

## 'Had we lived in Chile we would have been the ones imprisoned'

# Chile in the collections

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The military coup in Chile on 11 September 1973 shook the world. The democratically elected government was overthrown, the constitution abolished and a junta comprising the heads of all branches of the military and the police seized power. There was universal condemnation and in many instances organisations were formed in solidarity with the Chilean people, who were to live under a harsh dictatorship for 17 years to come.

### *The popular front*

In September 1970 the 'Unidad Popular' [Popular Front] consisting of six parties came to power. They won a general election and Chile acquired a left-wing parliamentary government under Salvador Allende. It looked to many like the start of a new era for Latin America and there were high expectations of this political experiment in terms of democracy and peace. The political and social process that was beginning was regarded sympathetically by the democratic parts of world opinion. Even critics showed a certain understanding. The real opposition and

repudiation of the Allende regime came from powerful political and economic forces in the USA. This was because of the reforms started by the Chilean government and the possible effects these new political experiences might have on other Latin-American countries or even other third world countries.

In Chile political and economic right-wingers were a formidable and confrontational opposition within the democratic framework, but they did not conceal their intention of overthrowing the constitutional regime by any means.

The process was followed with great interest in Sweden and by October 1970 Allende had been invited to the Nordic countries. The social democratic parties in these countries were to act as hosts for his visit. The trip did not proceed because of disturbances in his country. The Swedish government with Olof Palme as Prime Minister decided to give Chile financial aid and, in addition, in 1971 Solidaritetskommittén för folkfrontsregering i Chile [Solidarity Committee for the Popular Front government in Chile] was established. Its object was to show solidarity with the Popular Front government and disseminate information about the situation in Chile. In 1973 this organisation became Chilekommittén [the Chile Committee] and remained active until the early 1990s.

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*President Salvador Allende receiving orphans in Santiago. Photo: Thomas Billhardt.*

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*Preparations before the coup on September 11 1973: Soldiers loyal to the government outside the presidential palace, La Moneda. Photo: Comez Mora/Reportagebild.*

## The military coup

The international community's reaction to the coup and its leaders was one of fierce and total repudiation. The most notable phenomenon was the total elimination of the judicial standards that characterise the civilised world. During its time in power the junta proceeded to breach every human right laid down by the UN. The Swedish reaction was immediate. The day after the coup the social democrats held a demonstration in Stockholm. Alva Myrdal was one of the speakers:

*The message we have received today from the outside world is one of despair: in yet another country democracy has been raped; in Chile the constitutional order has been crushed.<sup>1</sup>*

Olof Palme also made a number of statements on the issue. In one he said that:

*Today our first goal must be the preservation of human life. The new masters of Chile must be aware that the rest of the world is following events there closely. It must be in their interests to avoid a bloodbath.<sup>2</sup>*

*Solidarity with the people of Chile was a main topic at the May Day demonstration 1974 in Stockholm. SAP's and the LO's march is headed by Beatriz Allende, one of the president's daughters. By her side Ingvar Carlsson, who would become the Swedish Prime Minister twelve years later. To their left Sweden's Ambassador to Chile, Harald Edelstam. Photo: Litman Epstein*

The government cut off aid and financial support was reallocated to humanitarian aid in Chile. Preparations for the reception of refugees started. The contributions of the ambassador, Harald Edelstam, are well known – he saved the lives of many Chileans who sought refuge at the Swedish embassy in Santiago. Part of a communiqué from the party secretariat's deliberations concerning Chile on 3 October 1973 reads:

*The Social Democrats, Centre Party, Liberal Party and Left Communist Party jointly express their fierce condemnation of the overthrow of democracy in Chile and wish to indicate by this statement their desire to work together without regard to party differences in support of the democratic forces within Chile.<sup>3</sup>*

