



Drawings by Marek E.

# Apologists for Terror

The Chilean junta and the U.S. press

John Pollock and Torry Dickinson

It is difficult to evaluate a document intended to justify the slaughter and summary imprisonment of tens of thousands of citizens of what was one of the world's most vibrant democracies. It is hard to be impartial toward a regime that commandeered air raids on the presidential palace, oversaw the wholesale burning of books, bookstores and publishing houses, executed citizens whose crime was the possession of leftist literature and dismantled one of the most distinguished university systems in Latin America, replacing rectors with military officers and abolishing sociology and journalism departments. *Libro Blanco*, the Chilean junta's apologia for last year's coup, is issued by men who have installed a reign of terror with the professed purpose of purging the country of an entire political sector.

To account for actions rarely seen since Nazi Ger-

many one expects some extraordinary effort at justification. A "decent respect for the opinion of mankind" would seem to require some unusual effort at exculpation to render even comprehensible such monstrosities. David Hathaway, a U.S. citizen imprisoned in Chile's National Stadium for sharing an apartment with Frank Teruggi (a U.S. citizen imprisoned and killed for possessing leftist literature), gives us a clue to the mentality of those who destroyed democracy in Chile. When the soldier came to his apartment and saw Teruggi's books (Hathaway's had been shipped to the U.S. only days before), their leader exclaimed: "These books are more dangerous than guns!" Perhaps the new praetorians in Chile do believe the pen mightier than the sword and have set out to redress the imbalance. But in their *White Book on the Change of Government in Chile* the regime betrays its belief that writing for public opinion is an important accessory to the sword in the quest for legitimacy.

Three major arguments are presented in the *White Book*: First, neither Allende nor his regime were democratic because Allende lacked an absolute majority of votes and his regime did not value democracy. Second, the social costs (the junta claims 95 people were killed for political reasons during Allende's presidency) and economic dislocation caused by the Allende years were high, especially for the middle classes. Third, the military intervention was re-

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JOHN POLLOCK is Associate Director of the Latin American Institute, Rutgers University, and Assistant Professor of Sociology and Political Science at Livingston College, Rutgers. He heads the Committee on the U.S. Press and Latin America of the Latin American Studies Association. TORRY DICKINSON is a student at Livingston.

*Libro Blanco*, the explanation issued by the Chilean regime of events leading to the September, 1973, coup, will, according to Chilean officials, soon be available in English.

luctantly agreed upon only after evidence of a secret preemptive coup from the Left, the so-called "Plan Z," was discovered. Readers of recent articles published in several North American journals, including *Worldview*, have ample evidence to refute these arguments.<sup>9</sup> But, now that they turn out to be the three pillars upon which the junta seeks to rest its legitimacy, they deserve further consideration.

Allende, like all other twentieth-century presidents of Chile (with the exception of Alessandri, 1958-64), had one thing in common with Trudeau of Canada, John Kennedy of the U.S. and even Richard Nixon in 1968. They all lacked absolute majorities in their presidential elections. Yet only Allende has been called illegitimate because of it. Allende's support, moreover, rose from 36 to 44 per cent in mid-term elections in March, 1973, a rise in popularity unprecedented in Chilean history.

**D**id the Allende regime devalue democracy? Under Allende Chile had no death penalty, although it has since been resurrected by the junta. Allende tolerated neo-fascist parties, such as the Fatherland and Liberty Party, which organized, assembled publicly and openly trained many children in the use of arms in upper and upper middle-class suburbs. Under Allende the Chilean press, owned mainly by privileged interests, openly advocated the overthrow of the government and refused to print government statements, compelling Allende to buy ads in newspapers to inform the public about government activities. One has only to ask whether U.S. newspapers feel free to call for the overthrow of the U.S. Government in order to sense how few controls were placed on the Chilean press.<sup>10</sup>

The economic dislocation of the Allende years has been presented as a necessary outcome of the experiment in socialism and a sufficient justification for the coup and the present brutal repression. Economic dislocation had indeed occurred by the time of the coup, when Chile suffered perhaps the highest rate of inflation in all Latin America. It is misleading to suggest, however, that this unhappy circumstance came about as an inevitable result of implacable efforts at socialism. Such an argument ignores two very important causal factors: the overt and central role played by the U.S. Government and U.S. corporations (among which ITT was only the most blatant) to strangle the Chilean economy and thereby topple the Allende government; and the active participation of middle-class groups and occupational associations (such as merchants, doctors, pilots and truck drivers) to sabotage the economy by refusing to work and by actually attacking, and in some cases killing, those who refused to join them.

