes to arrive and bomb down town Santiago. Meanwhile, Gen. Pinochet ordered an armour and infantry assault upon the *La Moneda* presidential palace and kill the government. The Chilean army met no resistance en route to the government's house; at the palace, the socialist defenders were out-gunned, over-powered, and killed. Finally, at mid-day, the air force arrived to bomb the elected Socialist president from office, ending with the death of Salvador Allende.

The worst of the military's violent purging from society of *thousands* of Chilean Leftists and *suspected* Leftists — by killing or forced disappearance — occurred in the first months after the U.S.-sponsored *coup d'état*. The military imprisoned 40,000 of their political enemies in the National Stadium of Chile; among the tortured and killed *desaparecidos* were U.S. citizens Charles Horman, and Frank Teruggi.^[11] Chilean song-writer Víctor Jara, and other 70 political killings were perpetrated by the death squad, Caravan of Death(*Caravana de la Muerte*) in October 1973.

Some 130,000 people were arrested in a three-year period; the dead and disappeared numbered thousands in the first months of military dictatorship. Those include the British physician Sheila Cassidy, who later brought awareness to the UK public of human rights violations in Chile. Among those detained was Alberto Bachelet (father of incumbent Chilean President Michelle Bachelet), an air force official; he was tortured and died on 12 March 1974,^{[12][13][14][15][16]}. The right-wing newspaper, El Mercurio (The Mercury),^[17] reported that Mr Bachelet died after a basketball game, citing his poor cardiac health. Michelle Bachelet and her mother were imprisoned and tortured in the Villa Grimaldi detention and torture centre on 10 January 1975.^{[18][19][20][21][12][13][22][23][24][25][16][26]}

After Gen. Pinochet lost the election in the 1988 plebiscite, the Rettig Commission, a multi-partisan truth commission, in 1991 reported the location of torture and detention centers — Colonia Dignidad, Esmeralda ship and Víctor Jara Stadium — and that some 2,700 people were killed or disappeared by the military régime for seventeen years, from 1973 to 1990. Later, in November 2004, the Valech Report confirmed the number as less than 3,000 killed and reduced the number of cases of forced disappearance; some 28,000 people were arrested, imprisoned, and tortured. Afterwards, many were exiled abroad as political refugees — especially to Argentina — however, the DINA (National Intelligence Directorate) secret police followed them abroad to spy upon and kill them, activities that were part of Operation Condor, which linked South American dictatorships against liberal, leftist, communist, socialist political opponents.

In *El día decisivo* (The Decisive Day), Gen. Pinochet recounts the *coup d'état*, affirming he was the leading plotter, and that he co-ordinated, from his army commander office, the deposition of President Salvador Allende. Recently, high military officials from the time said Pinochet reluctantly participated, following the lead of Adm. Merino and air force Gen.

(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1973_Chilean_coup_d'%C3%A9tat)