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## Chile: Report from the field, September 1972

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## Chile: Report from the field, September 1972

### Abstract

[Excerpt] "El pais es pobre." Sooner or later any Chilean, whichever side he or she is on, makes the point explicit. You know it from the beginning, though; it's the premise for any dialogue about social and political affairs.

### Keywords

Chile, Santiago, political action, activism, South America

### Comments

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1.

LANCÉ COMPA  
CHILE - REPORT FROM THE FIELD. SEPT. '72

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

"El país es pobre." Sooner or later any Chilean, whichever side he or she is on, makes the point explicit. You know it from the beginning, though; it's the premise for any dialogue about social and political affairs. And indeed, the country is poor. That was the first thing to show, riding to the city from the airport past miles of shacks stretching back from the road as far as you can see, heaped together to absorb the influx of campesinos to the capitol. They ring Santiago on all sides (except the "barrio alto," Santiago's Westchester), thrown together with wood, tin, wire and anything else that will hold. It reminds me of some parts of North Carolina I saw awhile ago -- the same kind of shacks, only there they were isolated, solitary in a tobacco or alfalfa field. It reminds me of New York, on the other hand, with all the people jammed together and the kids kicking a ball around a tiny makeshift soccer field, dreaming of becoming Pele. Still, it's not entirely the picture of desperate Latin American poverty you associate with parts of Brazil or Peru. The rickety shacks are slowly being replaced by small, sturdy brick houses, and among the hovels workers are laying electricity cables, water pipes and emergency telephone lines in order to provide essential services. The typical air of resignation is gone, too. Stretched across the entrances to each of these "campamentos" is a bright banner with its name and its message to the world, like the one "Campamento 26 Julio (the Cuban national holiday) -- Sin Casa, pero FIRME con el Gobierno del Pueblo!"

That's the other thing that strikes you riding into Santiago: the banners, posters and wall paintings. Some of them amount to advertisements by the government, like "Defendamos el Cobre (copper), Defendamos Chile!" Some of them are a result of "private enterprise" like "Este Fundo (large farm) Ahora Es del Pueblo!" or, for competition, "Allende al Diablo!" (go to hell, Allende). They add splashes of color and life to the surroundings, pleasures we forego by putting our political declarations on automobile bumpers. We may reach a larger audience that way, but "America, Love It or Leave It" still doesn't have quite the punch of a billboard blaring "Welcome to Chile - You Are Free of the Tentacles of Imperialism!"

My first full day in Santiago sustained the impression of political ferment. A central midtown intersection was lined with members of "Patria y Libertad," a fascist youth group, passing out leaflets and waving their flags with swastika-like symbol. You could tell from their looks that these were middle and upper-class kids, not the delinquent fascists that afflict Italy, for example. In a sense you could almost forgive their fanaticism since they're young and do have something to lose in the process Chile is going through. They're really being manipulated, used as shock troops by the right-wing elements in Chile's tenacious traditional power structure. But you can't sympathize too much. They know no limits; a military dictatorship is the solution they call for, with repression of all the elements of the UP (Unidad Popular -- the governing left-wing coalition).

A group of other youngsters formed, these ones generally darker, poorly-dressed and rough-featured compared to the others. They tossed coins at the fascists' feet and chanted "La Izquierda - Unida - Jamás Sera Vencida!" (the left - united - never will be defeated) and "Momo - Patron - Fascista y Maricon!" (Mummy [the common appellation for right-wingers] - Boss - Fascist and Queer -- Gay Liberation has not made it to Chile yet). A crowd gathered, some scuffling broke out, and the cops intervened -- but gently -- to restore order.

\*

That was the only confrontation I've witnessed, though there is often news about street fights between UP supporters and opponents. Nothing large-scale, but enough to form a "trend" of violence that provokes speculation about a civil war. Still, most of the Chileans I've met on both sides are so proud of their democratic tradition, proud that they are not like the rest of their Latin American neighbors, that a civil war appears unlikely. It's not out of the question, though. The same sanguine assurances were being circulated around Spain just prior to the fascist uprising against a democratically elected left-wing coalition. The parallel becomes even more forceful through the growing use, by UP adherents, of "No Pasarán" -- they shall not pass -- as a slogan of resistance against the machinations of the Right. And finally, Chile is ringed by fascist or semi-fascist governments in Brazil, Bolivia and Argentina, just as Mussolini's Italy and Hitler's Germany stood ready to help Franco -- the difference in the demise of free Spain, thanks to the "neutrality" of the democratic powers. What would be the attitude of the U.S., I wonder, if Chile's democratically-elected socialist government is attacked by the totalitarian, but capitalist, governments of her neighbors?

