

CHAPTER TEN

Prelude to the Coup

The unexpectedly high progovernment vote in the March 1973 election gave a psychological boost to the government forces, despite the fact that, technically, it had been a defeat. It also strengthened the arguments of the left wing of Popular Unity against accepting the fourteen conditions the military presented as their price for remaining in the cabinet.¹ On March 27, Allende organized a civilian cabinet, appointing Socialists to the key Interior and Agriculture posts and keeping the Communists in charge of Economics, Labor, and Justice. At the swearing-in of the new cabinet members, Allende warned of "the dark hours" which lay ahead because of the worsening economic situation.

Aside from minor shifts in the Congress in favor of the four largest parties, the election had not really altered the political stalemate in Chile. In some ways it made the situation worse, since at the same time that it closed off the electoral outlet to the opposition for three years, it also encouraged the Popular Unity coalition to push ahead with its program and not attempt to seek any compromise.

The ENU School Reform

Certainly the announcement immediately after the election of a plan to implement by decree an elaborate program to reorganize and reorient public and private primary and secondary education in a National Unified School curriculum (Escuela Nacional Unificada, ENU) contributed to an immediate escalation of political tension. The plan was described by the Ministry of Education in terms guaranteed to provoke opposition. It described as its goal "the construction of a new socialist society based on the development of productive forces, the overcoming of economic, technological, and cultural dependence, the establishment of new property relations, and authentic democracy and social justice guaranteed by the effective exercise of the power of the people" (1.1). While it called for an educational system that was humanistic and pluralist, it mandated the

establishment of a single educational system—including the then-private schools, which would "be obliged to adopt the content and curriculum of the ENU" (6.14); proposed that all secondary-school students engage in work in state-owned enterprises of the social area as part of their regular program (2.9); and proclaimed as its objective the "harmonious development of the personality of the young people in the values of socialist humanism" (4.2.8). The program was to be initiated on an experimental basis on June 1 with ninth-grade students. In addition, national, provincial, and local educational councils were created by decree with representatives of the government, workers, peasants, parents, and educational organizations to advise on the operation of the program.²

The ENU program was the result of work on educational reform which had begun under the Frei government, and its proposal that all students should develop a technical specialization by the end of secondary school had been discussed for years. Yet the vocabulary in which the reform was described had heavily Marxist overtones, and the timing of its release could not have been more unfortunate.

Predictably, it aroused strong protests from the opposition. The Christian Democrats, while agreeing with the need for education more relevant to national needs, denounced the scheme as a violation of the Statute of Democratic Guarantees and called it a "sectarian" document. They protested that despite its declaration of respect for democracy and pluralism, it had been adopted without consultation with those affected and contained "affirmations of a character clearly identified ideologically with the goals and methods of the minority Popular Unity government."³

The proposal also ran into strong opposition from the Catholic church. The archbishop of Valparaíso warned that the proposal could "lead to the control of education by a partisan ideology." A few days later, Cardinal Silva issued a statement which, while praising the positive aspects of the proposal such as the integration of work and study, objected that "we do not see emphasized anywhere the human and Christian values which form part of the patrimony of Chile . . . respect for man, especially for the child, cultural freedom, the search for truth and a critical spirit and the genuine conditions for its exercise, a balance between the material values involved in production and the spiritual values which contribute to the full realization of man, among them the real possibility of faith." The cardinal also observed that the report assumed that a majority in the country accepted a "socialist, humanist, pluralist, and revolutionary" orientation for its education when a considerable part of the country was in disagreement either with that goal or with the way in which it was being implemented. He therefore requested that the implementation of the plan be delayed to allow for full discussion and possible modification to take into account the views of teachers, students, and parents in both public and private schools.

In early April, the bishops of the entire country issued a joint statement expressing their opposition to the proposal and warning that "a desire for social justice could result in another model of an unjust and tyrannical society which would resolve nothing and only result in power passing from one minority to another."⁴

The Christian Democratic-controlled Federation of Secondary School Students of Santiago (FESES) denounced the proposal, and on April 9 its leaders had an interview with the minister of education in which they insisted that such a reform should be carried out by law and not by decree. After the interview they pronounced the minister's response unsatisfactory and gave the government ten days to modify its position. On April 11, the minister discussed the proposal for two hours with 150 representatives of the armed forces. The next day, a special meeting of the Christian Democratic Council issued a statement calling for mobilization of its bases against implementation of the decree and threatening to "make a pronouncement on the democratic legitimacy of the government" if it violated the freedom of education guaranteed in the constitution. In the face of such strong opposition, the Allende government decided to give in. On April 12, the minister of education wrote a public letter to the cardinal accepting his proposal that the implementation of the plan be postponed to permit "an open, democratic, and constructive debate." He expressed concern that the bishops believed that the plan did not respect fundamental humanistic and Christian values and insisted that the government reform fully respected freedom of conscience and ideological pluralism. He offered to make substantial modifications if subsequent debate revealed that they were necessary.⁵ Despite the government's surrender on the issue, the secondary-school students went ahead with planned demonstrations on April 26.

The issuance of the ENU decree appears to have been a very serious political error. The net result of the controversy was to increase substantially the level of political polarization in the country and for the first time to involve the Catholic church and the military in public opposition to government policy. It also made it even more difficult to negotiate any kind of political truce with the Christian Democrats following the elections.

Relations with the PDC were also adversely affected by the murder in mid-March of two PDC activists who were sleeping in tents on a vacant lot threatened with seizure by MIR militants. This led to the impeachment of the governor of Santiago in mid-April on the grounds that he had failed in his constitutional duty of maintaining order. The MIR stepped up its seizures in a campaign which evoked a furious television denunciation from President Allende of "the demagogic attitudes" and "erroneous methods" of some worker sectors at a time when what was necessary was "working more, producing more, and studying more."⁶

Again, just when the Allende government was in most difficulty, new reve-



A photograph published in early April 1973 of a Chilean policeman being clubbed by a member of the Popular Revolutionary Brigade, which symbolized to the opposition and the Chilean military the breakdown of law and order. (Embassy of Chile)

lations of U.S. interference in Chilean politics made it possible for President Allende to rally support. On March 20, 1973, the Multinational Corporations Subcommittee of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee chaired by Senator Frank Church began to hold hearings on ITT's role in attempting to influence the outcome of the 1970 Chilean presidential elections. The Church subcommittee heard testimony from many of the figures mentioned in the ITT papers released by Jack Anderson in April 1972. A memorandum from the staff director of the investigation, Jerome Levinson, publicized by Anderson in March revealed that in May 1972 several of the Cuban Watergate defendants had also broken into the Chilean embassy, the residences of the chief Chilean UN delegate and its economic counselors, and the New York apartment of the head of the Chilean Development Corporation (CORFO). James McCord later testified to the Senate Watergate Committee that the U.S. government had also tapped the telephones of the Chilean embassy.⁷ Not too surprisingly, the Overseas Private Investment Corporation announced on April 10 that it was turning down ITT's request for \$92.5 million in compensation for its interest in the Chilean telephone company which had been nationalized in 1971. (The Allende government had begun negotiations for compensation at that time, but they were broken off in 1972 after the revelations about ITT's activities.) The grounds that OPIC gave were that ITT had not disclosed "material information" and had failed "to preserve administrative remedies by which proper payment might have been achieved" by OPIC, which was required by law to attempt to secure compensation after it had compensated the nationalized firm. (The OPIC contract specifically rules out compensation for expropriations which occur as a result of "provocation or instigation by the investor or foreign enterprise.")⁸

Heightened Political Tension

The tense political situation was not relieved by the Christian Democrats' decision to bring up the question of the presidential vetoes of the constitutional amendment on the three areas of the economy which had lain dormant for nine months. The move was provoked by the Allende government's decision to use the collective "decree of insistence" to override the controller general's refusal to approve the requisitioning of forty-three plants. The controller had argued that breakdowns in supply (*desabastecimiento*) were not in themselves sufficient legal cause for government requisition; the government also had to demonstrate that the owners were responsible for the breakdown. He had also noted that such requisitions were legally temporary and that it was false to speak, as the government did, of the "incorporation" of the firms into the social area. The Christian Democrats also threatened to impeach the entire Allende cabinet for its signing of the decree.

