

Wednesday, March 24, 1999

Pinochet's Fate About to be Announced in London

Conduct over Pinochet's Status Shows Chilean Democracy Still Doesn't Meet the Test

- *Christian Democrat-led government again assumes its traditionally favored position regarding Pinochet: on bent knees*
- *Fear of Chilean military propels President Frei and his colleagues' lack of moral courage*
- *Santiago holds that immunity obtained by seizing power through overthrowing a constitutional government is more important than cultivating emerging international legal principles that no one can massively violate human rights with impunity*
- *There is less to Chile than meets the eye*

On Wednesday, March 24, Britain's law lords will decide whether Chile's former dictator can go home to his native land or be extradited to Spain. Chile's Christian Democratic president, the president of Chile's Senate, as well as its socialist foreign minister have been arguing that what is at stake in the debate over the legal fate of Gen. Augusto Pinochet is the question of sovereign immunity of a former head of state. They have based their claim on the fact that the former dictator, who seized power by overthrowing a constitutional government in 1973 through unabated violence in which several thousand civilians were killed, and who was never elected to office, is entitled to the same privileges as a lawful head of government. Furthermore, they insist that rather than it being held in some foreign venue, Pinochet should be forthwith returned to Chile where he will be made to stand trial.

The Truth Rather Than Fiction

But no foreigner remotely familiar with the Christian Democratic Party's (PDC) sorry history of self-serving and opportunistic leaders tirelessly wrangling and deal-making for high office, and who have all too often found honor and principle to be highly fungible factors, will believe that such a trial will ever take place in Chile if Pinochet were to be returned. President Eduardo Frei, Senate president Andrés Zaldívar, as well as Foreign Minister José Miguel Insulza, a socialist, are simply providing a political cover story to mask what is really motivating their energies on the subject: an abiding fear of the Chilean armed forces, and what that unregenerate institution, which has repeatedly displayed its contempt for democracy, might do if it is forced to witness its former leader, Gen. Pinochet, humiliated before the entire world.

Pinochet was apprehended by British authorities as the result of a writ issued by Interpol, at the behest of a Spanish judge. The outstanding charge against Pinochet was that he authored the murder of a number of Spanish and other foreign nationals during the coup which he led against President Salvador Allende in 1973. Almost two decades later, after civilian authority was restored in Chile at Pinochet's sufferance, the Christian Democratic leaders of the country still defer to the old dictator's station. They do so because they were restored to power as a result of the deal worked out with Pinochet which left Chile little better than a guided democracy with a military that, almost alone in Latin America, has not been appreciably downsized. This situation will continue until the end of the century because Pinochet was given the authority to appoint members of the Senate and to equip the military with the de facto

ability to veto political initiatives on the grounds of broadly defined national security requirements.

All Hail Pinochet

In fact, the Christian Democrats owe a great deal to Pinochet because his draconian actions in the aftermath of the 1973 coup established the groundwork for the country's so-called economic miracle. Under Pinochet's authoritarian control, all power was in the hands of the dictator, who was able to deflate the economy, remove all subsidies for the poor, sell off state industries, gut trade unions of their power, muzzle the press, and operate with a court system composed mainly of his servitors. The end result of Pinochet's rule was a country which, although it traditionally had a high concentration of wealth in the hands of a few, now had an extremely marginalized lower class and a relatively huge upper class created by one of the most skewed national incomes of any country in the world. Under Pinochet, Chile was able to make its basic economic reforms without being distracted by a process whereby opponents to his scheme could be heard, issues could be debated, and necessary modifications could be made. These didn't take place because under Pinochet's boot, conformity was the rule.

Christian Democracy: Less Than The Real Thing

U.S Senate hearings under the aegis of Senator Church and subsequent archival disclosures have established that the Christian Democratic Party was the recipient of large amounts of U.S. covert funding during the Allende period, including funds for electoral payouts and bribes. The PDC's portable ethical standards were again exhibited after Pinochet had been apprehended in London. In fact, the party and the country have long had an elevated overseas reputation that neither entirely deserved. For all of its preaching about democracy, it was the PDC's careerist drive and lust for high office which allowed its leaders to be faithless servitors of democracy in 1973. Its present groveling before Pinochet and selling out of the memories of those who he slaughtered in the thousands are in keeping with the Christian Democrats' faithless commitment to the rule of law at that time and ever since.

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