Whatever the economic problems of Allende's Popular Unity government, to cite them as justification for the military pogrom that was launched is to enter

a realm the civilized world finds repellent. It is precisely this loss of a sense of proportion that compels our rejection of the third proposition advanced by the military rulers, namely, that they reluctantly intervened only because they feared a preemptive coup from the Left labeled "Plan Z." The obvious overkill indulged by the regime, such as terrorizing crowds by random machine-gunning and killing scores of children who played in the streets a few minutes after curfew, strips the generals of their civilized masks. The evidence for "Plan Z" convinces only the junta's true believers.

The new rulers argue they have photographs of arms caches found in Allende's presidential residence and claim to have records of the classes in arms training for several hundred individuals, all taught in the same residence. The military further claims to have discovered contingency plans for some sort of national takeover by firing key generals and controlling strategic geographical positions, forcibly if need be. This plot was, they say, to have been carried out on Chile's Independence Day, September 18, thus precipitating military intervention on September 11.

**T**his evidence and its use invite several criticisms. The notion that a counter-coup was imminent cannot withstand even cursory examination. For example, army raids of factories during June, July and August did have the presumably desired effect of terrorizing workers, but they failed to turn up any sizable gun collections amassed by workers. This suggests that the working class was ill-prepared for even defensive action, much less an effort to take over the entire country. In addition, all reliable reports from Chile, including those from returned U.S. citizens, indicate that the modus operandi of Allende's government was always to educate citizens well in advance of any moves. But nothing and no one in the Left had even hinted at the possibility of a left-wing coup. Perhaps most convincing, however, is the knowledge that the Left was obviously quite ill-prepared to defend itself when the coup did come. The generals themselves were reportedly surprised to find so little resistance.

Later testimony from eyewitnesses indicates that the Left knew a *military* coup was imminent, but the explicit policy of the Left was to predict a split

<sup>9</sup>Refer to E. Bradford Burns, "Reform Gunned Down: True Verdict on Allende," *The Nation* (October 29, 1973); John Barnes, "Slaughterhouse in Santiago," *Newsweek* (October 8); Laurence Birns, "The Death of Chile," *The New York Review of Books* (November 1); Laurence Birns, "Requiem for Chile: La Moneda Is Burning," *The Village Voice* (September 20); Lawrence Stern, "Chile: The Lesson," *The Progressive* (November); and Laurence Birns, "Chile: A Bloody Fall," *Worldview* (November).

<sup>10</sup>See Gary MacEoin's forthcoming *No Peaceful Way: Chile's Struggle for Dignity* (Sheed & Ward).

in the armed forces that would delay the coup long enough to mobilize a "holding" action against it. In this light, the Left may quite logically have made contingency plans to help contain the coup of the generals. But to argue that Allende's supporters, knowing the attitude of the army, were about to launch a coup on their own is, quite simply, ridiculous.

In the final analysis it does not matter whether the stories about Allende training marksmen in his basement are true. If the tales are verified, the political atmosphere in precoup Chile clearly justified such precautions. It must be remembered that Chile's chief of the armed forces had been assassinated by the Right before Allende was even inaugurated (presumably for allowing Allende's legal assumption of the presidency). As long ago as the previous October and November, and throughout July and August, the upper middle classes, encouraging strikes by professionals, merchants and truckers and controlling over 90 per cent of the news media in Chile (and having almost exclusive access to the media outside Chile), had openly called for the overthrow—not simply the impeachment—of Allende and his government. There had been several attempts on Allende's life. The Right was openly armed and mobilizing in wealthy sectors of Santiago at the same time leftist workers were being searched for arms in the factories. The opposition-controlled congress had routinely impeached many of Allende's cabinet ministers. Finally, an attempted coup that brought tanks against the presidential palace on June 29, two and a half months before the successful coup, hardly increased Allende's sense of security. If indeed Allende was training a small group to defend himself against the growing violence of the opposition, it was not without good reason.

