



**A RED NETWORK ARTICLE
DOWNLOADED FROM
WWW.REDNETWORK.IE**

CHILE'S 9/11 – 50 YEARS ON. WE MUST NEVER MAKE THE SAME MISTAKES!

A Red Network Statement

The army moved with great speed. By 8am on the morning of September 11th 1973 they had seized ports, bombed radio stations and taken most of Chile into their hands.

By 2.30pm the Presidential palace fell and left wing president Salvador Allende was dead.

General Pinochet began a reign of terror which decapitated the working class movement. Thousands were shot, tortured, raped and exiled.

The Chilean ruling class, with the backing of the U.S. took revenge on the working class. 30,000 were killed and 130,000 jailed in disgusting conditions. 40,000 people were herded into the National stadium.

Henry Kissinger displayed the cruel anti-democratic instincts of the ruling classes:

“No country should be allowed go Communist due to the stupidity of its own people.”

How did the movement in Chile, which had been a beacon of hope to workers and activists worldwide, end up in torture cells? What went wrong?

Salvador Allende and the Popular Unity coalition of the left had been elected in 1970. In Chile and around the world there were those that proclaimed revolution was a thing of the past.

There was now a new ‘Chilean road to socialism’. It was supposed to be possible to take over the existing capitalist state machine and use it in the interests of the masses of people.

At first it seemed that things were improving for the majority of Chileans. Every child got milk. Land belonging to the richest 600 was handed to 100,000 landless peasants. Workers hopes were raised.

Allende’s strategy of ‘peaceful’ gradual change meant appeasing not only the poor but also the rich. He maintained the level of arms spending. He made sure to keep the Generals happy.

He made sure his reforms were no real harm to the interests of Chilean capitalists. ‘Enterprises where private ownership of the means of production will remain in force,’ he said, ‘in terms of numbers they will remain the majority.’ Overall it was planned to nationalise only 150 out of the 3,500 firms.

After a year in power everything seemed to be going well for the Popular Unity coalition. Their votes increased.

But at a certain point the increasing confidence of the working class was becoming incompatible with balancing those interests with those of the capitalist class. The Government had to start making choices.

The class struggle escalated as workers thought 'our' Government is in power we should push for more.

Allende pleaded with workers to behave, asking them to 'limit wage claims' and criticising those who occupied a U.S. bank. He resisted a strike by copper workers and he warned militants they must end their 'illegal seizures of land and property'

The ruling class sensed his weakness. The more the militancy of workers increased the greater the pleas from Allende for restraint.

Soon the pleas turned to threats. The rich understood and increased their pressure on Allende to act. Rich housewives marched with their servants' banging pots and pans for them. Owners of industry locked their factories and kicked workers out. Through blackmail and sabotage the ruling class fought to get their way.

The Government took the line that the most militant workers were as bad as the far-right. The worker's militancy was 'provoking' the response of the Right. So Allende assumed it wasn't his weakness but the workers strength that was the problem. So he set out to undermine that strength.

As a member of his Government said:

'There is an extreme right that traffics in arms and is aiming at civil war, But there are also "ultra" groups that call themselves "left" who are following the same course, playing the role of partner in a mad waltz with their political opposites.'

The Government authorised the Grupo Movil of the Carabineros (police) to use force to break up protests called by workers and students. In the city of Concepcion the Grupo Movil cost the life of a 17-year-old student and left 40 wounded. They sent paratroopers into poor suburbs.

These paratroopers, sympathisers of the far right, were well aware they were practicing for the day they took on Allende himself. He wound the rope around his own neck.

When workers started to demand arms to defend their factories against the growing threat from the right Allende was quick to turn on them:

'There will be no armed forces here other than those stipulated by the constitution, that is to say, the Army, the Navy and the Air Force. I shall eliminate any others if they appear.'

In March 73 he still received high votes but a massive copper strike from April to July saw the Government declare that the copper workers were not part of the working class calling them 'fascists' and 'traitors' despite knowing that those workers had voted 70% for Popular Unity.

But no one to the left of Allende bothered to support the miners. There was an attempt at a putsch by the army in June but Allende fell back on support from the 'loyal' elements of the army command. He invited the Christian Democrats to join his Government but they had no interest in propping up a weak government.

In Santiago and in worker's districts mass assemblies of workers were beginning to develop. They were called the cordones. The role of these was described by the Peruvian revolutionary exiled in Chile, Hugo Blanco:

‘Cordon is the term used to refer to the concentration of factories along certain avenues in Santiago ... The working class is organised into unions on a factory basis, and these unions are grouped into federations of the various industrial branches ... As in every pre-revolutionary process, the masses are beginning to create new organisations that are more responsive to their struggle, though for the moment they are not abandoning the old ones. The cordones are a partial innovation in the sense that they continue to make use of the unions, but they are linked by zone, by cordon, rather than by industrial branch. At first the top leadership of the CUT refused to recognise the cordones, and the CP called them illegal bodies. Today this is no longer tenable, and the reformists now reluctantly recognise them in view of the fact that their own rank and file has refused to heed their effort to ignore the cordones.’

All the elements for a worker’s revolution existed. The working class can gain confidence from the election of a left Government but the movement can only succeed if workers learn to look beyond such a government to their own power.

There have been many left governments that ended a wave of struggle and demoralised workers like the Labour government in Britain in 1974.

The rich can use their economic wealth, their control of the civil service, the police and army high command to destroy a left government when they sense weakness. Workers need to rely on their own revolutionary strength - protests, strikes and workplace occupations.

The reason most modern left governments don't lead to that scenario is because they simply surrender to the rich without a real fight, like Syriza in Greece.

The Sinn Fein leaders need not worry though - the bosses know they'll play ball and do what they're told in government. They're even talking about coalition with Fianna Fáil.

The state is a machine made to oppress workers, we cannot win unless we replace that machine. There is a permanent government made up of people loyal to the rich and they control the deep state.

As German revolutionary Karl Marx once said: the workers can’t just lay hold of the ready-made state machinery they have to smash it.

The possibility for such a workers revolution existed in Chile in 1973 but workers instead of looking to their own power looked to Allende to solve the crisis for them.

A working class party, uniting key militants in the working class, could have worked alongside workers who were still Allende supporters but pulled them over to the idea of power going to the assemblies, the Cordones.

Allende paved the road to the coup and 30,000 workers lost their lives to the counter revolution. In order to honour their memory we have to learn from their deaths and never make the same mistakes again. Otherwise their blood was shed in vain.

Never trust the rich or their state.

The RED Network (incorporating Rebel Telly) are a network of radical socialists within the political party People Before Profit, a 32-county people power movement on the island of Ireland.

www.rednetwork.ie