

# Teflon Tyrants: After Pinochet, Prosecute Kissinger

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Global Research, December 17, 2004

Pacific News Service 17 December 2004

Region: [Latin America & Caribbean](#)

Theme: [Crimes against Humanity](#)

The Chilean government has arrested Gen. Augusto Pinochet, who led a brutal military coup in 1973 and ruled the country with an iron hand until 1990. The United States should now follow suit by prosecuting Henry Kissinger, President Richard Nixon's former national security advisor, for breaking U.S. and international law by helping foment the coup that brought Pinochet to power.

Before Pinochet, Chile had a well-deserved reputation as one of the most vibrant democracies in the world. It had a democratically elected president and a Congress just as we do. It had a wide range of political parties from the far right to the far left, all of which participated in the political process. It had numerous newspapers, magazines and radio stations that together represented the views of people across the political spectrum. All of its citizens, including illiterates, had a right to vote.

Pinochet, with Kissinger's help, changed all that.

The military junta Pinochet led dissolved Congress, outlawed political parties and the largest labor union in the country, censored the press, banned the movie "Fiddler on the Roof" as Marxist propaganda, publicly burned books ("on a scale seldom seen since the heyday of Hitler," according to the New York Times), expelled students and professors from universities, designated military officers as university rectors and arrested, tortured and killed thousands who opposed the regime.

Among those who died in the coup and its aftermath were: Salvador Allende, Chile's democratically elected president; Victor Jara, its most famous folk singer; Carlos Prats, the commander in chief of the Chilean armed forces until the coup plotters forced him out of office; Jose Toha, a former vice president; Alberto Bachelet, an air force general who opposed the coup; and two North American friends of ours, Charles Horman and Frank Terrugi.

The Pinochet regime was condemned for torturing political prisoners and for other human rights abuses by the United Nations, the Organization of American States, Amnesty International and many other respected international organizations. Among those tortured was a 24-year-old young man who, according to the Wall Street Journal, "was stripped naked and given electrical shocks...They started with wires attached to his hands and feet and finally to his testicles." Newsweek magazine wrote on March 31, 1975, "Each day Chileans are picked up for interrogation by the secret police. Some are held for weeks without charge, many are tortured, a few disappear altogether."

Chile, in sum, became a nightmare society. Even when Pinochet finally gave up power in 1990 to an elected government, he continued to dominate the country's politics as

commander in chief of the military.

Only recently has the country demonstrated a determination to face its past head-on and bring those responsible for murder and torture under the Pinochet regime to justice, including the ex-dictator himself. Indeed, up until only a short time ago, Pinochet in Chile used to be like Kissinger in the United States. He was the Teflon man. No charges against him could be made to stick.

Three events provided Chileans with the resolve to take on the former tyrant. The first was his arrest in England in 1998 on a warrant issued by a Spanish judge charging him with human rights abuses. The second was the publication by the news media of documents indicating that he enriched himself at the expense of his own people in a variety of illicit ways. The third was a report by a government-sponsored commission detailing the torture of 45,000 people that took place under his regime.

So now, the 89-year-old ex-dictator — his former friends deserting him in droves, his cultivated image of the tough but honorable savior of his country in tatters — is under house arrest in his own country. He's trying to avoid prosecution by claiming he is too old and too feeble-minded to face a trial. What about Kissinger?

Innumerable reports in this country, beginning with a 1975 U.S. Senate document titled, "Covert Action in Chile," have made it clear that Kissinger was responsible for directing the CIA and other intelligence agencies to destabilize the Allende government. Kissinger's motivation was to prevent what he considered a communist government from gaining a foothold in Latin America. "I don't see why we need to stand idly by and let a country go communist due to the irresponsibility of its own people," he said after Salvador Allende was elected president.

Now, Pinochet's arrest reminds us that Henry Kissinger and others in our country who are responsible for undermining democracy and condoning human rights abuses need to be held accountable for their crimes. Until that happens, the rest of the world has a right to be incredulous when our leaders proclaim they want to spread democracy and human rights abroad.

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