Extremely damaging to the generals' case is the *White Book's* claim that a leftist preemptive coup was planned only from the middle of 1973, presumably about last June or July. Yet, according to the *New York Times* (September 19), the members of the junta admit that their coup had been planned since the previous October. Such advance planning is curious indeed if their pretext for action occurred only several months before the intervention on September 11. The *White Book* will, we believe, be of little benefit to Chile's new praetorians, for it will persuade few of their good intentions and convince many of their dangerous rigidity.

Although of little value in Chile, the message of the generals is nevertheless a warning for the United States. The significant lesson of the *White Book* lies not in the quality of its arguments but in the parallels between that argument and the reporting by several major U.S. newspapers in the weeks immediately following the coup. The overriding assumption of both appears to be that, if

a government, however democratic, tries to widen significantly the distribution of economic resources and encounters financial difficulties, bloodshed and repression are regrettable but understandable in returning the country to "businesslike" normality.

The point is not that U.S. reporting on Chile was necessarily "unbalanced" in terms of a pro-or-con measurement of paragraphs or column inches. The point is that several value frameworks shared with the generals are evident in postcoup reporting and comment by correspondents, wire services and editors in the six major U.S. papers concerned with Latin American affairs: *Los Angeles Times*, *Miami Herald*, *Washington Post*, *Christian Science Monitor*, *Wall Street Journal* and *New York Times*.<sup>9</sup> In the first few weeks after the coup these papers manifested three major perspectives supporting the new dictators, perspectives unchallenged by alternative or contrary viewpoints: (1) economic and social dislocation justified the coup; (2) threats to political stability were exclusively leftist in origin and justified repression; and (3) the military was (and is) essentially trustworthy, and the appropriate supreme authority, because it is "nonpolitical," intervened reluctantly and restored "normality."

The *White Book* asserts economic deterioration as an excuse for intervention. "The Chileans—their blood and their minimum necessities—were sacrificed by Mr. Allende and by the Popular Unity government . . . not for the profit of any business enterprise, but for the physical, economic, political, social, and gigantic moral destruction [of the country]." "[T]he country was thrown into the worst economic crisis of its national life, without parallel in the modern history of the world." Perhaps inadvertently, however, the junta admits that the *gremios*, or occupational associations of the relatively powerful, were determined to sabotage the economy to bring down the government. "[The military decided to act] . . . stimulated by the state of [economic] *paralysis caused by new multiple strikes of gremios*—and by the repeated demands for President Allende to resign" (emphasis added). The junta viewed its role as that of a sanitation engineer, cleansing society of a malignancy: "[T]he economic situation continued deteriorating in a catastrophic manner . . . [so] the military requested a *cleanup* in this area."

The U.S. press made similar assumptions about the sanitizing mission of the military in removing economic chaos, ignoring the alternatives of impeachment, referendum or new elections. Although the "middle" class constitutes no more than about 30 per cent of Chile's population,

<sup>9</sup>Photocopies of news clippings on Chile and other Latin American countries from these papers are available from the monthly *Information Service on Latin America*, P.O. Box 4267, Berkeley, Calif. 94704.

the news media insisted on calling it a "majority," viewing its alienation as a legitimate pretext for a coup.<sup>o</sup> The *Monitor* claimed that "[T]he majority of Chileans were probably not sorry to see the end of the Allende regime [which] had only minority support . . . from the start" (September 14). The *Monitor* also apologized for the Chilean military on the grounds that officers had witnessed the "dramatic decline of the middle class as a result of an effort by the minority Allende government to impose irrevocable change on the majority" (September 18). William F. Buckley Jr., appearing in the *Los Angeles Times*, invoked the image of "hundreds of thousands of people demanding an end to a regime that had brought repression, poverty, inflation, chaos, and fratricidal strife" (September 19). The *New York Times* viewed the coup as an act of majority will, picturing the middle class as a "mass force" involved in "mass action" which "virtually demanded military action against the constitutionally elected government of President Allende" (September 12; see also September 13 and 30). The *Times* also hypothesized that "[I]t was the progressive monopolization of economic power by the agents of a minority coalition, coupled with the gross mismanagement of that power, which so polarized the Chilean polity that democratic institutions could not be maintained" (October 21). The *Wall Street Journal* descended to the level of yellow journalism, saying Allende surrounded himself with "hard-eyed leftists intent on absolute power" (September 12). It even implied that Allende's death, declared a suicide by the military, was somehow justifying and insincere, done "with his eye always on how history would record the events" (Everett Martin, September 25).