On April 26, the Congress rejected the presidential vetoes of the constitutional amendment by a majority vote, but not by two-thirds. Congressional spokesmen maintained that the president's only recourse now was to a plebiscite. Instead, Allende announced that he intended to promulgate the sections of the amendment which had been adopted and to refer the disputed sections to the Constitutional Tribunal. The opposition majority in the Congress continued to maintain that the tribunal was not authorized to decide on such matters. It was an indication either of the strength of the Chilean commitment to legalism or of the reluctance of the tribunal to become involved in a direct conflict between the other two branches that on May 31 the tribunal decided that it did not have jurisdiction in the conflict, thus accepting the congressional interpretation. Only one of the five members of the court accepted Allende's claim that a constitutional amendment was included in the term "law" in the constitutional provisions authorizing the tribunal. The head of the court referred to the necessity of express constitutional authorization and observed that while the government had cited two cases in which the term "law" was used in a general sense to include constitutional amendments, there were a hundred others in the constitution which restricted its meaning to ordinary legislation.⁹

Meanwhile, the government had moved one step further on the expansion and consolidation of the area of social property. Having overruled the controller general on the industries requisitioned in October, it sent the Congress a revised list of ninety-three industries that were to be definitively nationalized. Now included on the list (it had been excluded in the bill introduced earlier in the year) was the Alessandri paper company—sure to be a red flag to the opposition. The bill also contained a general authorization for the permanent takeover of all firms intervened or requisitioned before April 30, 1973.¹⁰

The move came at a time of greatly heightened political tension following a particularly violent set of street demonstrations at the end of April. After a rally of secondary-school students at the Ministry of Education on April 26, there were serious clashes between the opposition and progovernment students. The students broke thirty-six windows in the presidential palace, and the police were compelled to use water cannons and tear gas to break up the rioting demonstrators. The next day, a counterdemonstration called by the Central Workers Confederation (CUT) attacked the Christian Democratic newspaper and headquarters. One demonstrator was killed by a gunshot which, the government claimed, was fired from within the party headquarters.

The Christian Democratic vice-president of CUT, Ernesto Vogel, announced that all Christian Democratic unions would boycott the traditional First of May ceremonies in protest against the CUT demonstration. Cardinal Silva also indicated that he would not appear, explaining that he was departing from his usual custom because of "the division which has been

created in the heart of the labor movement, which has produced injury and hatred and turned worker against worker."¹¹

There was evidence of division among the military as well. *Ercilla* reported on a meeting of eight hundred military men on April 13 at the Military Academy at which General Prats, the army commander and former interior minister, defended the Allende government and gave specific support to its educational proposals and to its program of nationalization. Prats was said to have criticized Rear Admiral Huerta for submitting a memorandum to the minister of education critical of the ENU proposal and to have stated that if he had been minister of defense at the recent meeting of the military with the education minister, "I would have ordered the immediate arrest of those officers who spoke in such an unprofessional and

message to the Congress, and Frei reciprocated in 1973. On May 21, at a joint session presided over by a Left Radical senator, Allende delivered a message which was markedly more sober than those he had delivered in 1971 and 1972. He observed that the daily confrontation between the opposition and the government "has accumulated a heavy charge of social violence which so far has been contained within reasonable limits or put down when it began to exceed those limits." However, he warned of "a genuine, and serious threat to our democracy" and foresaw "very difficult times for the country and for the security of all Chileans." While attributing major responsibility for the present difficulties to the "national and foreign interests affected," he also admitted that his government had not created "the necessary instruments to capture the excess profits of the bourgeoisie and

pendent farmers sent food in a "Caravan of Hunger," and the small business and commerce employees' organization voted to give them "unrestricted support."¹⁵

One of the more ironic aspects of the government's problems with El Teniente was that Frei had had similar difficulties there in 1966. Remembering his own criticism of the Frei government for sending troops to the El Salvador mine in 1966 when it struck in sympathy with El Teniente, Allende was cautious in handling the strikers. There was continual violence in Rancagua, the town nearest to El Teniente, and at one point a worker was killed.

The strike was not settled until early July, and the national economy lost an estimated \$1 million a day in reduced production of Chile's principal export. The length of the strike demonstrated both Allende's determination to hold down soaring wages and the loss of confidence in his government, at least by the best-paid workers.

In June the Christian Democrats initiated their threatened impeachment action against Orlando Millas, the minister of economics, for undermining the authority of the elected neighborhood committees by vesting power in the appointive JAP committees. The Congress also gave final approval to the Moreno constitutional amendment guaranteeing landholdings under forty hectares against expropriation and requiring the vesting of individual titles within two years of expropriation. This created a second source of constitutional controversy between the legislature and the president.

The Allende government was also involved in disputes with the judiciary over court orders returning seized property, or, more often, prohibiting intervenors from taking actions which might increase the indebtedness of intervened or requisitioned companies without the authorization of a representative of the owners (*medidas precautorias*). Thirty such court orders were mentioned by the president of the Supreme Court in June, and in July Allende alluded to sixty cases. In June, the opposition in the Chamber of Deputies also published a confidential circular from the Ministry of the Interior ordering the carabineros not to carry out court orders to return industries or other establishments which had been taken over, but to report the court order to the governor, who was instructed to respond that it was "indispensable" to suspend the court order.¹⁶

The initiation of judicial action against the government for attempting to compel radio stations to join a compulsory radio chain for a government program led to a strong campaign by the progovernment press against the *viejos de mierda* in the judiciary. In May and June the Supreme Court wrote open letters to President Allende protesting the press campaign and asserting that nonfulfillment of court orders and the abuse of legal loopholes were leading to "the imminent breakdown of the judicial order." However, the campaign against the judiciary continued, and now it was broadened to include the controller general as well.¹⁷

A sense of the imminent breakdown of Chilean institutions is also evident in a photostat of a document published after the coup in the handwriting of presidential adviser Joan Garcés. Dating from early June, it speaks of the need for "organization of the people to resist a confrontation—beginning in three to four months" and calls for "shifts in the armed forces and carabineros in order to strengthen the constitutionalist sector." After his escape from Chile in September, Garcés wrote that on June 6 Allende told the leaders of the UP coalition that an insurrection would take place within three months unless he called a plebiscite—a move they vetoed. A post-coup interview with a retired air force general also indicates that the air force began in June to plan for a coup scheduled to take place before the middle of September.¹⁸