A couple of months later the labour movement's Chileinsamling [Chile Collection] was started under the management of Tage Erlander. Landsorganisationen LO [Swedish Trade Union Confederation], Socialdemokratiska arbetarepartiet SAP [Social Democratic Labour Party], Socialdemokratiska ungdoms- och kvinnoförbunden [Social Democratic Youth and Women's Associations], Broderskapsrörelsen [Brotherhood Movement], Unga Örnar [Young Falcons movement] and Arbetarnas bildningsförbund ABF [Workers' Education Association] were among the organisations giving their active support to the Chilean people. A paper containing information about the situation in Chile – *Chileaktuell* [Chile Today] – was published and raised money in various ways. The Chile Collection was later incorporated in the labour movement's international solidarity fund, the I-fund.

With representatives of all the branches of the labour movement the I-fund ran international solidarity campaigns. 'Chile is still bleeding' was one of the campaigns to raise money for the resistance movement in Chile.

For Arbetarrörelsens internationella centrum AIC [Labour Movement International Centre], Chile was an important field of activity. The AIC was founded as a co-operation agency in the labour movement to reinforce international activity. The AIC had also for many years supported the Chilean struggle for democracy. The Swedish trade union movement, in general, played an important role during the years of dictatorship. Through the LO-TCO Secretariat of International Trade Union Development Co-operation, for one, co-operation was established with the

Chilean trade union movement with regard to union training and the defence of union rights. The LO had by means of the Nordic Trade Union Association, the NFS, also become involved in supporting those union representatives who had been imprisoned. The NFS was in close contact with the Chilean central organisation, the CUT, in exile.<sup>4</sup>

Thus solidarity with Chile was extensive. It was present in political parties, political groups, union organisations, popular movements and between private individuals. The local union branch at the engineering works in Kallhäll expressed it thus:

*Had we lived in Chile, we would have been the ones imprisoned in the football stadium. We would have been stricken by terror and abused by the junta's forces.*<sup>5</sup>

They decided to donate an hours wage each to their persecuted comrades.

### ***The Chile Committee***

In the months following the coup more than 70 local Chile groups were set up around the country. In December 1973 representatives of these groups gathered and founded Chilekommittén [Chile Committee] as a national, party politically independent organisation, which remained active until Chile returned to democracy in 1991. The Committee's material was then transferred to The Labour Movement Archives and Library. It contains extensive material that summarises its activities, the situation in Chile and Chileans in exile. ARAB also holds the Nacka Chile Committee's records. Other local groups transferred their material to the regional Popular Movement archives, for example in Gothenburg, Malmö, Örebro and Uppsala.

The Chile Committee was a wide-ranging solidarity movement that under its statutes worked to offer material and political support to the Chilean opposition's struggle and to disseminate information and knowledge about developments in Chile. The principal slogans were:

Support the Chilean people's fight  
against fascism – for socialism

Fight imperialism

Free the political prisoners

The Chile Committee's plan of operations included the development of solidarity work among workers whereby the issue was introduced to the workplace, to union branches and other worker organisations. Information would be provided in schools, among young people and in the radical music movement. Conscripted soldiers must be made aware of and have illustrated the military's roles in Chile and in Sweden. The Chile Committee study activities were also designed to raise consciousness among those members who were already active in study circles and seminars and to offer sympathisers and other interested parties better reason to participate in solidarity work. The book *Chilekommitténs introduktionscirkel* [Chile Committee's Introduction Circle], used by study circles throughout the country, gives detailed information about Chile's history, geography and economy and about the Unidad Popular and the coup. Following each chapter there are questions on the various subjects. It is one of many examples of just how ambitious the effort to inform and educate members was.<sup>6</sup>

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*Sweden's Davis Cup home tie with Chile, in the town of Båstad in 1975 caused an outcry. The booklet 'Action Group Stop the Chile Game' gives the background to the demonstrations against the game and their results, some of which were even noted in Chilean media.*

Another important objective was to mobilise opinion for a boycott of the junta economically, politically, militarily and culturally. There are resolutions, circulars, posters, proclamations and leaflets containing this demand. One important campaign, already under way in the autumn of 1973, was that for a boycott on imports of Chilean copper. Although the LO rejected the boycott, a circular sent out by Hamnarbetareförbundet [Dockworkers' Union] to all its sections exhorted all its members to refuse to take part in the unloading of Chilean copper imported into Sweden for one month in the autumn of 1974.<sup>7</sup> For its part the Chile Committee wrote a leaflet encouraging the Transportarbetareförbundet [Transport Workers' Union] to unite with the dockers in the boycott and work towards international co-ordination.

