

Fifty Years Since the Chilean Coup of September 11, 1973

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In commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the 1973 Chilean coup, we repost this article by Bill Van Auken, first published in 2013 by WSWS and Global Research.

Today marks the 40th anniversary of one of the most tragic events of the latter half of the 20th century: the September 11, 1973 coup in Chile. The seizure of power by Chile's fascist military represented a major defeat of the working class in Latin America and internationally, turning a situation of immense revolutionary potential into a nightmare of killing and repression.

This coup was instigated by the Nixon administration in Washington and organized in the closest collaboration with the Central Intelligence Agency and the Pentagon. Not only did the US ruling establishment and its military-intelligence apparatus actively support the military coup, they were intimately involved in rounding up, torturing, and slaughtering tens of thousands of Chilean workers, students and left-wing intellectuals. US officials also oversaw the murder of two US citizens, Charles Horman and Frank Teruggi.

Among the chief architects of the bloodbath in Chile was Henry Kissinger, the former US national security advisor and secretary of state and one of the world's oldest and most odious war criminals. He was praised by Nixon's successor, Gerald Ford, as a "national treasure," and by Barack Obama as a "hard-headed, tough defender of American interests and American security."

It was Kissinger who famously declared, in relation to Chile, "I don't see why we need to stand by and watch a country go communist because of the irresponsibility of its own people." He oversaw a program of aggression aimed at destroying the Chilean economy, fomenting right-wing terrorism and finally orchestrating the military's overthrow of the elected government of President Salvador Allende. Afterwards, he defended the atrocities carried out by General Augusto Pinochet's junta.

Kissinger is today celebrated as the “grand old man” of American foreign policy, his counsel still sought by the White House. He has never been indicted, much less tried for his crimes.

Anyone gullible enough to lend credence to present day claims that Washington is uniquely equipped to uphold human rights and enforce “international norms” on the world stage should be told, “Look at Chile.”

As with every major anniversary of the 1973 coup, the media and the pseudo-left focuses its principal attention on the fate of Salvador Allende, who died in the La Moneda presidential palace as it was bombed and besieged by the Chilean military.

The attempts to beatify Allende, however, conceal the reality that the Chilean catastrophe would not have been possible without the role played by his Popular Unity government, an alliance between Allende’s Socialist Party, the Stalinist Chilean Communist Party and a section of the Christian Democrats.

Allende was not a socialist, much less a revolutionary. His essential political role was that of holding back the socialist revolution in Chile and imposing “social peace” by suppressing the powerful offensive of the Chilean working class. This was done in close collaboration with the US-trained Chilean officer corps. Its chiefs, including General Pinochet, appointed commander-in-chief of the army by Allende, were invited into the president’s cabinet to better coordinate the suppression of the mass workers movement.

Factories that were taken over by workers in the so-called industrial cordons were placed back in the hands of their right-wing owners, who then victimized the most militant workers. Gun control laws approved by the Allende government were used to carry out police-state-style raids on factories and workers neighborhoods—a dress rehearsal for the coup to come—while the military armed fascist terrorist groups.

The most slavish in their efforts to subordinate the workers’ struggles to the needs of capital and the discipline of the military was the Communist Party, which hailed the army as “the people in uniform.”

Assisting in this betrayal were a coterie of Pabloite revisionist organizations who had broken with the Trotskyist perspective of fighting for the independent revolutionary mobilization of the working class in favor of the petty bourgeois nationalist guerrilla tactics of Fidel Castro and Che Guevara.

Lionized by these political elements, Castro made a three-week trip to Chile, embracing Allende’s “Chilean road to socialism” and insisting that the revolution in Chile would be “made by Allende or no one.” The effect was to further disarm the working class politically in the run up to the 1973 coup.

The International Committee of the Fourth International, the world Trotskyist movement, warned forthrightly against the threat of a counterrevolution in Chile, calling upon the Chilean workers to place their trust not in the popular front government of the Social Democrats and Stalinists, but only in their own independent revolutionary struggle.

Many, particularly the Stalinists, dismissed such warnings, extolling Chile’s nearly 140 years of parliamentary democracy and insisting that “it can’t happen here.” Obviously, it could and it did.

The bitter lessons of Chile are today more vital than ever as the international working class enters a new period of revolutionary struggle. Within capitalist ruling circles this is well understood. In the aftermath of last July's military coup in Egypt, following nearly two and a half years of revolutionary ferment, the *Wall Street Journal* expressed in an editorial its fervent hope that "the new ruling generals turn out to be in the mold of Chile's Augusto Pinochet."

In the United States, the Obama administration has steadily constructed the framework for a police state. It has arrogated to itself the power to throw US citizens into indefinite military detention and assassinate designated enemies of the state by drone missile strikes, while presiding over a vast NSA domestic spying operation that extends to every phone call, email and Internet search. The US government is the principal enemy of democratic rights the world over. Just as in Chile, those who believe "it can't happen here" are only deluding themselves.

The decisive task remains today what it was in Chile four decades ago: resolving the crisis of revolutionary leadership in the working class. The defense of democratic rights, the struggle against social inequality and the fight against war depend upon the emergence of a new socialist leadership in the working class in every country. This means building the Socialist Equality Party and the International Committee of the Fourth International.

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