Other demonstrations I've seen have been mounted by UP partisans. At first I thought nothing of it, but then I considered the frequency of pro- government demonstrations in democratic countries, like the Reverend Carl MacIntyre's massive Washington demonstrations or the outpouring of popular sentiment for the Heath government in England. Here, the people who were "out" for so long, who thought they were in with the reformist Christian Democratic government of 1964-1970 but were bitterly disappointed (the PDC - Partido Demócrata-Cristiano - got 56% of the vote in '64; 28% in '70), now feel that at last there's a government that really represents poor and working class people. It's still early, though. A lot of this sentiment is based on faith, because the government cannot in two years, or even six, "solve" the intractable economic problems that beset the country. Whether it, too, will turn to disappointment if too little is accomplished remains to be seen.

One of these pro-UP demonstrations was held by the workers of several large firms that had recently been nationalized. Along with socialization of large enterprises comes the setting-up of structures for worker participation in management and planning, and of programs for training workers in technical and management skills in order to be able to participate effectively. The courts -- still occupied by judges trained as corporation lawyers, like in the U.S. -- had indicated through a series of decisions that they would order these companies turned

\* Up to end of July.

back to their original owners (this is a very schematic statement of the problem, which is much more legally complicated than this indicates, but not relevant to the point I'm getting at). The workers of these "liberated" firms, therefore, held a demonstration to support the Government's program and protest the courts' actions. These were the organized, better-paid workers, it must be remembered, not marginal groups. Their militancy was remarkable, especially in comparison with current attitudes of the U.S.'s steadily-employed workers. "Make the Judges Work and Let the Workers Judge!" read one poster. Another: "Crush Bourgeois Justice with Revolutionary Justice!" The speeches were in the same vein, pledging never to return the companies to their "owners" who only owned by virtue of bourgeois property laws that allow people to own factories, where others work to produce wealth, the same as they own a house or a car; that is, laws that legitimize exploitation.

As indicated, the militancy and heightened political consciousness of the Chilean working class is striking to an American accustomed to the George Meany type of labor leader. Chilean labor history is the history of Communist, Socialist and anarchist efforts to organize the workers, often in the face of fierce repression. In the early part of this century, for example, when nitrate was Chile's chief resource (copper not yet discovered), two thousand striking nitrate miners were massacred by army troops on a single day. As recently as 1966, striking copper miners were killed by troops sent by the "liberal" Frei government (anybody who thinks this is an alien phenomenon should read some American labor history, for a bloody story).

The biggest demonstration so far was called by the CUT (Central Unica de Trabajadores), Chile's national trade union federation, to show support for the Government's programs. Labeled "the March to Support the Changes," it drew close to a half-million people. It had an air of spectacle, as well as of serious political purpose. The generally dreary Santiago streets were transformed into a swirl of colors and a rhythm of chants. "U--P! U--P! U--P!" came the cry (pronounced oo-pay, for those of you with puerile senses of humor). You closed your eyes and could almost hear the same beat and the "Peace--Now!" that we've heard so often. And the flags, thousands of them waving in time with the chants.

The aversion I've often felt about mass pro-government demonstrations, especially due to films of the Nuremberg rallies, didn't rise up here. Instead of the ordered rows of swastikas, for example, dozens of different symbols were displayed aloft: the familiar red with hammer and sickle of the Partido Comunista, the red and white of the Partido Socialista, the blue and white of the Izquierda Cristiana, the green and red of MAPU, the red and black of the MIR, and so on, each of the separate elements hoisting its own flag. And instead of any superhuman "leader" doing the talking, the speakers were the President of the CUT, a tough, Communist printers' union leader, and Allende, who in the charisma department is rivalled only perhaps by another well-known president of a prominent American republic.

The CUT president was good. His voice had a live quality, as if the words hesitated an instant in his throat after he spoke them, then darted into the microphone, emerging with a ring. A large part of his discourse was concentrated on condemning U.S. imperialism. Many Americans, I'm sure, would be irritated by the repetition of "imperialismo yanqui," because many Americans prefer to believe that "U.S. Imperialism" is a fabrication by radical demagogues who should be grateful for the too-much foreign aid we give them. But the Chileans know what they're talking about. They've experienced imperialism first-hand. Any American who thinks the ITR-Chile affair was just an isolated case probably also thinks the Thieu government is a bastion of democracy in a sea of red devils. ITR was just clumsy (it appears to be a habit). The "invisible blockade" being mounted by the copper companies and banks through the international trade and finance markets is a lot more sophisticated and effective.