### ***Båstad 1975 – Nobel Prize 1976***

Another campaign that attracted great public attention was the boycott of the Sweden's Davis Cup home tie with Chile in Båstad. The 'Stop the Chile Match Campaign Group' was set up, other organisations being involved too. The Swedish Sports Confederation and the Tennis Associa-

Chilean sports commentators had no option but to report back to Santiago on the demonstration.<sup>8</sup>

A letter of 2 November 1976 from the Chile Committee to the Royal Academy of Sciences read:

*Is the Royal Academy of Sciences convinced that Milton Friedman does not have blood on his hands? If the answer is no, we wonder whether the Academy is anxious to exculpate him by giving him the Nobel prize?*<sup>9</sup>

This letter was a part of the extensive campaign initiated after the decision to award Milton Friedman the Nobel Prize for Economics. The protests were based on the fact that Friedman had acted as adviser to the military dictatorship in Brazil and had contributed to the formulation of Chile's economic policy. An appeal against Friedman's nomination was subscribed by 40-odd organisations. The Chile Committee held a press conference regarding the protest against the prize. Material on Milton Friedman was distributed and a demonstration held on the same day as the presentation of the prize.

### ***Sweden's membership of the IDB***

In 1976 the bourgeois parties won the Swedish election and there was a change of government. In spite of massive protests from all the political youth movements except Moderata ungdomsförbundet [Conservative Youth League] it was proposed that Sweden should seek membership of the Inter-American Development Bank, the IDB. The bank had significantly reduced its aid to Chile during the time of Salvador Allende's government, but increased it again after the military coup. One element of the bank's operation was governed by the principle that the USA had its own right of veto on aid projects. The Social Democratic Party and the Left Party - Communists also issued communiqués protesting at the decision.

The Chile Committee ran an extensive campaign against membership of the IDB; this involved studies and debates based on weighty documents written by experts.<sup>10</sup> The youth leagues of the Liberal, Centre and Communist Parties signed a proclamation from the Chile Committee. Lars Engqvist, chairman of the Social Democratic Youth Association, wrote to the Prime Minister, Thorbjörn Fälldin, requesting a 'no' to Sweden joining the IDB on the grounds that the bank's credits were employed directly to serve the purposes of American foreign policy.

*Collecting money for Chile and selling the Chile Bulletin in Stockholm in the spring of 1976. Photo: Anders Enarsson.*

tion, amongst others, were urged to support the Chilean people. The campaign culminated in a demonstration that drew around 7,000 participants. Hundreds of balloons were released bearing the names of political prisoners and the information really did reach Chile, partly because the

The Chile Committee's work and meetings were characterised by thoroughly worked out information campaigns and the contributions of prominent people from both the political and cultural scenes. The Committee published books and essays and arranged concerts and theatre performances. Members of the Chile Committee received detailed and up to date information through the *Chilebulletinen* which was also sold on the streets and at demonstrations. The *Chilebulletinen* was produced throughout the Committee's existence.

