

CHILE - THE FACTS AND THE LESSONS

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On the 10th of September, there were three freely elected Marxist Governments outside the Iron Curtain. Now there are only two—in India and Ceylon. What has happened in Chile during the past few weeks is therefore a matter of some interest and relevance to us in India.

Let us consider the picture of Chile as it was at the end of August 1973. The economic situation had become hopeless and the people were suffering misery unparalleled in the history of Chile. Since foreign comment might be considered suspect, it is fortunate that Mr Gautam Vohra has given an eye-witness account as a result of speaking four weeks in Chile this summer, in the *Times Weekly* of September 23, 1973:

What struck me most were the unending queues outside the shops in Santiago. People stood for hours to buy items for daily use, such as bread, sugar, meat, rice and butter. There was scarcity of several other goods, ranging from spare car parts to oil and detergents as well. The shortage of these items was so widespread that whoever I talked to had nothing but complaints.

He goes on to add:

The middle class, which forms thirty per cent of Chile's total population, was alienated from Allende, as it was directly affected by his reforms: nationalisation of factories and manufacturing companies which were put under workers' control as well as expropriation of large agricultural landholdings. But what was worse, his reforms did not even benefit the working class, who found that their increased wages were eroded by inflation.

"On the industrial front, production of nationalized industries declined because, after Allende's accession to power, there was a large-scale exodus of managerial and technical personnel (mainly to the US). The workers in charge of running the factories, it is alleged, soon discovered that they did not possess the know-how to run their factories. If there was a breakdown in some machinery it took months to get it repaired... The net result of all this was that industrial production fell by 5.8

per cent from January to March 1973."

The decline in agricultural production (1973) was even more drastic—22 per cent. Under Frei, the former President, \$160 million worth of food items (wheat, meat, bananas, coffee, tea, butter) were being imported. Under Allende (in 1972), food imports totalled \$700 million—a dramatic increase."

"A cursory glance at the price lists revealed to me the skyrocketing rate of inflation. For example, a cooking range at a store in the Centro (Santiago's shopping centre) cost 1,800 escudos (owing to the price control on certain items), while a torch—which did not have any price control restriction—cost 1,700 escudos. This is absurd considering that the weight of iron used in a cooking range is 90 kilos while that used in a torch is only 300 grammes. The government increased the price of these items in October 1972. It raised the price of the cooking range to 4,000 escudos. But by then the price of a torch had risen to 3,000 escudos."

It is well-known that, since 1971, the women of Santiago had, during certain day and time of the week, come out of their homes with their pots and pans, banging their spoons against empty pots in a symbolic babel of protest which drowned all other sounds throughout the capital. On the eve of the liberation of Chile, a hundred thousand women had turned out for a demonstration against the Marxist regime and had been dispersed with tear gas.

This then briefly is a picture of the economic collapse and the growing disorder, violence and mob rule which Allende's regime had created as a result of Marxist policies which had inevitably become counter-productive.

As if this all was not enough, Allende, like his counterpart in Ghana the late lamented President Nkrumah, had thrown the doors of his country open to thousands of the Communist rag, tag and bobtail from neighbouring countries.

The new Chilean Government has arrested no less than 14,000 of this riff-raff from other countries with whom Allende had sought to tyrannise over his own people. They include 4,187 Bolivians, 3,266 Uruguayans, 2,139 Argentinians, 1,200 Brazilians, 580 Colombians, 178 Peruvians, 150 Mexicans, 36 Venezuelans and 187 Cubans.

Thus, as the *London Economist* stresses, the responsibility for the tragedy lies entirely with Allende.

A MINORITY PRESIDENT

Let it also be recalled that Allende did not at any stage represent a majority of the Chilean people. In the Presidential elections of September 1970, he had obtained, with the support of the communists, only 36 per cent of the popular vote—even less than the 43 per cent which Prime Minister Indira Gandhi secured in 1971. He only got elected President because of the absence of a system of proportional representation. He was thus a minority leader misusing his position by falsely claiming the support of the people and flouting repeatedly the majority in Parliament.

The leaders of the liberation have claimed that they moved in to remove Allende in response to the almost unanimous call of the Chilean nation. "We acted", said a spokesman of the new Chilean Government on September 22, "in interpretation of the absolute will of a majority of the people who pleaded with us for more than a year to take this course." In acting thus, the Chilean Armed Forces followed the tradition in Latin American politics of the Army moving in to remove hated demagogues when there is no other way out. Normally, such interventions have proved to be of a progressive and patriotic character. Mr Gautam Vohra documents the truth of this when he writes: "For days I did not meet anyone who spoke in favour of the Socialist President."