Allende's speech to the Popular Unity Federation congress in mid-June was devoted to a denunciation of the rapid expansion of the black market. Earlier in the month, *Ercilla* had estimated that sixty thousand people were now working full-time in the black market and that 35 percent of the national income was being spent or earned there.¹⁹ Until 1973, workers in refrigerator or textile plants whose contracts permitted them each year to buy specified items of their plant's products could make a small fortune reselling them on the black market. Peasants in the "reformed" areas of agriculture received a guaranteed minimum wage but now devoted most of their energies to production for the black market. A new profession appeared, that of the *colero*, made up of those who spent all their time in lines (*colas*) waiting to purchase a scarce item for resale. (Many domestic servants found this new occupation attractive, and a maid shortage ensued in middle- and upper-class areas.) The size of the black market affected government income adversely since sales taxes of 18 percent, a major tax resource, were not collected on these transactions. It also had an effect on the government's program of income redistribution, since it enriched the black marketeers and increased consumption by upper- and middle-income groups, but undermined the effort to raise the living standards of the poor. Since January the government had concentrated its price control and distribution efforts on a limited number of basic items in order to maintain the living standards and purchasing power of the lowest income groups, which had already been seriously harmed in 1972 by the fact that food prices had increased far in excess of the government price index figure. From a political point of view the government's price policy was calculated to maintain and solidify the support of the lowest income groups while at the same time attempting to put a brake upon inflationary wage increases. The government's firmness in the face of the El Teniente demands was part of this policy, but it had led instead to a considerable increase in social and political tensions.

In Santiago, those tensions were increased by the presence of several thousand workers from El Teniente who had accompanied their leaders for

the discussions with President Allende and were housed in the central building of the Catholic University. On June 21, the Central Workers Confederation (CUT) called a mass demonstration of worker support for the government. In reply, the opposition-controlled peasant, student, professional, and worker groups called their own twenty-four-hour strike and urged their sympathizers to stay indoors to avoid violence. A crowd estimated by the progovernment press at between 500,000 and 1 million (*The New York Times* estimated it at 100,000) gathered to hear President Allende speak—while bombs exploded outside the Socialist Party headquarters, the Cuban embassy, and the government television station. Two days earlier, Allende had told the nation that “subversion is under way and the order of the state is in danger.” Now he announced that a new plan had been developed to fight inflation, and he referred to the concern of the government to provide adequately for the needs of the armed forces. The latter reference was an allusion to a bill which the government was preparing granting raises to the armed forces at the very time that it was urging other sectors to restrain their wage demands. The raise was felt to be necessary since there were indications of military discontent, and it was becoming increasingly clear that both the economic situation and the threat of military action against the government would soon make it necessary to attempt again to involve the military in the cabinet. Negotiations were begun, and the progovernment press, as well as speakers at the Popular Unity Congress, spoke of the desirability of military involvement. Allende seems to have seen this as the only way to strengthen his political position in view of the perceptible hardening of the position of the Christian Democrats.²⁰

The government also took steps against the right. In his speech at the June 21 rally, Allende announced that he was initiating the necessary legal steps to outlaw the right-wing organization *Patria y Libertad*, and the Ministry of the Interior attempted to compel *El Mercurio* to cease publication for six days because it had accepted an advertisement from the National Party which asserted that Allende had “nullified his presidential mandate because of the illegitimate exercise of his power. . . . No one is obliged in law or morality to obey a government which is no longer legitimate.” The Court of Appeals revoked the minister’s action, arguing that the party, not *El Mercurio*, should be sanctioned, but the newspaper was not published on June 22.

First Military Revolt

During the last week of June, the Allende government put down the first attempt at a military coup since it had taken power. Never a serious threat to the existence of the government, it nevertheless gravely aggra-

vated an already tense political situation. On the evening of June 26, Military Intelligence reported a plot against the government centered in the Second Armored Regiment, whose barracks were located to the south of the center of Santiago. A captain in the regiment who was an alleged organizer of the plot was arrested on June 27 and detained in a cell in the basement of the Ministry of Defense, opposite La Moneda.

On June 27, after a meeting of the Council of Generals had voted 18 to 6 against his recommendation that the military rejoin the government, the commander-in-chief of the army, General Carlos Prats, was involved in a strange incident while driving into the center of the city. Alejandrina Cox, a middle-aged woman, stuck her tongue out at him as she passed his car, whereupon the general drew his revolver and fired two shots at her, one of which struck her car door. The opposition, which was not fond of Prats because of his support for the Allende government, denounced his violent response to such a trivial incident, while the government argued that Prats was only trying to defend himself from a possible repetition of the Schneider assassination of 1970. The weakness of this explanation (Prats himself never asserted it) produced a skeptical reaction on the following day, when General Mario Sepúlveda held a press conference to announce that the military forces had knowledge of a plot to overthrow the government involving both civilians and lower-level military men. A similar reaction greeted the Minister of Defense on the evening of June 28, when he spoke to the Senate on the same topic. The following morning, the coup attempt took place.²¹

According to the official version issued subsequently by the Chilean army, two officers of the Second Armored Regiment had been in contact earlier with the leaders of the extreme right-wing movement, *Patria y Libertad*, and had planned an uprising on June 27 involving the seizure of President Allende at his residence in the Barrio Alto as well as the occupation of the presidential palace in the center of town.²² The rightists claimed the support of three army divisions in other parts of the country, as well as of the adherents of their movement throughout the country. However, on June 26 *Patria y Libertad* called one of the officers to tell him that the scheduled coup had been discovered. When a captain of the regiment was arrested and imprisoned in the Defense Ministry the next day and Colonel Roberto Souper, the regimental commander, was told that he was to be relieved of his command, the remaining officers decided to carry out a rescue operation and to seize the palace as in the original plan. At 8:45 A.M. on June 29, three combat groups of tanks and armored cars left the barracks. A few minutes later they arrived at the Defense Ministry and surrounded the presidential palace, firing in all directions. The insurgents freed the arrested officer from the Defense Ministry but were not able to seize the presidential palace, which was defended by the palace guard.

General Prats was informed immediately of the uprising, and he ordered the other army units stationed in Santiago to put down the revolt and to seize the Second Armored Regiment barracks. (In suppressing the coup, Prats personally commanded the Tacna Regiment, which had supported the 1969 coup attempt led by General Roberto Viaux. Since the 1969 coup attempt was referred to as the "Tacnazo," the 1973 tank uprising was subsequently dubbed the "Tancazo.") By 11 A.M. Prats had arrived at the center of town, and after about a half-hour of negotiations he secured the surrender of most of the insurgents. Four tanks and armored cars escaped and returned to the barracks headquarters, where negotiations were going on for its surrender to the Tacna Regiment. (One tank had to stop at a service station for gasoline on the way!) According to the official account, the accidental discharge of an artillery piece by one of the defenders in the barracks led to generalized firing in which three soldiers were killed. (After the September coup the number was put at "a little more than ten.") Rumors circulated subsequently that as many as eighty had died in the occupation of the barracks, but military censorship prevented further investigation of those figures. The official figures listed twenty-two killed and fifty wounded, most of them civilians hit by flying bullets. By early afternoon the total surrender of the regiment had been achieved.