At the annual meeting in September 1991 the decision was made to disband the Committee after 20 years of solidarity work. The minutes state that on dissolution the Committee's resources will be passed on to organisations working for political prisoners and, on their liberation, to human rights organisations.<sup>11</sup> The day after the Committee's final annual meeting six members met to close the books. Stefan de Vylder, economist and researcher of developing countries, had been with the Committee throughout. He summed up its work thus:

*The Chile Committee was the only place where people of a slightly radical bent could discuss important issues across party borders. ... The organisational framework that the Committee chose, free of tendencies and open to a range of views within the framework of the mini-platform was absolutely essential to the success of the work for Chile.*<sup>12</sup>

### **Hans Göran Franck and the Chile Commission**

Six months after the coup, on 21 March 1974, 'Internationella kommissionen för undersökning av militärjuntans brott i Chile [International Commission of Enquiry into the Crimes of the Military Junta in Chile]', the Chile Commission, was founded in Helsinki. The chairman was the Finnish parliamentarian Jakob Söderman and the Secretary General was Göran Franck, jurist and social democratic politician. Together they would head the Commission until the start of the 90s. In 1991 the Commission handed over relevant material to the Chilean embassy in Stockholm to be forwarded to the 'Commission on Truth and Reconciliation' in Chile. Material concerning the Commission's work is included in Hans Göran Franck's papers. It is as he organised it and reflects his working methods. Before the various sessions the Commission held he assembled material such as correspondence, testimony, investigations and newspaper clippings chronologically.

The Commission's regulations emphasised that it did not intend to act as an international court but that its decisions should rather be of the nature of moral and humanitarian opinions based on jurisprudential rights. The Commission's foremost task was to investigate the events arising from the coup d'état. It organised tribunals, sessions and hearings. The work also included the analysis of information received, testimony etc., and to draw the conclusions required to deal with the accusations levelled against the military regime. In this way the Commission was able to deal with hundreds of cases of crime and after thorough examination pass a verdict on their nature, which was done in accordance with the general principles of human rights laid down by international law and agreements.

Without belittling the significance of the other organisations and solidarity groups that appeared at this time, there is no question that the Commission was the most pluralistic entity, with representatives from the majority of the world. Its work was supported by governments, parliaments, political parties, religious associations and human rights organisations and, above all, prominent people representing virtually all sections of society. The

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*Booklet edited by the Secretariat in Helsinki of the International Commission of Enquiry into the Crimes of the Military Junta in Chile.*

Commission consisted of a fixed number of permanent members and a number of observers. The latter's contribution was as experts at the various international sessions and to present current information on events, reports or analyses of the Chilean situation. These contributions were made on an individual basis and not as representative of any organisation or political party. Mario Soares of Portugal, Felipe González of Spain, Andreas Papandreou of Greece, Ole Espersen of Denmark, Gabriel García Márquez of Colombia and others participated in this way. Many of the members were jurists who contributed technical and professional advice.

The Chile Commission kept open every channel that might offer information or documentation about Chile including material disseminated by the junta itself. The sources of information used were primarily documents dealt with by international organisations such as the UN, the Organisation of American States (OAS), the Red Cross, Amnesty International and human rights organisations, religious organisations, trade unions, etc. Other sources included the documentation of Chilean parties, personal testimony of the victims of repression, reports and enquiries carried out by experts along with reports of the Commission's own observers. Hans Göran Franck went to Chile himself as an observer. He visited the Tres Alamos concentration camp, spoke to some of the prisoners and reported later on the illegalities of the conditions there. At a meeting of the Commission held in the Parliament building on 11 September 1976 Franck said:

*From my visit to Chile six months ago I shall never forget the intense, concentrated atmosphere with prevailed during my visit to the concentration camp of Tres Alamos. Everything had to be said in two short hours – unheard by the military guard who stood in his corner with a machine gun continuously ready to use. I remember the woman worker who was called to the morgue and there – by chance – learned that her husband had been tortured to death.<sup>13</sup>*

On his next trip to Chile Hans Göran Franck was detained at Santiago airport and then deported as a 'persona non grata' to the military government. Many years later he was honoured with the 'Orden al mérito' by the new democratic Chilean government for his work for the preservation of human rights.

