

PsychoWar of the Media In Chile under Allende

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From the information that "The New York Times" has been giving since the fall of 1974 concerning the role of the C.I.A. in the overthrow of the late Salvador Allende, President of Chile, it is clear which groups received direct or indirect help from that agency. The role which some of these groups such as the truck owners played is also clear. But there has been little concerning the role of "El Mercurio" the main right wing newspaper. A distorted image of El Mercurio as a democratic force has been presented in several articles in the Times without any attempt of criticism. For example, the Times of September 20, 1974 quoted a C.I.A. official as saying that most of the funds "invested for propaganda purposes went to El Mercurio, the main opposition newspaper in Chile. It was the only serious political force among the newspapers and television stations there." It was in fact a subversive force, working for a foreign power for the overthrow of a democratically elected president.

Recently the Senate Intelligence Committee reported that "the C.I.A. covertly channeled \$11.5 million to El Mercurio, the largest daily paper in Chile, to insure anti-Allende coverage and to keep the paper solvent." (The New York Times, December 5, 1975). The report also stated that El Mercurio is published

by Augustin Edwards a close friend of Donald M. Kendall, president of Pepsi-Cola, Inc., and said that the committee's assassination account "noted that Mr. Kendall had arranged a breakfast meeting between Mr. Edwards, Mr. Kissinger and the then Attorney General John N. Mitchell." Presumably this meeting would have discussed the kind of help that the C.I.A. could give to the Chilean newspaper. Those attending represent the main powers that organized the resistance against the Allende government: the Government of the U.S. (Mitchell was also a member of the Forty Committee at that time), the C.I.A., the Multinational Corporations (Edwards had just been appointed Vice-President of Pepsi-Cola) and the Chilean bourgeoisie.

However the real role that El Mercurio played is by no means clear. It is the intention of this article to present some evidence as to that role and to show that the "anti-Allende coverage" was not innocent. On the contrary its propaganda campaign was carefully planned by propaganda experts trained in psychoanalytic techniques to increase the paranoia and sense of distress and profound unease amongst the middle class and the military.

After the October 1972 strike was over, El Mercurio began an enormous and sensationalist coverage of "organized crime", in order to generate a real fear that stable social order and accepted values were being severely undermined and to link the "crimes" with Allende's Popular Unity coalition and the "marxists".

The display of news about "crime" was particularly intense during the parliamentary election campaign between November 1972 and March 1973. Before this and between July and October of that year (1972), El Mercurio published another impressive number of news items about "marxist violence". This subject

was replaced by "criminal violence" during the election campaign.

Was "organized crime" really increasing in Chile? Was it really a social danger? In fact, no; there was no evidence of that. But El Mercurio opened its campaign with a strange article on the editorial page in the issue of November 13, 1972. The article was called "On the Verge of Collective Insanity" and it said, essentially, that the Chilean people were losing their traditional rationality and their respect for the law, a fact which left them defenceless in the face of many kinds of dangers. As an example the article mentioned a recent case when a taxi driver had short another driver who crashed into his car. A week later, El Mercurio published another article on the same page, "Alarming Wave of Assaults" which referred to the existence of a "very dangerous gang" called "Los Chaquetas Negras" (The Black Jackets). The gang was presented as a "high ranking criminal organization", and it was said also that the country was for the first time in its history confronting a gang like that.

After the election El Mercurio reduced considerably the publication of news of this kind. Had "organized crime" diminished in Chile because of an election? Had it diminished all of a sudden because the opposition to Allende had got 54% of the votes? Impossible! No, the earlier campaign had been an effort to "influence" the election.

Of course El Mercurio had a rather open strategy designed to defend what it considered the traditional values of Chile. The main theme in its strategy was the "Need for Order" a theme which continued to be stressed after the coup. For example in the September

22, 1974, issue it said: "A first requisite for the existence of civil freedom is order and the main reason why this country began to sink into oppression has been disorder" (editorial page). But the fact is that to "prove" that Allende had brought disorder to the country El Mercurio developed among other things the "organized crime" tactic. That emphasis heightened the middle class anxieties that were genuine enough because of real problems: queues, black market, food speculation, economic disorder, etc.

But the question is, Why weren't these real problems enough to show the disorder? Why "add" to that the invention of an increasing and terrifying "criminal violence"? In figures, on what El Mercurio published between November 6, 1972, and March 4, 1973, (in the main pages, namely the front, editorial, the last of the first section and the first of the third section) it came to 183 items on "organized crime", 169 on economic disorder and 163 on queues, black market, shortages and food speculation altogether. Among the "criminal violence" stories it published a large number of news items referring to "agression on children" (almost 25%).

The reason for this is simple. El Mercurio was trying to create a state of psychological tension beyond the real one, a state of tension which could produce finally a primitive panic.

The emphasis on "organized crime" as an important propagandistic effort to show disorder during Allende's government continued after the coup. In the same issue mentioned above El Mercurio says in its main editorial that there is "evidence that the country was falling into anarchy, systematic crime and civil war."

In the last 2 or 3 months of Salvador Allende's government El Mercurio increased its psychological

warfare campaign. It began to work in purely "intra-subjective" aspects. The psychological tensions were indeed already enormous, so that people were in a state in which that could be done easily. El Mercurio then carried a substantial number of stories which were aimed at arousing very deep anxieties, for example food anxieties corresponding to a deep unconscious level; claustrophobia, the fear of being destroyed internally; fears of being assassinated, etc. They constituted a brilliantly conceived and executed campaign to make the Chilean people paranoid and thus to prepare them to support a military action with all its repressive consequences.

With regards to the military themselves, of course, this propaganda had its effect as well. El Mercurio developed specific propaganda to produce and increase panic among military leaders. After the attempted coup on the 29 of June, 1973, Indonesia's massacre of communists was presented as a logical and human reaction of the military and the people when they "discovered" that the communists were planning to kill the generals and the commanders-in-chief of the armed forces "Jakarta" (a word which had been written on the walls of Chilean cities since 1971 by the extreme rightist group Fatherland and Freedom) was falsely presented as a Popular Unity attempt to assassinate the highest officers of the armed forces. The "Jakarta" tactic is strikingly similar to what actually happened in Chile: first the Junta fabricated a story that the Popular Unity had a special plan to kill the highest officers of the armed forces (Plan Z); second, the Junta then killed many thousands of people.

It appears clear now what the role of "the only serious political force among the newspapers and television stations" in Chile, really was: terrorism, subversion and sabotage via psychological warfare.

The question remains, though, as to the extent to which "public opinion" is aware of the power of manipulation by the mass media. What would be the reaction of the Chilean middle class if they knew that El Mercurio was helped by the C.I.A. for the purpose of inducing paranoia? But of course they can't know because the Junta leader, Pinochet, Augustin Edwards, and other right-wing owners have complete control of the media in Chile and don't tell them. This is the much vaunted "free press" in action, triumphant in the suppression of information that might enlighten people.

THE PRIME CENSORS IN THE MEDIA ARE THE BASSETTS

John Bassett, chairman of CFTO-TV and the owner of the defunct Toronto Telegram told the LaMarsh Commission on media violence that he was "shocked and horrified" at Commission researcher Ken Marchant's suggestion that newspaper violence be censored, licensing established. Marchant in the January, 1976, Interim Report, said governments "could consider" this measure or alternatives. Bassett's "cry wolf" reminded me of research on the Ontario election coverage of 1967 in which Bassett's Telegram flagrantly slanted the news to favour the Tories. Who really censors the news? Why, it's an Inside Job!

Earle Beattie

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