The part of the plot which involved the capture of President Allende had never been implemented, and as soon as the firing began around the presidential palace Allende was informed by telephone by Under-Secretary of the Interior Daniel Vergara. Vergara indicated that the carabineros who formed the palace guard were determined to resist. Allende then went on the air from his residence to inform the country of the uprising and to call on the workers to assemble at four or five central locations to defend the government. Allende was then informed that the military commanders and the carabineros had remained loyal to him, and two battalions and six armored cars were sent to defend him. Allende then spoke to the country a second time in a statement which was recorded and continually rebroadcast during the day. He described the uprising as organized by a "small group of rebellious military men" in the Second Armored Regiment and assured the Chileans of the continued loyalty to him of the armed forces, describing the efforts of General Prats to suppress the revolt. Allende declared that he was going to the scene of the uprising, but meanwhile, he said, "I call on the people to take over all the industries and enterprises, and to be prepared to go to the center of the city, but not as victims—to go to the streets—but not to be machine-gunned—to act with prudence with whatever material they have at hand. . . . If the coup comes, the people will have arms—but I am confident that the armed forces are loyal to the government." He then listed the units that were loyal to the government and reemphasized the fact that only one regiment had rebelled. One hour later, after the revolt had been put down, the president left his

residence for the presidential palace, escorted by three armored cars and his personal bodyguard. When he arrived at 11:45 A.M., occasional sniper firing was still being heard.

A military court took jurisdiction over the prosecution of the rebels, and seven officers and two civilians were held incommunicado. Military censorship was imposed on the newspapers for several days, and a film taken by a Swedish cameraman of his own death—as he was shot by a soldier—was prohibited from appearing in Santiago theaters and newspapers. When asked why there had been so many casualties compared with earlier cases which had been handled by the carabineros, General Augusto Pinochet, then army chief of staff, replied prophetically, "When the army comes out, it is to kill."

Popular Power

The president of the Central Workers Confederation (CUT) also went on the air to call for worker occupations of factories and agricultural centers, "for as long as the CUT so directs." In a single day, the number of companies taken over by the government nearly doubled, rising from 282 to 526. The CUT support for worker takeovers seemed to indicate an attempt by the union organization—and the Communist Party which dominated it—to control and direct a movement that had been inspired by its enemy on the far left, the MIR. The industrial belts (*cordones*) and communal commands which had sprung up more or less spontaneously at the time of the October strike as coordinating groups in various industrial centers around Santiago achieved new importance, as many more factories were taken over. New *cordones* were established in areas where they had not existed, and the power of the older ones was increased as more factories were occupied. This was useful to the government to demonstrate the kind of resistance that a more serious coup attempt would provoke. However, it also created new problems, since production declined sharply after the takeovers, new force was given to the opposition's insistence that the expansion of state control of industry should be carried out through legal and constitutional channels, and the quasi-spontaneous worker occupations seemed to be creating a center of power which was a possible rival to the government. Allende's own ambiguous attitude to the occupations, which he had encouraged when the limited extent and easy defeat of the insurrectionists were not clear, was expressed in his speech to the rally of support for the government on the evening of June 29. He called upon the "comrade workers of Santiago" to "organize and create *el poder popular* [popular power], but not against the government or independent from it, for the government is the basic instrument which the workers have to advance in the revolutionary process."

In the same speech Allende denounced the cowardice of the leaders of

the right-wing Patria y Libertad, five of whom (including Pablo Rodriguez, its chief) had received asylum in the Ecuadorian embassy late in the afternoon. They admitted that they had attempted to overthrow the government, "together with a heroic unit of our army," but aside from lamenting the lack of support from other units "who had previously manifested their support" they did not explain why the coup had been so easily suppressed and had not involved any attempt to capture the president. (Lacking more evidence, the explanation in the official army statement that the coup had been scheduled for June 27 and then called off seems persuasive.) More Patria y Libertad leaders sought asylum in the next few days, but the organization did not cease to function. A week later the second in command of the organization, Roberto Thieme, who had appeared in Argentina in May after earlier arranging a faked death in an airplane crash in the Pacific, made a clandestine return to Chile. Appearing on the Catholic University television station, he announced that the organization was going underground and was now committed to the forcible overthrow of the Allende government.

It does not seem to have been a direct result of the coup attempt, but the following day it was announced that the El Teniente strike had been settled and the copper workers would return to work on Monday, July 2. It was agreed that they would receive a "productivity bonus" in lieu of the wage increases they had been demanding. Since the bonuses were given to all workers regardless of productivity, they amounted to a wage increase, but since they were ostensibly related to productivity, a principle that was important to the government (that of tying wages to output) had been established—although at great cost in copper output.

On the day following the uprising, Allende requested that the Congress grant him state-of-siege powers for thirty days. These powers, which included limits on press freedom and freedom of assembly and the authority to place people under house arrest, were viewed by the opposition-dominated Congress as an attempt to use the coup as an excuse to secure a blank check to move against the opponents of the government without any evidence that they were violating the law. It was immediately clear that the Congress would not grant Allende's request, and it was rejected in the Chamber of Deputies by a vote of 82 to 51.

On July 8 the presidents of the two houses of the legislature also issued a joint statement denouncing the establishment of "popular power," which they said amounted to the de facto creation of a "parallel army in which numerous foreigners are involved."²³

Cabinet Restructuring

Allende now resumed conversations with the military leadership concerning their possible entry into a new cabinet. After several days in

which it was expected that a cabinet with military participation would be announced, the president stated that for reasons similar to those which had motivated their departure from the cabinet on March 27—their desire "to avoid being involved in political contingencies . . . and to preserve their unity"—the military would not enter the cabinet. The declaration naturally gave rise to speculation about divisions among the military and the conditions they had set for possible entry.²⁴ The military commanders issued a joint declaration reaffirming their respect for "the constitution which governs us" and for their own character as "nonpolitical [*no deliberantes*] institutions." Nothing was more apparent in the evolution of Chilean politics since mid-1972 than that the armed forces had by then become a very important "deliberating" force.

In a further attempt to broaden the base of political support for his government, Allende made efforts to include in the new cabinet well-known Chilean political personalities who were not directly affiliated with the Popular Unity coalition. He was reported to have approached Felipe Herrera, former head of the Interamerican Development Bank, and Raúl Rettig, a former Radical leader then ambassador to Brazil, who both declined. Allende's most important overture, however, was to the rector of the Catholic University, Fernando Castillo Velasco. The brother of the leading ideologist of the Christian Democrats, but related to Allende through his daughter's marriage to the president's nephew, Castillo seemed an ideal person to reopen links to the Christian Democrats and was personally disposed to do so. However, as a PDC member, Castillo consulted with the Christian Democratic leadership and was told that he could not participate, since a Christian Democratic presence in the cabinet, however indirect, would require that the government fulfill a number of conditions. As outlined by the party in succeeding weeks, those conditions included enforcement of the Arms Control Law adopted in November 1972, adoption of the disputed constitutional amendment defining the three areas of property, and return of the enterprises which had been seized by the workers unless they were within the areas defined by that amendment.