As you might have guessed from the flags' description, there is a dizzying proliferation of parties, movements and fronts in Chile, both in and out of the UP. Among those mentioned earlier, the main components of the UP are the PC and PS (Communist and Socialist parties). MAPU (Movimiento de Accion Popular Unitaria) is a party that broke off from the Christian Democrats in the late 60's, when it became clear that the DC's "Revolution in Liberty" was not a revolution at all -- and with little liberty besides. The IC (Izquierda Cristiana) broke off from the DC and joined the UP after Allende took office (even now the PDC is split into two wings -- it seems to have a taste for self-mutilation that would delight Procrustes). The MIR (Movimiento de la Izquierda Revolucionaria) is the major group outside the UP to its left, but there are also the ELN, PCBR and other splinter groups. The main enemy of them all is the Communist Party, representative of the revisionist Moscow line internationally and domestically the most conservative member of the UP -- even more than the PR (Partido Radical), once Chile's leading liberal party but now fallen into desuetude, so that it simply adopts the line of whoever's in power and continues participating in government.

In the Opposition the same thing takes place. The DC, as pointed out, is lurching along on its two wings. The DR (Democracia Radical) was the right wing of the PR, which broke off when it joined the UP. The PIR (Partido Izquierda Radical) was the left wing of the DR, which split off to rejoin the UP, but then pulled out after a couple of months to rejoin the opposition. The whole business would confuse P.G. Wodehouse. Then there are the right-wing PN (Partido Nacional), which itself has a couple of sprouts you can't yet call wings, and the fascist FNPL (Frente Nacionalista Patria y Libertad). As you can see, Chilean politics could stare down a hydra. All of which goes to answer unequivocally the problem of the dialectic as pithily posed by the Chinese: do two merge into one, or does one divide into two?

The multiplicity of parties does not happen by caprice. It reflects serious political and philosophical differences that emerge as important concrete problems are confronted in the course of governing or opposing the government. To Americans it appears chaotic. To Chileans, on the other hand, our vaunted two-party system looks like a simplistic reflection of fuzzy thinking and retarded political consciousness, the kind that puts George McGovern and George Wallace in the same party. I think the Chileans may go overboard in the other direction; there's a point at which you can be so busy defining differences and sharpening theory that practice suffers as a result. Still, it's a striking change from the U.S., a reminder that most of the world takes socialism seriously -- whether pro or con -- while we have no fundamental differences between our two major parties, whose only dispute is over how "liberal" liberal capitalism will be.

Considering this contrast -- the open encounter of fundamental differences in Chile, versus their fudging into "consensus politics" in the U.S. -- I would argue that Chile is more democratic than America. This is without changing the use of the word "democratic" as Americans use the word; that is, accepting the traditional notion of democracy rather than imputing to it the sense used when talking about the socialist democracies. Even in this framework of "bourgeois" democracy, Chile is more democratic.

First of all, Chile's democratic institutions are as firm as our own (only the U.S. and Switzerland pre-date Chile's democratic government). They have been more rigorously tested than ours. The UP did not come out of nowhere. Salvador Allende ran for President every time since 1952, and almost won in '58. It was fear of an Allende victory in '64 that ended prematurely the campaign of the right's candidate, whose supporters switched to Eduardo Frei to give him his majority victory. Chile elected Popular Front governments in the 30's and 40's which were also coalitions of Communist, socialist and liberal parties. It also elected conservative governments in 1927 and 1958. Saying "Chile elected . . .", of course, usually means that a little more than 1/3 of the citizens elected, since there are usually candidates of the left, center and right. Each side castigates the others in terms that would make our political campaigns look like Amish Sunday service, but when the votes are counted the losers accept it and continue their fight through the legislature and through private organizations.

It may sound like a game, and it certainly has elements of gamesmanship like any electoral politics. But the differences are serious and the policies are bitterly fought for or against, as the current situation abundantly displays. Still, the center holds. The rules continue to apply, and on this is based the thesis of the "via chilena," the peaceful road to socialism: that it is the only road that proceeds from Chile's concrete experience.

Whether Chile continues on this peaceful road or not, the richness of her democratic experience up to now -- capsuled in the past fourteen years, for example, by successive election of conservative, liberal and socialist governments -- exceeds our own. Ideas considered "subversive" or "way out" in the U.S. here have full access to means of communication, support in the population, and acceptance as legitimate political positions. Our "consensus", on the other hand, deters us from developing a critical perspective of fundamental problems and erodes our ability to conceive and articulate alternative ways of organizing society (which is more than reducing military spending and eliminating tax loopholes).