The Chile Commission financed the cost of its permanent secretariat itself from private donations and contributions from individual organisations. Meetings were held with various countries as host and in many cases with the explicit support of the host country's government. One

*The Swedish evening paper Aftonbladet reporting on the expulsion from Santiago de Chile of Swedish lawyer Hans Göran Franck, who was also the Secretary General of the Chile Committee.*

example is the third session held in Mexico City in February 1975. 135 people were invited from five continents for four days of discussion on the situation in Chile. Reports were submitted on everything from North American involvement in the coup to testimony of torture and disappearances. Detailed reports were presented from Amnesty International and the International Commission of Jurists. There were contributions from Chilean delegates, such as the former minister, Orlando Letelier. Shortly after, he was murdered in the USA on the orders of the junta. Letelier, Minister of Defence in Allende's administration and supreme commander of the generals involved in the coup, gave a detailed description in his report of the treachery of these officers and their moral cowardice. The proofs presented by this session were later used by parliaments and governments to decide whether to condemn the Chilean military regime and dissociate themselves from it.<sup>14</sup>

In addition, to illustrate and call into question the military regime's actions in various cases, the Commission also concentrated on the presentation of substantive accusations as to how the judicial system was subordinated to the military and the junta's introduction of a new constitution. The Commission's criticisms still apply as since Chile's return to democracy a debate has been carried on in the Chilean parliament on the reform of the constitution and the legal system inherited from the military. The solidarity movements worked on were still to some extent relevant after the reversion to democracy. Truth, justice and reconciliation are the keywords in modern Chilean politics.

The material in the various archives concerning Chile and the solidarity work during the military regime paints a broad and varied canvas of the work of the popular movements, politically and internationally. It also illustrates the involvement of individuals in the issue. Much of the material also consists of the history of the afflicted.

## NOTES

1. *Aktuellt i politiken* [Politics today] no. 19 1973.
2. Träindustriarbetareförbundets [Wood Industry Workers Union's] conference- 26 September 1973, minutes. 3. Vänsterpartiet kommunisternas VPK [The Left Party - Communists] fonds volume F7d:15.
4. The archives of Arbetarrörelsens internationella centrum [Labour Movement International Centre], LO-TCO biståndsnämnden [Aid Council] and Nordens fackliga samorganisation [Nordic Trade Union Association] are at ARAB.
5. *Chileaktuellt* [Chile Today] no. 3 1974.
6. Chilekommittén [Chile Committee volume] 21:1.
7. Chile Committee volume 9:6.
8. Chile Committee volume 9:6.
9. Chile Committee volume 9:2.
10. Chile Committee volume. 9:5
11. Chile Committee volume 3.5.
12. *Chilebulletinen* [Chile Bulletin] no. 4 1991.
13. Hans Göran Franck's papers volume 4.2:016.
14. Hans Göran Franck's papers volume 4.2:007,010

## LIST OF ARCHIVES AND COLLECTIONS

The Labour Movement International Centre, AIC  
- isolated volumes

Chile Committee - 268 volumes  
Hans Göran Franck - in a series relating to the Chile Commission  
Föreningen för Unga Örnars barnmatsal i Chillán i Chile [Young Falcons Children's Canteen in Chillán Association] - 11 volumes  
Landsorganisationen LO [Swedish Trade Union Confederation] - many series, inter alia International items  
LO-TCO's Aid Council - in the Documents concerning studies and Projects series  
Nacka Chile Committee - 6 volumes  
Nordic Trade Union Association, NFS - isolated volumes  
Olof Palme - in the Speeches, Interviews, Correspondence series  
Göran Sallnäs - 30 volumes  
Pierre Schori - isolated volumes  
Social Democratic Party of Sweden (SAP) - in the International Secretaries' correspondence series, Documents concerning other countries; Printed matter collection  
The Left Party - Communists (VPK) - in the International Correspondence and International Documents by subject series

### *Poster collection*

*Lucy Viedma is an archivist.*