

Brief for Murder: Pinochet's Apologists Five Decades On. Chile's September 1973 Coup d'état

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During the Cold War, assassinations most foul were entertained as necessary measures to advance the set cause. In Latin America, military regimes were keenly sponsored as reliably brutal antidotes to the Marxist tic, or at the very least the tic in waiting. Any government deemed by Washington to be remotely progressive would become ripe targets for violent overthrow.

To this day, the murderers of Chile's socialist president Salvador Allende, (wait, we hear the first apologist mock, he was not murdered but suicided out of *choice*) along with thousands of innocents continues to receive briefs in their defence.

On September 15, Mary Anastasia O'Grady, a *Wall Street Journal* scratcher turned police-state boot polisher [bombarded](#) her Australian Radio National host, Tom Switzer, with the stock libels about Allende's legacy and the military coup of September 11, 1973. The interview will go down as one of Switzer's poorer efforts, despite meek attempts to bring his frothing interviewee back to the bloody account opened by the military regime.



Perhaps we could have expected little else. As Jeffrey Goldberg so [fittingly remarked](#) in *The Atlantic* in September 2010, O'Grady "never met a fascist Central American oligarch she didn't like". Her penchant for falsifying history in the

name of pathological polemics is the stuff of legend.

With Switzer suitably boxed, O'Grady gives Allende the traditional Cold War brushing: he was not *really* democratic; he had issues with the press (the same press backed by Washington to disrupt the reform agenda). He did not countenance varied opinions. He appropriated property for the peasantry.

The O'Grady interview with Switzer is remarkable for not making a single mention of the role played by the crippling US economic blockade, the spoiling efforts of the Central Intelligence Agency and its covert funding of opposition groups, or the delighted, proud encouragement from President Richard Nixon's National Security advisor Henry Kissinger egging on the destruction of Allende's "insidious" model of a government. Switzer also fails to mention the meddling efforts made by other powers such as Australia, a country whose own intelligence service admitted to having no national or economic interest in Chile's affairs yet committed intelligence officers to the task of overthrowing Allende.

In a CIA Intelligence Memorandum, [issued](#) shortly after Allende's election victory, the views of the Group of Inter-American Affairs, made up of representatives from the agency, State and Defense departments, and the White House, concluded that the US had no vital interests in Chile. Allende's victory would not alter the military balance in any significant way, or pose threat to peace in the region. But a victory would "threaten hemispheric cohesion and would represent a psychological setback to the US as well as a definite advance for the Marxist idea." With such sentiments in place, the hand of intervention was soon forthcoming.

The [1975 staff report](#) by the Senate Select Committee to study governmental operations with respect to intelligence activities is frank and unequivocal about that fact. "Broadly speaking, US policy sought to maximize pressures on the Allende government to prevent its consolidation and limit its ability to implement policies contrary to US and hemispheric interests."



Rather than being treated exactly as he should be, a sadistic psychopath deserving a cell with a bar soap, potty and a lengthy prison sentence, the man who came to power, General Augusto Pinochet, is seen as the necessary school bully who bruised one nose too many ("human rights abuses", as these are sniffily called), the thousands of corpses arising under his watch barely warranting a footnote of recognition. The relativists immediately resort to the canard about Allende's Marxist credentials and his closeness to Cuba's Fidel Castro, as if that justified everything.

Remaining in power till 1990, Pinochet oversaw the killing or disappearance of 3,200 individuals, and the torture of 38,000 victims. After leaving the presidency, he remained chief of the armed forces and a senator until 2002 managing, despite protracted legal proceedings against him, to remain out of prison. (He did, however, spend 16 months under

house arrest in the UK.)

In May this year, the polling company Cerc-Mori found that 36% of people believed that the general “liberated Chile from Marxism,” tying it with a similar figure reached in 2000. Sociologist Marta Lagos, [speaking](#) to the AFP news service, mused darkly that Pinochet “is the only dictator in Western contemporary history who, 50 years after a coup d’état, is viewed favourably by more than a third of the population.”

Conservative lawyer José Antonio Kast is very much of that view, perpetuating that tiresome fantasy that the Pinochet regime could hardly be considered a dictatorship, certainly not when compared to Venezuela and Nicaragua. The political right, in such a hair-splitting mood, is never seen as capable of police-state authoritarianism. Besides, the General did the good thing in overseeing a peaceful transition of power, leaving the opposition intact. Splendid of him to do so.

Despite losing to his left-leaning opponent Gabriel Boric in the 2021 presidential elections, Kast’s Republican Party netted 23 of 51 seats on the council that is tasked with rewriting a constitution that operated during the military regime. Marcelo Mella of the University of Santiago [sees such signs as ominous](#): “It is a far-right party with a cultural restoration project.”

For Kast, the link between progressive agendas, the broader left, and communism, is seamless, the red bogey that needs social extirpation. As he [stated](#) in 2021 during the presidential campaign, “This December we won’t just elect a president, we will choose between liberty and communism.” Boric’s alliance with Chile’s Communist Party has also made such links easy, if faulty.

In August, Boric announced the National Search Plan, an initiative to search for the remains of those who were forcibly disappeared during the Pinochet era. “This is not a favour to the families,” the president [declared](#). “It is a duty to society as a whole to deliver the answers the country deserves and needs.” But his own popularity is flagging in the polls.

The pendulum, it would seem, is again swinging away from the left. The shadow cast by the legacy of the military junta has grown thicker.

As it does so, the Pinochet defenders, beneficiaries of economic policies that were prosecuted alongside murderous ones against critics, remain noisy and grotesquely at large.

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