After a week of negotiation, a new cabinet was announced made up entirely of members of the Popular Unity coalition. The principal changes in its composition involved the replacement of those members who were being impeached by the Congress. It was an indication of Allende's desire not to antagonize the opposition that he removed the impeached ministers entirely rather than shifting them to other posts as he had on several previous occasions. The same moderation was shown in his appointment of Carlos Briones to the Interior Ministry since, although a Socialist, Briones was known as a moderate and a legalist who had good relations with the opposition.

The Christian Democrats reacted to the new cabinet by lamenting the absence of military participation. Patricio Aylwin, the party president,

issued a statement that "in present circumstances, the best guarantee for the reestablishment of democracy would have been the institutional incorporation of the armed forces in the government with effective power to carry out the corrections that are indispensable to assure the rule of law and of the constitution." The party itself issued a statement accusing the government of attempting to set up an armed militia by distributing arms in the seized factories and the cordones industriales. "The establishment of this de facto 'people's power' with the evident participation of state authorities is incompatible with the survival of the 'institutional power' of law established by the constitution."

As usual, there were two possible interpretations of the Christian Democrats' position. Recalling that the 1971 military coup in Bolivia by Hugo Banzer was precipitated by the establishment of a popular assembly and militia by the leftist government of Juan José Torres, the Popular Unity forces saw the Christian Democratic campaign as an attempt to persuade the military of the need for a coup before a parallel army was created and consolidated by the left. The opposition, on the other hand, argued that unless the military continued to have a monopoly on the use of force, both sides would accelerate their preparations for an inevitable armed confrontation. (Visiting Chile at this time, I was astounded at the widespread acquisition of arms by both pro- and antigovernment Chileans.)

Here as elsewhere, the Christian Democratic position seemed to be echoed in the position of the Communist Party. While the Communists supported the right of the workers to adopt "security measures in the face of the recent attempt at a coup and to maintain those measures as a precaution," it declared, "We support and will continue to support the absolutely professional character of our armed forces." The party intensified the campaign against the threat of civil war that it had already initiated and called for a dialogue between the government and the opposition.

Political Rapprochement: Attempts and Obstacles

The Communists were able to quote a declaration of the Catholic bishops of Chile issued on the feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, the patroness of Chile, which called for a "political truce" and a dialogue on how to attain peace with justice in Chile, to be initiated in conditions of "spiritual and physical disarmament." A similar statement was issued by another group which also conceived of itself as a bridge between the two sides—the rectors of the four private universities of Chile. The Allende government affirmed its desire for dialogue. The new interior minister declared that most of the occupied industries would be returned after agreements between the owners and the workers that an important part of their production

would be supplied to the state, and Allende stated that in Chile "neither the military nor the armed people will take power, for either situation would lead to civil war."

The delicate negotiations for a meeting between the Christian Democratic leaders and the Allende government were set back when Aylwin declared that he would not negotiate with "a pistol leveled at my chest," a statement that Allende labeled as "insolent." The dialogue finally was initiated at the end of July, but by then a number of changes had taken place in the political picture. These included a report that the Allende forces had "stolen" more than 200,000 votes in the March congressional elections, the fusion of three opposition parties, the beginning of another nationwide strike by private truckers and other *gremios*, and Chile's third important political assassination in three years.

Electoral Fraud?

On July 18, *El Mercurio* published a report on research being carried out in the Faculty of Law of the Catholic University which purported to demonstrate a massive electoral fraud involving more than 200,000 votes in the March elections. The report, described as preliminary, was published by the dean of the Law School over the objections of the rector, Fernando Castillo. It argued, first, that the conduct of the Chilean electorate in the March elections seemed strangely out of line with all its previous known behavior. Opinion polls, the rising inflation, and the pattern of by-elections since mid-1971 had shown a steady decline in support for the government. This decline seemed to indicate the likelihood of only about a 35 percent vote in favor of Popular Unity rather than the 43 percent it received. Further investigation of the electoral data indicated a surprising number of new registrants for the 1973 elections—820,000 new voters since November 1970. If, the report said, the likely number of new registrants among citizens eighteen to twenty-one years of age (420,000) and illiterates (75,000) enfranchised in 1970 was added to the likely number of late registrants over twenty-one (75,000), minus the registered voters who had died during the same period and were eliminated from the electoral registration lists (70,000) the result was a figure of 500,000 new voters—far below the 820,000 new registrants since 1970 or the 750,000 since the 1971 municipal elections. The report then compared the new registration figures in the various senatorial districts (*agrupaciones*) in Chile and found that in the Tenth District, where no senator was up for election in March, registration had only increased 18 percent, while in the Sixth and Eighth Districts, where there were senatorial contests, there were increases of 33 percent and 37 percent. The report listed the various ways in which it was possible to register more than once and cited specific cases of fraud in Santiago and Coquimbo which it proved by demonstrating that the numbers of the identity cards

cited did not belong to the voters in question. It also gave examples of two communes near Coquimbo with large increases in electoral registration where the new registrants voted for the government in proportions far exceeding the older voters. (It is possible to determine how new registrants vote in Chile because additional voting places are established when earlier voter lists are filled.) The report concluded: "In the March parliamentary elections, an electoral fraud of major proportions took place. Up to this point, it appears to have involved between 200,000 and 300,000 illegal votes. . . . Our electoral system has permitted a gigantic fraud to be carried out, and there is no guarantee that it will not be repeated in future elections."²⁵

It was typical of the state of opinion in Chile that the report was immediately accepted as conclusive by all sectors of the opposition and rejected by progovernment spokesmen as yet another maneuver to promote a military coup. The Congress appointed a special committee composed of five Christian Democrats, three Socialists, two Communists, and three members of the National Party, but no one raised some obvious questions about the report. Why, for instance, was not the Institute of Political Science of the Catholic University consulted in the preparation of the report? (The answer seemed to be that the institute was made up of professional political scientists who might raise questions about the methodology and the appropriateness of the preliminary release of the study.) Why had the study not listed among the possible new voters those twenty-one to twenty-four years of age, who had been too young to register in 1970? Assuming that they were roughly equivalent in numbers to the estimate of new voters in the group aged eighteen to twenty-one, the missing 200,000 to 300,000 voters could be found right there. And would not the false registration of 300,000 voters by one side in a highly polarized political situation have come to light earlier, even if, as the opposition assumed, the Communist Party had carried out the operation in utmost secrecy?

Creation of the Social Democratic Federation

Two days after the release of the report, the Left Radical Party (PIR) held a convention in Santiago. Representatives of the Radical Democrats and of the minuscule National Democratic Party (PADENA) were invited, with a view to uniting the three small parties into a single Social Democratic Party which would fill the vacuum left by the increasingly Marxist orientation of the Radical Party and recoup its loss in popular support since its participation in the Popular Unity government. In addition, the organizers of the meeting invited Senator Patricio Aylwin, the head of the Christian Democratic Party, to speak at the opening session. It was a mark of the increasing cooperation among opposition groups that his speech,

which recounted past errors committed by both groups, received warm applause. On the last day of the convention, procedures were initiated for the registration of the Social Democratic Federation as a new political entity which combined the Left Radicals who had departed from the official Radical Party in 1971, the more conservative Democratic Radicals who had left or been expelled in 1969, and the tiny remnant of the National Democrats (PADENA) into what they hoped would be a center-left reformist party in roughly the same position on the ideological spectrum that the Radicals had occupied before their leftward movement in the late 1960s. Given the increasingly secular character of the Christian Democrats and the decline in importance of the religious issue in Chilean politics, it was still doubtful whether the new group could successfully compete with the Christian Democrats, but it was clear that the bitter enmity which had characterized the relations between the Christian Democrats and the Radicals in the 1960s was totally absent from the relations between the PDC and the Social Democrats.