The second perspective shared by the junta and the U.S. press is that a threat from the Left made military intervention inevitable. According to the *White Book* the Left welcomed the destruction of its own government. "It was [not the military institutions but] the Popular Unity government . . . [which] forced the ultimate decision [to intervene]. . . . All the previous events signaled that, from the middle of 1973, the government *had known* that its absurd political economy had placed the country in a swamp without a democratic exit. . . . They [Allende and his supporters] *preferred* a desperate attempt to take over the country by force . . ." (emphasis added). This view is not new to readers of the U.S. press. Throughout Allende's incumbency our major papers emphasized threats to democracy and stability from the Left, failing to mention similar threats from the Right (threats reported widely in the foreign press).

Reporting after the coup, like that which appeared during Allende's tenure, also portrayed the threatening Left as bristling with "extremists." The *Miami Herald* reported "[I]t was an open secret that arms were being distributed to workers in an industrial

ring around Santiago by extremists . . ." (September 16). The *Herald* also expressed concern for the health of the military, urging that the "rise of extremists and armed para-military groups implicitly threatens the very existence of the armed forces" (September 23). The *Los Angeles Times* suggested that "They [officers] were alarmed by the formation of revolutionary factory militia cadres by some of the more militant groups for socialism" (September 19). The *Christian Science Monitor* was among papers which uncritically quoted the junta in its contention that an "extremist apparatus was on the verge of launching a reign of terror in Chile aimed at eliminating the nation's military leaders, opposition politicians, newspapermen, and others, to give the Marxist-leaning Allende government total control of the nation" (September 25). The *Wall Street Journal*, strongly supporting the junta's claims, reassured its readers that the junta would survive. "Armed attacks by extremists reinforced by more than 10,000 foreign revolutionaries from Cuba and other Latin countries are expected to continue for some time. But they aren't a serious threat to the junta" (Everett Martin, September 25). The same reporter: "Chile's armed forces appear to have won the battle. . . . Now the military rulers face the much tougher task of trying to win the war—that is, rebuilding this nation's shattered economy and fulfilling their promise to lead Chile toward sustained economic growth" (October 4).



The *New York Times* is thought to represent not simply one paper's opinion but the "U.S. position" abroad, and thus exercises special influence. Early reporting by the *Times* after the coup minimized the importance of right-wing activity. Papers in Europe and Mexico's equivalent of the *Times*, *Excelsior*, regularly described the new regime as "right wing" or a "dictatorship." The *Times* spoke simply of the military "junta" or "government" and on several occasions said explicitly that the re-

<sup>o</sup>Estimates of the size of the middle classes in Chile are based on interviews on October 4 and October 6, 1973, with, respectively, James Petras, author of *Politics and Social Forces in Chilean Development* (1969) and Dale Johnson, editor of *The Chilean Road to Socialism* (1973).

gime is "non-political." Not only was the *Times* loathe to speculate about the political orientation of the junta, it also took pains to deflate widespread reports of terror and mass killings. Estimates of the number killed were almost always taken from official military sources, and for the first week ran below a hundred. From the very beginning the foreign press reported deaths running into several thousands. As late as September 20, nine days after the coup, the *Times* reported repression as though it were directed mainly against foreigners in Chile. Echoing the official line, an editorial of the same day regretted that "lurid rumors of mass execution would circulate," adding that the "military leaders moved against Dr. Allende with great reluctance, and only because they feared a polarized Chile was headed for civil war" (emphasis added). This despite reliable reports of savagery and barbarism unprecedented in Chile's history, reports available from foreign news services such as Reuters and the French Press Agency, many foreign papers, the academic community and, quite nearby, the *Washington Post*. *Times* readers scarcely knew that the presidential palace, La Moneda, had been almost razed by bombs, or, as the French moderately conservative *Le Figaro* put it, "torn out by the guts" (September 17). In Colombia, Bogota's conservative *El Tiempo* lamented that a "river of blood had shipwrecked Chile" (September 17).