There is another, less conventional sense -- owing to the advent of the UP -- in which Chile is more democratic than we are. This comes closer to notions of "socialist democracy" as it ought to be, not as its deformation perpetrated by the Soviet bloc. Furthermore, linked as it is with the strong traditional democracy, it acquires a uniquely Chilean character. I'm talking about democracy at the base; in factories, fields and offices. Any of you who have worked in U.S. factories or offices know what the regimentation is like -- the time cards, the production quotas, the foremen and supervisors watching every move, the sense of isolation and mechanization etc. An integral part (from my point of view the key part) of the UP program concerns participation and self-management at the base. The large socialized firms have established workers' councils at the different internal levels to participate in decision-making and to assume the task of self-discipline. Government offices are run on a democratic basis; supervisors are elected by their co-workers. Agricultural workers are organizing unions and co-ops to take over the process of production and distribution.

This certainly does not mean that everything is going along beautifully; that the transition to full participation has been made in less than two years. There are all the problems that those hostile to radical change predicted -- absence, late arrivals, lazy work habits etc. -- among many workers unprepared to assume their new responsibilities. On the other hand, there are marked successes among the more conscious groups -- increased production, money-saving suggestions and inventions, voluntary overtime etc. And how can you measure the "value" of the sense of emancipation, of fraternity and sorority stemming from the abolition of time clocks, of separate dining halls for clerical and manual workers, of the establishment of rotating foremanships so your turn will come, and all the other small manifestations of what "workers' control" means? I suppose it comes down to whether you consider "efficiency" the highest value in the productive process, one that can be measured and tested, in contrast to indeterminable counter-values like dignity and equality which may in a time of transition require a certain sacrifice of efficiency.

July 31



A serious problem remains with Chile's efforts to establish worker participation: the technical requirements of modern production. If, in very broad terms, building socialism is a process of overcoming the discrepancy between the social organization of production and its ~~service~~ of anti-social, private interests, through the self-transformation of the agents of production -- the workers -- into its initiators and creators, then this transformation has to take place among experts and technicians as well as among manual workers. Either the workers must become experts or the experts must become workers; that is, acquire the consciousness that they, too, are alienated from their labor even though it may pay them well. Although they are engaged in producing wealth, they do not control the conditions of their work nor the ends it serves.

Both of these processes are extremely difficult and require long periods of development. Making workers experts or experts workers means learning from mistakes and building on experience, just as the initial organization of trade unions required years of efforts. Where the entire stratum of technical personnel is thin, however, as it is in Chile (much of it formerly composed of outsiders working for U.S. companies that left after '70), the only recourse is to make the workers experts. It can be done, as the Chinese are showing, but not from one day to the next. Chile has established a broad-based program of "capacitacion" ("making capable") for workers. While its ~~program~~ is growing, however, workers' participation, ~~which~~ exists in the directive council at the top and on the production line at the base, is weak in the intermediary technostructure.

Everything comes back to the problem posed at the beginning: "El pais es pobre." I'm reminded of it every day when I buy the paper and have to tell the vendor how much change I get because he can't subtract. When I compare it to our own abundance, I'm filled with admiration and respect for these people who are trying, with what little they have, to distribute it more equally and produce it more democratically. And shame that we, on the contrary, have done so little with so much. We should realize that we have a lot to learn from some of the world's "backward" countries, and I'm not talking about Zen. But that's enough moralizing. I mostly wanted to inform you, to share a few impression that have stayed with me after a couple of months in Chile. I hope to let you know more. If anyone has anything in particular they'd like to know more about, let Ron know or drop me a line direct at INSORA, Compania 1270 (8<sup>o</sup> piso), Santiago, Chile.

En la lucha,

*Lance*

August brought a noticeable rise in tension. To begin with, the Government lost one of its moral trump cards. In the election campaign of 1970, and at nearly every public and private opportunity since then, UP partisans had invoked the official violence, the killings by police and soldiers, that occurred under previous governments. Special targets were the Grupo Móvil, the Tac Squad used to break up left-wing demonstrators, and the shooting of several striking copper miners by troops sent by President Frei in 1966. In contrast, promised the UP, it would never use force against workers and poor people.

For nearly two years it made good on its promise. The Grupo Móvil was disbanded. No longer could a farm or factory owner call the cops to deal with a toma (literally a "taking"; anyone who has ever liberated a college dean's office knows what it means). The tomas were talked out by both sides with government troubleshooters until some settlement was reached -- "a gross violation of the rights of property", complains the Opposition.