The Role of the Gremios

Too much stress should not be placed upon the shifts in attitudes and alliances among the political parties and professional politicians. Even before the strike of October 1972, independent political power had been acquired by the organized interest-group associations, trade unions, and peasant groups. Described generically as the *gremios*, most of these associations were strongly opposed to the Allende government, although the top leadership of the Central Workers Confederation (CUT) was progovernment, and the government had encouraged the formation of a Patriotic Front of Professionals and Technicians to support its policies. The peasants were divided into pro- and antigovernment groups, and the government's 1970 attempt to establish a national peasant confederation had run out of steam when it became clear that the group was likely to be dominated by opposition forces. The other groups—doctors, dentists, lawyers, airline pilots, small businessmen and shopkeepers, and, since May 1972, the trade union organization of Santiago province—were opposed to the government and since October 1972 had been coordinating their policies with one another. Most strongly opposed of all were the small truck owners, and since October their leader, Leon Vilarín, had been an important political leader in his own right. (After the March 1973 elections the CIA proposed that the *gremios*, including the truckers, receive additional support, but Ambassador Davis and the U.S. State Department opposed the proposal on the grounds that the groups were known to favor military intervention. On August 20, the Forty Committee approved a grant of \$1 million to opposition parties and interest groups contingent on ambassadorial approval. A specific proposal to provide \$25,000 to the truckers

was not approved, although they may have received part of the funds given earlier to other organizations and parties.²⁶)

As the October strike had demonstrated, the power of the truck drivers was based on Chile's dependence on truck transportation for its supplies of food and fuel. As in other countries, the drivers were fiercely independent, and it was the announcement of an attempt to establish a government-owned trucking agency that set off the October strike in the first place. Part of the settlement of that strike had involved a promise to the private truckers that they would receive spare parts, tires, and so on, the lack of which the truckers had attributed to the government's desire to force them out of business. Those parts had been slow in coming, and an increasing number of trucks were immobilized for this reason.²⁷ By July the truckers had become exasperated with the delays, and they began to threaten a strike. At midnight on July 25, the National Truck Owners Confederation began an indefinite walkout which, given the cooperation among the various *gremios*, threatened to escalate into a stoppage on the scale of October's strike—this time more serious in its effects because reserve supplies had not yet been built up again.

Third Assassination

The political situation was further worsened a day later, when Chile experienced its third major political assassination since Allende's election. On the night of July 26, on his return from a reception at the Cuban embassy, the president's naval aide-de-camp, Commander Arturo Araya Peters, was assassinated on the second-floor balcony of his home. Allende deplored the act and appointed a special investigating committee headed by an air force general. In the investigation which followed, two suspects were detained. One of them gave himself up the day after the assassination and claimed to have been involved with a leftist group which planned to kidnap Araya; the other, arrested subsequently, was an active member of a far-right group. Roberto Thieme, the leader of the underground Patria y Libertad organization, immediately disclaimed all responsibility for the act. However, the assassination was followed by terrorist acts all over Chile which appeared to be organized by the extreme right, and the progovernment press argued that the right extremists were responsible for the assassination as well. The opposition replied that the MIR and similar leftist groups might equally well have carried out the act in order to sabotage the impending conversations between the Christian Democrats and President Allende, and they cited taped radio conversations to prove that Cuban agents were in the street outside Araya's house when he was killed. Both left and right groups appear to have been near Araya's house, and a military investigating commission appointed by President Allende rejected attempts by the government to place all the blame on the right, although it subse-

quently charged a member of Patria y Libertad with being the "material author" of the assassination. (Many accounts of the shooting noted that the naval aide emerged on his balcony with an automatic rifle and began shooting after an explosion had taken place in the street. Silhouetted against the light of the house, he thus presented a perfect target for a gunman in the darkness.)

The assassination has never been satisfactorily explained. The left maintained that Araya was killed by right-wing conspirators who wished to remove a pro-Allende officer scheduled to return to the navy general staff in September. The right said that he was assassinated because as Allende's aide "he knew too much" and was about to denounce government efforts to subvert the military. Both explanations seem possible; neither is fully convincing, although the theory of the left seems somewhat more plausible.

Allende-Aylwin Dialogue

On Monday, July 30, the long-awaited conversations between Allende and the president and vice-president of the Christian Democrats finally took place. Carried out in an atmosphere of cordiality and civility, they covered the four principal points that the Christian Democrats had cited as the bases for agreement: disarmament of paramilitary groups, promulgation of the Hamilton-Fuentealba amendment on the three areas (to which the Moreno amendment on small and medium-sized agriculture was added since the Congress had voted down by a majority, but not two-thirds, the president's vetoes of that document), return of the industries occupied on June 29, and strengthening of the institutional and legal order through military participation in the cabinet.

On the issue of disarmament, there was no disagreement. Allende agreed that the military forces should have a monopoly on arms and that the Arms Control Law should be enforced. More generally, he agreed that constitutionalism, legal procedures, and personal freedom were to be maintained. Allende indicated that he was willing to promulgate the constitutional amendments proposed by the Christian Democratic senators on the condition that the Congress first add another which provided that presidential vetoes of constitutional amendments could henceforth be overridden only by a two-thirds vote of the Congress. This would rectify in the executive's favor the ambiguity of the 1970 constitutional reform which had provoked so much controversy. Senator Aylwin replied that he could not accept promulgation on such conditions or expect that the congressional majority would give up what it regarded as its rightful prerogatives.

On the issue of the occupied industries, Allende noted that a few were already being returned to their owners, but allegedly answered, "We cannot expel the workers from the industries they have seized for they are the

support of the government—the sole support, along with the armed forces. . . . I have 100,000 workers who are ready to defend the government and I cannot give up the only thing that supports me.”²⁸ On the participation of the armed forces in the cabinet, Allende did not rule out military participation, but he added that he believed in bringing in the military as institutional representatives rather than on an individual basis and had made attempts along these lines earlier in the month. On these questions—as well as others, such as the control of the mass media, the black market, and problems of production and distribution—Allende proposed the creation of special committees to work out a set of joint agreements.

Following the conversations, the president of the Christian Democrats, Senator Patricio Aylwin, consulted with his party and sent a lengthy letter to Allende which reviewed the positions of both sides and reasserted to Allende his party’s belief that “you would reinforce your constitutional authority and preserve the institutional stability of the Republic if you would establish a cabinet with the institutional participation of the armed forces with sufficient power at the upper and middle levels to assure effective implementation of your decisions within the framework of the constitution and laws.”²⁹ The letter said that the establishment of study commissions on the problems listed by Allende would make it impossible to arrive at an agreement, and in exchange for the promulgation of the constitutional amendments it offered to vote another amendment guaranteeing that the amendment process could not be used to reduce the powers of the president. It concluded that the conversations had arrived at an impasse and that it seemed useless to continue them.