Toward the end of September evidence of terror and repression and the effective abolition of political parties began to receive serious attention in the *Times*, but even then it was "balanced" with items stressing the legitimate, acceptable qualities of the new rulers. Of the four editorials printed on Chile in September, three were apologies for the dictatorship and one warned that the praetorians were "Off Course in Chile." On September 22 and 26 Jonathan Kandell mentioned that Congress had been suspended, that no political rallies were allowed, that no plebiscite would be asked for when the new constitution was drafted (allowing for permanent military "participation"), that the Central Workers Confederation, Chile's largest labor group, was abolished, and that all mayors and city councilmen throughout the country were to be removed, their posts to be filled by men "appointed by the military junta." The same reporter on September 26 blithely characterized these measures as efforts to merely "transform" Chilean institutions, to engage, in their "remodeling" (September 28), and to replace all university rectors with military "delegates." As late as October 6, almost one month after the coup, no editorial opposition was voiced to the slaughter of thousands from the slums (where one-half of Santiago's population of four million lives), to the book burning, the killing of U.S. citizens Frank Teruggi and Tom Horman, or to the destruction of universities by abolishing textbooks, teaching positions and entire disciplines.

The third perspective shared by the junta and much of the U.S. press was that the coup was carried out reluctantly by a nonpolitical, patriotic military. The *White Book* states that, despite the economic deterioration, "the military continued cooperating, not with the [Allende] regime, but with the country, in a dignified, disinterested and patriotic manner." We are told the "actions of the Armed Forces cost minimal destruction and lives . . . and now the Junta is preoccupied with solving the terrible problems of all kinds which are the legacy of Allende and the Popular Unity government. Not the least of these is to seek new 'institutions' which respond to the current situation . . . and which will block absolutely the repetition in Chile of the sad days of [Allende's incumbency]" (emphasis added).

The U.S. press invited sympathy for the "reluctant" generals by emphasizing their cautious, non-political qualities, by humanizing them and by suggesting rather quickly that the situation in Chile had returned to "normal" almost immediately after the coup. In a September 12 editorial the *Los Angeles Times* emphasized Chile's tradition of a "non-political" military, and the *Monitor* underlined the "reluctance even among the military to resort to unconstitutional means to get rid of [Allende]" (September 15). The *Wall Street Journal* reported that "the military leaders are sorry they felt obliged to stage a coup, but they don't really want to be in charge of the country" (September 17). Much of our press seems to accept the notion that the military should, as a matter of course, have considered formal intervention. The newspapers appeared to view Chile's political problems as a military problem. As the *Monitor* put it: "The real problem for them [the military] was political polarization and economic chaos into which Chile was drawn as a result of the movement toward socialism" (September 14).

The U.S. press has also emphasized the sympathetic personal qualities of the new dictators. The *Miami Herald* quoted junta majordomo Pinochet: "I ascended the military hierarchy step by step, with no other ambition than to pursue my career. . . . We are a professional army" (September 17). The *Monitor* reported that "Pinochet . . . gave every indication of being disappointed he and his fellow officers felt it necessary to move against Allende" (September 20). The *New York Times* described General Pinochet as "tall and powerfully built," "quiet and businesslike," "disciplined" and "tough," and emphasized his "sense of humor" (September 15).

These reluctant, well-disciplined, concerned and virtuous men were returning the country to a "normal," "businesslike" situation. Those who continued to resist the dictators were often called "extremists" by the *Wall Street Journal* and "rebels" by the *New York Times* in the first few weeks after the coup. (Lovers of democracy who fought against dictators within their own countries were called "re-

sistance fighters" in World War II.) The *Wall Street Journal* solicited our understanding for the "thankless task of the armed forces. The discipline they will have to enforce throughout Chilean society will undoubtedly cost them some of the popularity they now enjoy among the majority of citizens" (September 25). The *Los Angeles Times* reported relief in Chile after the coup and quoted several citizens: "I'm sleeping better than I have in years"; "You feel safer when you hear the guns"; "I wish it [the dictatorship] would last forever" (October 12). The preferability of postcoup "normality" in Chile was emphasized by veteran correspondent Lewis Diuguid in a report in the *Washington Post* as late as October 21: "[T]he armed forces probably acted with majority support. . . . It may turn out that the military intervention was a substitute for civil war, forestalling large-scale death and destruction by use of violence that was cruel and arbitrary, but *limited*" (emphasis added). Terming the massacres in Chile "limited" violence, used to "forestall" "large-scale" death and destruction, is not entirely unlike "We had to destroy the village in order to save it."