Finally, it was not the military who intruded into politics. It was Allende who, in order to bolster his tottering regime, brought the Generals into the

Cabinet and into politics in order to bail him out. The move boomeranged.

Contrary to the impression given by loaded press reports, the bulk of the Chilean people—the silent majority who had suffered during the last few years—have welcomed the change.

The leaders of the new regime have announced that their primary purpose is to restore order and to get the economy moving. Indeed, an expert on Chile has said that "it looks very much as if the military men intend to cast Chile in the Democratic Socialist mould, possibly the West European model, but more likely closer to what you find in Brazil or Mexico."

There has been some controversy about how Allende met his end. It is quite clear that he preferred to commit suicide rather than accept the offer of safe conduct out of the country that the Generals, following the well established Latin American pattern, offered him. His widow, on arriving in Mexico City, said: "My husband preferred to kill himself rather than be betrayed alive," and went on to add that the weapon with which he did the job was a sub-machine gun presented to him by his dear comrade, Fidel Castro.

The fact that the President committed suicide has now been confirmed by a judge who was appointed to investigate the manner of his death.

But international communist propaganda has to invent its inevitable martyr. So, like the late lamented Lumumba of the Congo, Allende had to be "murdered" and

added to the pantheon of communist saints.

A PARALLEL?

Prime Minister Indira Gandhi has chosen to draw a parallel between her own position and that of Allende in a maudlin effort to attract sympathy to herself as a potential martyr. There is an old saying that if the cap fits, one is welcome to wear it. On the other hand, Mr Girilal Jain has argued at great length in an article in the *Times of India* that the parallel between India and Chile does not hold and that it can only "vitiolate thinking which is already muddled as a result of a thoughtless import of ideas and ideologies."

Mrs Gandhi also allowed herself the luxury of entertaining Fidel Castro in Delhi and stood by encouragingly while Castro characteristically misused Indian hospitality to indulge in a tirade against the US. The first reaction to this is the US Senate resolution, passed by a thumping majority of 67 to 18 barring any settlement of India's huge debt to the US "at less than 100 cents to the dollar." Our Prime Minister's escapade has thus cost the country a few million dollars.

Two constructive contributions in regard to the lessons that this country may draw from the liberation of Chile from Marxist tyranny have been made by the President of the Congress (O) and a former Indian Ambassador to Chile.

Immediately after the coup, Mr Asoka Mehta said in a statement in Delhi that "Dr Allende had in pursuit of his objectives—however laudable in intention—so mismanaged the economy that Chile had come almost to a grinding halt. While that country hardly advanced towards socialist objectives, its democratic policy had been destroyed and social peace endangered." The Congress President added that the events in Chile warned us to be on our guard.

In a letter to the press published on 27th September, Mr B. K. Massand, who had served for two years from 1965 to 1967 as Ambassador of India to Chile and

had the opportunity to study the politics and politicians of that country, observed:

Chile among the Latin American countries is unique inasmuch as the country has an enlightened and substantial middle class. In other Latin American countries the middle class hardly, if at all, exists, there being either too rich or too poor segments. Then Chile has had a fairly long tradition of respect for democratic institutions and mainly as a result of this, the armed forces, unlike in other Latin American countries, have had a long tradition of keeping out of active politics.

Going on to consider the mystery as to why a shrewd politician like Allende managed to alienate the very sections of society whose cause he had apparently espoused, Mr Massand comes to the conclusion that

apparently, he could not have done so out of his free will but under compulsion of circumstances as a captive of extremists in the coalition of diverse leftist elements he was heading. Here then is a lesson for us all.

"In politics as in life," concludes Mrs Indira Gandhi's former envoy, "undue haste makes waste and shortcuts do not help in achieving even the most cherished and laudable ends."

Perhaps one more lesson from Chile is that a communist takeover of a country outside the Iron Curtain can only succeed if and when the country has a common frontier with the Soviet Union. This has been proved repeatedly by the example of several far-flung countries such as Indonesia, the Congo, Ghana and the Dominican Republic. Cuba is perhaps the only exception.

An example from our own country was Telengana in 1948. It is known that the great master Stalin taught this lesson to the Indian communist leaders when they visited Moscow in 1951 to report on the failure of their mission in Telengana.

In other words, no nation will allow itself to be destroyed unless Soviet arms and military assistance are brought in to do the job and overwhelm patriotic resistance. Allende paid the price for forgetting this. But Chile has been saved.

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