After the 1973 coup the military revealed that if an agreement had emerged from the conversations, the subsequent history of Chile would have been different. Even Fidel Castro recognized the importance of the dialogue in a letter to Allende sent on July 29 with two prominent Cubans, Vice-Premier Carlos Rafael Rodriguez and Manuel Pineiro, head of the Cuban secret police. (The exact nature of the Cubans’ mission to Chile is still unclear. After the coup the junta claimed it was to assist in preparations for a violent takeover.) Castro’s letter referred to the assassination of the naval aide, the initiation of the truckers’ strike, and the impending dialogue with the Christian Democrats. He sympathized with Allende in “your desire to gain time, improve the relation of forces in case the struggle breaks out, and if possible, find a way to allow the revolutionary process to move forward without civil conflict and demonstrate to history that you are not responsible for what may occur.” He reminded Allende that if the PDC demanded a “price which is impossible for Popular Unity and the Revolution to pay” he should not forget the “formidable force of the Chilean working class,” which at his call would “decide the destiny of Chile once and for all.” In a prophetic sentence, Castro encouraged Al-

lende to resist the pressures of the opposition. “Your decision to defend the process with firmness and honor even at the cost of your own life . . . will draw all forces capable of fighting to your side.”³⁰

Whose fault was it that the dialogue did not succeed? Aylwin insisted that real progress was made in the initial conversations on July 31, but that after a break in the discussions to consult with the other members of the Popular Unity coalition, Allende returned with his unacceptable study commission proposal. Something similar also happened in the case of the Christian Democrats, since when Aylwin consulted with his party after one day of discussions, it simply announced that the dialogue was over and initiated the exchange of letters. On August 17, Allende made a final effort to revive the dialogue when he invited Aylwin to secret conversations at the residence of Cardinal Silva, but no progress was made in reaching an agreement, although informal negotiations on the matters in dispute with Aylwin and other Christian Democrats were continued by Carlos Briones in Allende’s name.³¹

The “National Security” Cabinet

The Christian Democratic suspicion of Allende’s delaying tactics was increased by a series of moves involving the commanders of the armed forces. Allende had already used the absence of the commander of the national police during the June 29 uprising as an excuse to remove him, but thus far he had made no attempt to interfere with promotion on the basis of seniority and the recommendations of the top leadership of each of the services.

On August 6, instead of waiting for the annual meeting of the top commanders in September which would decide on promotions and retirements, Allende used his presidential powers to retire the air force generals who were second and fourth in seniority (Generals German Stuardo and Augustin Rodriguez). He apparently did so in order to clear the way for the general who was fifth in seniority (General Carlos von Schowen) who, he believed, was more sympathetic to his government. Allende then once more made efforts to secure institutional participation by the military in the cabinet. This time, with the aid of General Carlos Prats, he succeeded.

On August 9, what Allende called the “national security” cabinet was sworn in. General Prats was appointed defense minister, a departure from the Chilean tradition of civilian control of the military, but an important basis for any operation to advance military men who were favorable to Allende and to retire those opposed. Air Force General César Ruiz took over the Ministry of Public Works and Transport, which was charged with settling the truckers’ strike. The national police (carabineros) were involved institutionally for the first time with the appointment of General

Sepúlveda to the largely symbolic post of minister of lands and colonization. The navy was represented by Admiral Raúl Montero in the key Finance Ministry. In this position, he would be responsible for the recommendation of the wage readjustment promised for the national holidays in September, and for the preparation of a new budget at a time when the government deficit combined with the losses in the nationalized industries was likely to reach half a trillion escudos for 1973.³²

The entrance of the military men into the cabinet—without control of the vital Interior Ministry (because of Socialist Party opposition, Carlos Briones, known for his interest in arriving at an agreement with the Christian Democrats, was removed from that ministry) and without the influence over lower levels in the ministries that they had earlier demanded—is puzzling, except as a final effort by the top commanders, especially General Prats, to save Chilean “institutionality.”

Almost coincident with its entrance into the cabinet, the navy became involved in a conflict with the left wing of the Allende coalition. On August 7 naval intelligence announced the discovery of a plot to carry out an enlisted men’s revolt on August 11 in Valparaíso and Talcahuano near Concepción. Forty-three sailors were arrested in connection with the plot. The navy accused Socialist Senator Carlos Altamirano and MAPU Deputy Oscar Garretón, along with Miguel Enriquez of the MIR, of being “intellectual authors” of the revolt and demanded that the immunity of the two members of Congress be lifted. In early September, Altamirano admitted that he had encouraged navy men to resist their insurrectionary officers. Similar efforts by the left to infiltrate the air force were the subject of an extensive public trial in mid-1974.

After the coup, the junta claimed that the Socialists had also been preparing files on the political orientations of military officers and units and were developing elaborate plans to neutralize the military units around Santiago. The Unidad Popular parties were also said to have initiated a program of military training for their followers at this time. In judgments about responsibility for the breakdown of constitutionalism in Chile, chronology is an important factor—who began arming when and why. The opposition can point to the importation of arms from Cuba in March 1972 and to Allende’s mendacity about the contents of the crates containing them as an indication that the Allende government had already begun to prepare for an armed confrontation. Supporters of Allende cite a *New York Times* interview (September 27, 1973) with Chilean army colonels who said they decided on a coup in October 1972, or to General Pinochet’s later admission that the general staff decided in April 1972 that a peaceful solution to the political impasse was impossible. On the other side, the White Book contains detailed descriptions of military preparations by the Popular Unity

parties. It indicates that MAPU began arms training at the end of December 1972, and that the leaders of the Radical Party approved a “war plan” on July 5, 1973.³³ The MIR, of course, had been organized on a paramilitary basis from the beginning, and the 1970 establishment by the Socialist and Communist parties of the Elmo Catalán and Ramona Parra brigades was what had first produced the demand in Congress for the Arms Control Law adopted in October 1972.

The arming was not restricted to the left. The right-wing Patria y Libertad had admitted playing a part in the June 29 tank regiment revolt and in July had announced that it was going underground in order to engage in acts of violence against the Allende government. Indeed, by mid-1973, everyone in Chile seemed to be arming himself. Peaceful middle-class neighborhoods had been organized through *juntas de vecinos* (neighborhood committees) which now took on a new vitality and began to develop plans for self-defense and for concealment of opposition political leaders. On the other side, the JAP committees became the basis for the establishment of a progovernment network in the lower-class areas, and since October the MIR had been organizing the industrial areas and some of the settlements into paragovernmental industrial belts to control highway access to the cities. The MIR also began to use some left-controlled factories to manufacture and distribute arms.³⁴

By August 1973, Chile had become an armed camp—and the armed forces were well aware of the extent of the distribution of weapons because of the arms searches they had been carrying out all over Chile since the beginning of July. The searches, authorized under the Arms Control Law of October 1972, involved suspected arms caches of both left and right, but most frequently those of the left. The specific results of the arms searches were never published, but they reinforced the widely repeated comment heard on both sides: “Things cannot continue this way.” Indeed, the threat to the military’s monopoly of the instruments of coercion, now combined with attempts to subvert the hierarchy of command from below (the infiltration of the navy) and above (the replacement of the top military commanders) provided the classic scenario for a coup d’état.