Now the UP has its official violence: the Lo Hermita incident. The whole affair is still very confused and cross-accusations are still flying, but the gist remains. Police were officially dispatched to one of Santiago's suburban slums to conduct a search; in an ensuing encounter with residents they opened fire and killed a young worker who lived there. The Government strove mightily to distinguish it away from a broken promise. President Allende went personally to the scene and talked with the pobladores in an effort to prove the Government's good faith. The Police Commissioner was suspended pending an investigation. The Communist Party opened a fierce campaign against the MIR and other "infantile" left-wing elements accused of provoking the violence. Some spokesmen tried to argue that "only" one person had been killed, a kind of body-count approach whose bankruptcy we know too well. Despite all these twistings and turnings, the bare facts speak for themselves. Little more is heard about official violence now.

Since then the pace of dramatic events has quickened. Argentine revolutionaries hijacked a plane to Chile, putting the Government on a sharp fence between revolutionary solidarity and rule of law. For days it issued statements about how the courts would decide; the next thing you knew, the brothers were in Cuba. In the rural South, the pattern of vigilante violence accompanying tomas continued, averaging a death a day -- almost all of them campesinos killed by farm owners trying to re-take their fundos. In an anti-Government protest of small shop-owners in the southernmost city of Punta Arenas, one of the demonstrators died -- of a heart attack, as it turned out. The Opposition press attributed it to the police acting under government orders, hoping to further estrange the modest middle class -- typically represented by the thousands of small shopkeepers -- from the "lower class" government. Topping things off was the Government itself, decreeing long-overdue food price hikes without any advance warning, causing consternation everywhere, even among its most ardent supporters.

It was a good opportunity for the Right to raise hell, and they took it. First they called for a one-day closing of all the shops on August 21 to observe the funeral of the Punta Arenas shopkeeper "killed in action against the Communists," as one paper put it. Then they sent the young toughs of Patria y Libertad, the fascist youth organization, to enforce the order by trashing shops that stayed open. The Government acted with equal obtuseness, declaring the closings illegal and forcing open some shops selling "essential goods", which included, from what I could see, a ladies' underwear store and a perfumery. (ah, those Latins!) Anyway, the poor shopkeepers were getting it coming and going.

Their would-be customers didn't fare much better. ~~They~~ Inevitably, the fascist bands clashed with the police, and soon the odor and effects of tear gas were everywhere in the crowded downtown commercial area. The major effect of just a slight whiff was to make people sneeze. I don't think it was the hard stuff they use in the U.S. It was almost comical; people's sneezes are as different as their voices, and the variety of tone, pitch, resonance, frequency etc. would do for a symphony. Crying eyes and crying children made the scene less humorous, and so did the crush to board ~~xxxxxx~~ a bus away from there. The next day, the press of each side deplored the other's "turning central Santiago into a battlefield." Compared to what was coming, though, it was more like a playground.

On August 25, opposition high school students organized a march to protest police intervention in a conflict between FERistas (Federacion de Estudiantes Revolucionarios -- student branch of the MIR) who had occupied a high school and right-wing students trying to dislodge them (politics start at an early age here, and it's no surprise <sup>to hear</sup> a pair of 14-year-old Chileans, whose American counterparts are laying bets on the Yankees and the Orioles, accusing each other of left or right deviationism from the correct correlation of theory and practice). On every corner where the marchers passed, small groups of passersby formed to argue politics. Where I stood they started with real finesse, a pair of young UP supporters debating opposition moderates about whether the legislature is a bourgeois institution. That didn't last long, though. They were outflanked on both sides by a MIRista and a Nacionalista (the right-wing opposition party), who dissolved the whole thing into a shouting match about whether Communists are human beings.

The march itself went peacefully, but when it ended the hard right stayed in the streets. This time the trouble was not just between them and the police. They stopped traffic, stoned and burned buses and attacked various UP party offices. When the police did come, a mini-war of rocks and bottles versus gas broke out, and non-combatants suffered heavily from both. I hopped a bus

*figured* that somehow had made it through most of the battle zone, and ~~we~~ we were clear of it when a group of running youths rounded the corner and came after the retreating bus. I thought we were in for a stoning, but then I saw a solitary paco (cop) round the corner after them. He stopped, raised his gas gun, and fired. The cylindrical cartridge rose in a high arc, fishtailing slightly as it descended toward us. When it hit the street between us and the fleeing kids, I thought it would go off in their faces and was silently admiring the paco's accuracy. Instead of exploding, though, it skittered rapidly after the bus which had now stopped for a light. The amused faces of the other passengers, like my own, I'm sure, turned to horror as they realized what was happening. "Apúrese!" (Hurry!) they shouted to the driver as the cartridge slid under the bus. There was a pop as it exploded, but it was muffled by the roar of the bus's motor. The light had changed, and the wind was fortunately blowing the other way. We got off unscathed, except for a chorus of sneezes that reverberated through the bus.