But it did not have to be this way. The U.S. press had access to various materials documenting the holocaust. For example, early reporting on Chile's coup by the *Washington Post* far surpassed coverage by other major U.S. newspapers. Especially in articles written by Marilsle Simons, the *Post's* reporting was admirable for several reasons. The Allende government, the *Post* mentioned, had a clear plurality and was properly considered legitimate. Middle-class white-collar and truck owner-operators were identified by the *Post* as instigators of strikes. The *Post* early expressed concern about repressive aspects of the military regime. Allende's death was labeled as a possible murder, and forthcoming trials by court-martial of jailed civilians, considered war criminals by the regime, were treated as the disturbing news it is. Censorship of dispatches from Chile was mentioned. Considerable speculation about American corporate intervention appeared in the *Post*, with an excellent article by Lawrence Stern, along with a definition of the Nixon-Kissinger low-profile strategy, a policy of withholding economic and humanitarian credits while military assistance increased to pro-United States armed forces in Chile and elsewhere. The *Post* made reference to alternative news sources such as Reuters, Agence-France Press, *Excelsior*, Prensa Latina (a Cuban news agency) and the North American Congress on Latin America, which were employed in estimating ambiguous or conflicting information. Only the *Washington Post* mentioned the existence of Plan CENTAUR, described by Hugh Vigorena, Chile's former ambassador to Mexico, as an anti-Allende plot organized by the CIA, eventually contributing to the overthrow.

The foreign press and some exceptions in our own news media have expressed the outrage appropriate

to Chile's situation. The performance of most of our major papers, however, is itself outrageous and a disservice to the protection of human liberty. In January, 1973, months before the coup, several of us in the academy tried to relate our concern to journalists from major dailies at a conference at the Center for Inter-American Relations. The response was generally hostile.<sup>9</sup> The *Wall Street Journal* and its correspondent Everett Martin seem particularly determined to prevent a relationship of greater trust between academics and journalists. In a November 2 article on Chile the *Journal* managed to attack the competence of *The Nation*, *Newsweek* and practically every academic knowledgeable about Chile, arguing there "[is not] much that's accurate or useful in the colored accounts the U.S. academic community is currently putting out on the subject."

The national Latin American Studies Association (LASA), prompted by concern about reporting on Chile, has recently created a committee on the U.S. press and Latin America. The press has run the risk of alienating some important academics because of its unwillingness to help a genuine democracy survive in Chile while legitimizing sham democracies in other parts of the world.

Just prior to the coup Richard Fagen, Professor of Political Science at Stanford, spent eighteen months in Chile as social science consultant to the Ford Foundation. He is also president-elect of the LASA, which numbers over 1,700 professionals. Fagen described the *New York Times* coup coverage as "schizophrenic," ranging from some sensitive material by Marvin Howe to the editorials, which he described as "barbarous." "The contradictions between what the military junta says and what it does are so clearly visible," he said in an interview several weeks after the coup, "that it is a complete violation of the trust put by people in the mass media to accept the edicts and press releases of murderers as though they constituted a legitimate government." Many of us in the academy have had to ask, and would encourage others to ask, whether a press that legitimizes fascism abroad can be trusted to do a much better job at home.

<sup>9</sup>For discussion of several themes in U.S. press reporting on Chile see John Pollock, "Reporting on Chile: What the Press Leaves Out," *The Nation* (January 29, 1973); Pollock with David Eisenhower, "The New Cold War in Latin America: The U.S. Press and Chile," in *The Chilean Road to Socialism*; with Torry Dickinson and Joseph Somma, "Did Eichmann Have a Sense of Humor? The *New York Times* and Militarism in Chile," *LASA Newsletter* (December, 1973). See also Jerry W. Knudson, "Allende Falls, the Press Reacts," *Masthead* (January, 1974); Pat Chain, "Press Coverage of the Chilean Coup: The Information Gap," *CALA Newsletter* (October, 1973); Joseph P. Lyford, "The 'Times' and Latin America," Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions, 1962; and Laurence Birns, "Chile in the 'Wall Street Journal,'" *The Nation* (December 3, 1973).