Nevertheless, General Prats had been successful in persuading the other top commanders of the necessity of entering the cabinet once more in order to attempt again what had been accomplished in late 1972: a lessening of polarization and tension through the introduction of the armed forces as impartial arbiters. In August 1973, however, the armed forces were very much more politicized and polarized than in the preceding October, and the country had changed dramatically. Attitudes on both sides had hardened, and even the casual visitor could sense the tension and the feeling of impending crisis. The truckers now seemed determined to persist in

their strike until they brought the government down. Professional people who earlier had been willing to give Allende the benefit of the doubt were now fiercely opposed to the government and frightened about their own future livelihood. Their fear was intensified as the managers of the numerous firms that had been taken over on June 29 were summarily fired. As government control of distribution expanded and was used to favor those known to be sympathetic to the government, shopkeepers feared they would be driven out of business. And underlying it all were the escalation in violence, the widely publicized (and, as it turned out, exaggerated) reports of the organization and arming of the *poder popular* groups, the class hatred encouraged by the government press and radio, and the fears of the middle and lower-middle classes played upon by the opposition.³⁵

Effects of the Truckers' Strike

The first problem facing the new cabinet was the truckers' strike, now entering its third week. In Santiago, cars were limited to 10 liters (2.5 gallons) of gas, and long lines appeared at the gas pumps. Heating fuel for the Chilean winter was running out. The shortages of such staples as bread, sugar, and detergent, already a problem before the strike, now became acute. On the day on which the new cabinet was sworn in, there were one-day strikes of protest against, and support for, the government called by the shopkeepers and professionals on the one side, and the CUT on the other.

The government had the legal power to seize the idle trucks which were parked outside the major cities and guarded by the truckers, but it had been slow to do so for fear of violence. One such "requisition" did lead to violence in which opposition parliamentarians were tear-gassed by carabinieri, leading the opposition to initiate proceedings for the impeachment of the minister of the interior.

Allende warned that this might be the last chance to avoid civil war. He noted that four people had been killed since the strike had begun and that more than 215 terrorist attacks had been initiated by the extreme right, including the explosion of an important oil pipeline and attempts to sabotage the rail system. (One terrorist attack blacked out Santiago for thirty-five minutes during an Allende television speech.) He assured the military that he would not tolerate the existence of paramilitary groups and would support the principle of hierarchical command in the armed forces.³⁶

Allende expressed particular concern that the truckers' strike be ended since, as he noted, if it continued 50 percent of the nation's industry would be forced to cease production. However, hopes that Air Force General Ruiz could arrive at a quick settlement were ended when a new requisitioning

party took over more trucks two days after the cabinet took office. Ruiz disclaimed responsibility for the act, saying it had been decided by a cabinet committee. The incident led to new protests by the *gremios*, in which the wives of the truckers were particularly active. These groups occupied the Congress grounds and took over several radio stations to broadcast their grievances. By the end of the week following the naming of the new cabinet, Ruiz had resigned as minister of public works and transport (citing insufficient powers to end the strike), the truckers had defied two government ultimatums to return, most buses and taxis in Santiago were on strike, and the professional associations and shopkeepers had announced another sympathy strike for the following week. Housing construction had ceased, distribution of milk to school children was discontinued, and 500,000 industrial workers were threatened with layoffs because industries would be compelled to shut down.³⁷

When Ruiz informed Allende of his intention to resign as minister, Allende insisted that he must also resign as head of the air force. Ruiz resisted, but he finally agreed to add that his resignation carried with it "implicitly" his retirement from the air force. Allende offered the post to General Gustavo Leigh, who initially refused it, then to General von Schowen (now next in seniority and supposedly more sympathetic to the government), who also refused. The next day, Allende worked out a compromise whereby an air force brigadier general entered the cabinet and Leigh became commander in chief. The compromise, of course, infuriated Ruiz, since he had been removed on the pretext that only the air force commander in chief could be in the cabinet, and he expressed his irritation on a popular television interview program on Sunday evening.

Allende himself spent Sunday, August 19, at his vacation house just outside Santiago with Regis Debray, the French writer, as his guest. After the coup and Allende's death, Debray wrote his recollections of their conversations in "jovial, warm, relaxed" atmosphere of a winter afternoon. They discussed Allende's maneuvers with the military, and Debray had the impression that Allende enjoyed the chess game he was playing with them. Yet, Debray noted, "everyone knew that it was only to secure time or organize, to arm, to coordinate the military apparatus of the Popular Unity parties—a race against the clock which had to go on week after week." Allende was guided in this game, writes Debray, by two principles. On the one hand, he felt a

visceral rejection of civil war which, given the balance of forces, would be lost. He was not taken in by the phrase "people's power." When those on the left declared that "only the direct action of the masses will stop the coup d'état," he would reply, "How many of the

‘ masses are needed to stop a tank?’” On the other hand, he was determined not to tarnish the image which he wanted to leave to history by giving in to the military on the essentials of his program. But between these two conflicting principles, Allende refused to choose, since he thought or pretended that his two fundamental aims were not contradictory.³⁸

His refusal to recognize that these two principles were mutually exclusive contributed to his overthrow three weeks later.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

The Overthrow of Allende

The most important week in Chilean politics prior to the September 11 coup began on Monday, August 20, 1973, when a meeting of 120 air force officers with Generals Ruiz and Leigh ended at noon with a decision by Ruiz to resist his removal and remain as air force commander. Air force Hawker Hunter jets had already taken off from Santiago for bases in Concepción, where the navy, like the air force, was on alert status. In the afternoon, while air force wives demonstrated in opposition to Ruiz's resignation, Ruiz consulted with the other generals and appears finally to have yielded to a threat by General Prats to take control of the air force as minister of defense. Finally, at 7 P.M. (seven hours after the time originally scheduled for the ceremony), General Leigh was sworn in as commander of the air force.¹

On Tuesday afternoon, a large number of army officers' wives, including those of several generals, gathered at the residence of General Prats to present a letter requesting his resignation. When the police broke up the gathering with tear gas, it provoked such dissension within the armed forces that after a meeting with the council of generals on the following day at which he was outvoted, 12 to 6, General Prats decided to resign both as defense minister and as army commander. (The right-wing magazine *Qué Pasa* reported that General Pinochet had supported Prats but added that as the new army chief, Pinochet would “reflect the predominant tendency in the high command which is clearly opposed to giving political support to the Unidad Popular.”) In his letter of “irrevocable” resignation, Prats stated that he did not wish his continuation in office to disrupt “institutional discipline” or “provide a pretext for those who seek to overthrow constitutional government”—presumably an allusion to his belief that he could only continue in office by purging two-thirds of the council of generals. Two other generals who were close friends of his, the head of the Santiago garrison and the director of the military institutes, also went into retirement, and Admiral Montero gave up his cabinet post, but not his position as commander in chief of the navy. It was significant that the three army generals