People thought it couldn't get worse, but again they were wrong. They had only seen a dress-rehearsal. Tension increased during the following week. The barrio alto resounded with the clanging of pots and pans every night at 10:00, the ~~xxx~~ well-to-do's symbol of class solidarity. Supposedly they were protesting their "suffering" under the price rises and meat shortages, though most likely they had just finished using the empty pots to cook fresh meat purchased on the black market. As if things in Santiago were not bad enough, in Concepcion a policeman was killed during a gun battle between Socialists and right-wingers. Each side's newspapers, as usual, produced irrefutable proof that the killer belonged to the other. When the Minister of the Interior attempted to speak at the dead officer's funeral, he was stoned, and I mean by rocks. By the end of the week, everybody was in a nasty mood and itching for some kind of action.

Action there was, in the form of a well-planned and well-executed toma of central Santiago by rightist youths. It started with the business of stopping traffic. Along with other neutrals, I stood a prudent half-block away watching them mill in the intersection. Riot-watching has by now become the city's chief spectator sport, and non-participant observers are making a science of seeing everything while avoiding the rocks and gas. This time we were fooled, though. Behind us came the siren of a police bus careening toward the blocked intersection (traffic on that street had been backed out and rerouted). The next thing you knew, the air was filled with rocks hurled from the intersection at the oncoming bus. They are not Joe Namaths, the Chileans, and most of the stones went flying into the crowd of neutrals. When the police bus neared the intersection the kids scattered. The pacos emptied out and immediately fired gas in all four directions, convincing those of us who had turned back after the rock barrage to see what was happening to definitively split.

On the 6th floor of a building around the corner was a government office where I had been doing research. I knew the jefe there, so I went up to get a safe view of events -- safe if you don't mind the gas. The demonstrators had regrouped at the corner underneath us and were building a fire in the middle of the intersection. There were about 100 of them, maybe one-third girls. They called up for paper to fuel the fire, and from the rows of 8 and 10-story office buildings on all sides the response was instant. I had wondered why Chile has the highest per-capita newspaper sale rate in the world. They were waiting for that day. The easy comparison is to a ticker-tape parade, but these were whole newspapers, crashing and floating down. Part of it, I'm sure, was people's fascination with fire, but a lot had to do with their sympathy for the demonstrators, and it was a supremely safe way to participate.

It was quite a sight: papers flying everywhere and little firepiles all over the streets, as well as the big one in the intersection. A liebre ("rabbit" -- a VW bus converted for public transportation) that had been stopped by the little fascists suddenly ran the space between two fires, but at the cost of smashed windows and possibly heads of the passengers inside, since a torrent of rocks followed it. Then down the cross-street, ~~where~~ *from which* traffic had been re-routed, swept a police truck with a powerful fire hose. The kids paused to hurl rocks (the supply was inexhaustible -- they had brought satchels full with them) at the oncoming truck. It extinguished the fire, but they quickly began it again. A contest developed: every ten minutes or so the truck would come through and put out the fires, and the demonstrators would set them again, using the constant supply of papers from above and yelling triumphantly when the flames arose.

By now we heard on the radio that the same thing was happening all over downtown Santiago. We began to notice ourselves that it was more than just a spontaneous event. The teen-age troops periodically gathered below us around a handful of well-dressed adults in their 20's and 30's, who were designating people and pointing in various directions. Particularly conspicuous was a woman in a bright yellow pantsuit, whose gesticulations were comically agitated and whose piercing voice rose to our height, though we couldn't make out the words. She and the other adults went occasionally to a car parked in the middle of the block, where two men sat with a walkie-talkie antenna protruding from the window. It seemed kind of funny, the whole cloak-and-dagger bit, except when you consider that this, like last week's trouble, could also serve as a dress rehearsal for something more serious.

When they tired of playing matador with the police truck, the kids detached a pair of trolley-buses from their cables and pushed them across two sides of the intersection, blocking passage from either direction. I was told there's enough police strength to handle the thing with ease -- as they had often done with left-wing demonstrations in earlier years. But someone -- possibly Allende himself -- decided not to crack down. They sealed off the entire downtown sector and waited for the rioters to get bored. Except for keeping their fire going, there was nothing ~~xxx~~ to do. With the dark it broke up.

Union leaders threatened to have fifty thousand workers in the streets the next time it happened, and the MIR -- no strangers to street fighting themselves -- suggested that counter-revolutionary violence be met with revolutionary violence, citing Lenin (poor Lenin is whipped out like a Saturday night special by everybody on the left here, as if to end all the arguments. Miristas attack with passages from What Is To Be Done?, for example, while the PC retaliates with Left-Wing Communism, An Infantile Malady). "El Pueblo Aplastara a la Seducion!" (the People will Crush Sedition), shouted the headlines in the pro-UP press. All this left chest-beating, however, did not deter the Government from its proper stand: that it is the constitutionally elected government of Chile and will use constitutional means -- the police, that is -- to deal with illegal activities. It looks like the police are making the conversion to putting down right-wing troublemakers, after a century or so of confronting workers and left-wing students, without too much difficulty -- here they take orders, unlike some of our big-city cops. Their immediate civilian boss is a Communist. The PC, in fact, has emerged as the law-and-order party of the UP, with its incessant criticism of the MIR as well as of right-wing agitators. Socialists, on the other hand, keep getting caught hiding arms or stealing medicine for future guerilla hospitals. The Communists are much too disciplined for that sort of thing. The minor UP parties, MAPU and Izquierda Cristiana, are so busy proving they're revolutionary in spite of being Christians (both split from the Christian Democratic Party) that they can't afford a law-and-order line. All this leaves the PC as the champions of public order.

After the week of right-wing troublemaking, UP supporters had a chance to show some life. The occasion was the September 4th march for the second anniversary of "Chichó's" (diminutive of Salvador -- like Dick is to Richard) electoral win. Many people on both sides thought there would be trouble, considering the tough talk on the left the week before and the announcement by the MIR that it would participate in the march. The Right was hopeful that the general tense climate and the recent price hikes would make the demonstration embarrassingly small, besides containing some left-inspired violence to take the heat off themselves. Everybody was wrong. It was a huge, spirited, disciplined march, and it went a long way to restore enthusiasm inside the UP.

The march began with a trek by construction workers from their work sites in the barrio alto down Avenida Providencia, a major artery of the upper-class sector of Santiago (in contrast to the U.S., construction workers are among the most militant left-wing workers; it has happened, for example, that Communist hardhats fight with long-haired right-wing students, the reverse of the famous New York City incident). With three tractors at their head, they moved down past the rows of expensive apartment buildings, red flags waving, shouting, singing and laughing. Although their actions were peaceful -- not a single rock was thrown at all those inviting windows -- their words were animated, to put it mildly. "Las calles a la izquierda -- Momios a la Mierda!" was a favorite slogan (The streets belong to the Left; mummies go to shit!) To the faces peering down from the windows they yelled, "Momia - Ahora - Saca la cacerola!" (Mummy (feminine) -- Now - Pull out your pot!), in reference to the nightly noise-making in the barrio alto. One young fellow, safe on about the twenty-fifth floor, did exactly that, banging his pots together drawing jeers, whistles and shouts of "Maricon!" from the marchers.

In a surprising number of windows women leaned out waving tablecloths, sweaters or any other red cloth they could find, which won them smiles and comradely waves. As the marchers approached Plaza de Italia, the official starting point of the celebration, the huge number of demonstrators became evident. Surrounding streets were swarming with colors of people and banners and flags and posters, priming themselves for the push down Alameda, the main downtown thoroughfare. When they realized how big they really were, the sense of excitement quickened to jubilation. "La marcha es suspendida," shouted one young textile worker, "Es un festival!"

A delegation of ~~different~~ workers from different industries marching under the banner of the CUT was supposed to lead the parade past the reviewing stand, occupied by President Allende and various ministers and UP party heads. Alameda was so crammed with people coming against them to join the march, however, that they left no place to go. It was a people's traffic jam. Organizers tried to reroute the oncoming crowds down side streets, asking them to attach themselves to the end of the march, but they came faster than they could be diverted. In the meantime, the main body of marchers continued their singing and chanting. Loudspeakers alternated the UP fight song, the national anthem, and the Internationale, all sung with pride and gusto. Occasionally the chant "A-llen-de! -- A-llen-de!" would spread, with everyone hopping on the beat (this is a characteristic Chilean demonstration tactic, and several thousand people hopping up and down at once can be quite an impressive sight).

With the street still blocked and no solution in sight, the ceremony got under way. President Allende made a speech comparing the marchers' dignity and discipline with the opposition's frenzied agitation of the week before. He spoke frankly about the economic difficulties Chile is going through, but expressed confidence that the people would endure them without losing faith in the Government, that they would remain conscious of their larger historical mission of building socialism democratically. When the march proper began, and the roadblock problem disappeared rather simply. The late-comers just turned around and walked the other way. It was impossible to know where the head of the parade was, but at last the mass of people was in motion.

Once again the thing most striking to the eye was the number and variety of flags, banners and posters. It seemed that everyone carried something. Chile may be underdeveloped, but it must lead the world in flags per capita. The red of the Communist and Socialist parties dominated, but almost as evident was the red, white and blue of the Chilean national flag. The UP and the Opposition both claim the flag as their symbol, and each is constantly trying to out-patriot the other, the Right invoking the "tools of Moscow" charge against the UP, which counters with "tools of U.S. imperialism." At least they avoid the nasty flag-burning incidents of "Amerika's" infantile leftists.

Banners were raised to identify different groups in the march. The basic division was by factory or workplace, with subgroups according to parties. Neighborhoods, youth organizations of the various parties, and student groups were also identified. Hand-made posters were also popular. Their originality would not rival the banner years of the last-place Mets -- "Momios a la Mierda!" was the overwhelming favorite. Still, a few notable ones emerged. "Por el socialismo sin alcoholismo!" (for socialism without alcoholism) said one, in reference to the current Government campaign against the drinking problem that affects many Chilean workers. Above a group from the Izquierda Cristiana rose another proclaiming "Cristianos y Marxistas a Parar (stop) el Fascismo!" -- again, the Christians trying hard to prove their revolutionary fervor. Along the main body of marchers, walking alone and somewhat aimlessly, it seemed, was an old man with a laconic paraphrase of the Opposition's lamentations about shortages: "Hoy desabastecimiento de Momios" (Shortage of mummies today). Of course, all the visual images were accompanied by repeated chants, songs and "Vivas!", plus admonishments to the sidewalk observers: "A las calles, los millones -- No se hagan los huevones!" (which translates roughly "Into the streets, everybody; don't be assholes.")



The merrymaking was dampened somewhat by the MIR section of the parade. Their red and black flags filled the avenue, giving the image of a mass of marchers. Beneath the flags, however, their ranks were thin, the flag-bearers placed at strategic points to give the impression of density. They were about a thousand, I thought, a small portion of the half-million that marched. They went like soldiers, in step and holding heavy staves over their shoulders -- both formidable weapons themselves for street skirmishes, and symbols of the rifles they have cached for the real thing. In a sense it was comical to see the preponderance of beards, levis and other manifestations of student culture parading in such paramilitary fashion. They had another tactic designed to impress: they would slow almost to a halt, letting distance grow between them and the group ahead, then charge fiercely ahead, shouting slogans, until the gap was closed. The slogan most often heard was "Pueblo -- Consciencia -- Fusil, MIR, MIR!" (people - conscience - rifle, MIR, MIR). At one point, though, passing a pair of policemen in front of the new UNCTAD building, they shouted another slogan about the police being "asesinos", in reference to the Lo Hermda incident.

Soon it was over. UP supporters went home happy, while the Opposition grumbled how it would show them, in the opposition march scheduled for the following week. The day before it was scheduled to go off, however, they canceled it. The ostensible reason was "harrassment" by the Government, which had changed the route of the march. Honest Christian Democrats, however, admitted that there was serious division in the Opposition over the participation of Patria y Libertad in the march. The right-wing Partido Nacional was willing to have them -- after all, the Government had had the MIR. The right wing of the Christian Democrats, headed by ex-president Frei, didn't mind either. But the DC left-wing would not tolerate it and said they would withdraw from the march if the young fascists joined -- Christian Democrats don't march with fascists, they argued, even though a large part of their party was prepared to do it. Since Patria y Libertad had said they would march whatever anybody said, the whole thing was called off to avoid exposing the splits in the Opposition.

Three clear lines are emerging in the Opposition. One, led by Patria y Libertad and the right wing of the PN, is the "coup at any price" line. They are openly calling for a military takeover and suppression of the UP parties and the trade unions -- classic fascist tactics. A second is that of the left wing of the PN (if the term can be so used) and the right wing -- the Frei wing -- of the DC: the "constitutional coup"; to win two-thirds of both parliamentary houses in the '73 elections and impeach Allende. The third is the conciliatory line of the DC left, which is willing -- indeed happy -- to accept the reforms made thus far by the UP, but want to stop them from going much further. They are prepared to wait until the '76 presidential elections.

So far none of the Opposition lines is dominant. The constitutional coup tendency is moving ahead, though, since it straddles the chief opposition parties and is headed by ex-president Frei. It's at least certain that nothing will happen until March when the elections -- for an entirely new Chamber of Deputies and two-thirds of the Senate -- will be held. The Opposition is hoping to win a crushing victory and impeach Allende; the UP is hoping to hold its ground. With over one-third of the Congress, Allende can govern by veto. If the UP falls under one-third, they're at the mercy of Congress.

All these are notes I sit down and write from time to time, intending to send them in small doses to you all. It's become more than a small dose, I'm afraid, because I keep wanting to add things to make the picture more complete. Anyway, I'm going to stop here so I can get it off. Hope you enjoy it.

SEPT. 15

*Jance*