

The Fall of Salvador Allende

Introduction

The 1973 Chilean coup was a shocking political event

- Heard 'round the world'
 - Good social democrats replaced by evil reactionary dictators
 - Echoes of Nazism
- Allende's government was leftist *cause celebre* at a time when the socialism was all the rage
 - Seductive promise of peaceful road to socialism
 - Marxists inspired by Engel's remarks in Holland about possibility of democratic route
 - Everyone concludes peaceful transition impossible; capitalists will never surrender power
 - Intense criticism of foreign policy in U.S.

We will spend a lot of time (3 weeks) on Chile for two reasons

- Such a well-known event
 - Still discussed and debated; very controversial
 - Issue of transitional justice still alive (even though Pinochet will not be tried)
- Chile is the most overstudied country in the world, so readings are very good
- **Chance to observe the whole cycle (democracy-dictatorship-democracy) without having to learn a whole new country each time**

Chile in 1970

Moderately developed

- High education, literacy
- Quite unequal distribution of wealth
 - Neofeudal relations in some areas
 - Like Esteban's estate in *The House of the Spirits*
- Pockets of extreme poverty
- Dependent on minerals (copper) and agriculture

Long tradition of democracy and rule of law

- Military firmly under civilian control
- Parties dominate political scene
- Electorate divided along three-thirds (Left-Center-Right)
- Some semi-loyal groups
 - Rightist parties, who want to turn back clock
 - Leftist parties, who want revolution
 - Not so bad as in Weimar; semi-conditional acceptance of democracy
- Gradual erosion of old norms
 - Competition for "captured votes" in rural areas
 - Extreme politicization under Christian Democrats (CDs)
 - Reject pork-barreling and partisan compromises
 - Aim at political hegemony
 - Attempt to capture mass media

- Polarize both Left (who fear challenge) and Right (who feel betrayed)
 - Push Radicals to Left
- As a result of CD behavior, Center and Right can't agree on common presidential candidate in 1970

Allende wins in 1970

- No majority, so Congress must ratify
- Opposition from far Right and sections of military
- Insistence from Left that he be ratified
- CDs on a leftist kick, so they agree
- Opposition forces him to agree to new conditions
 - Respect for rule of law
 - Not to politicize military and police
- Not clear whether he keeps these promises

Allende's ambivalence

- Very charismatic and prominent politician in Chile
 - helped found Socialist Party
 - four-time presidential candidate of the Left
 - almost won in 1958
- Wants to make a Revolution, but without violence
- A democrat, a socialist, and a freemason
- Himself an aristocrat and a bon vivant
 - Installs his mistress (La Payita) in the presidential palace
 - likes fine wine, brandy, and art
 - Accepts bribes, but not bought by anybody
- A portrait of contrasts; deep ambivalence
 - Revolutionary agenda, democratic means
 - Marxist views, bohemian life
 - On the day of the coup, he appears with his gold-plated AK-47, given to him by Fidel Castro, a helmet, a cardigan sweater, and a tweed jacket

Honeymoon: Nov. 1970-September 1971

- Allende moves very quickly after election
- Rapid wage increases
- "Chilean way" speech in May 1971
- Constructive opposition from Christian Democrats
- Massive social mobilization
- Moves to nationalize industry
 - Foreign copper companies; very popular
 - Largest Chilean industries
- Rapidly gets to ~50% of electorate

Increasing political polarization

- Bid for majority of electorate; comes very close
- Mounting violence
 - Class warfare
 - factory occupations
 - land seizures
 - leftist terrorism
- Castro comes to visit
- CDs break off alliance in September 1971
- Allende now lacks majority in legislature

Polarization: September 1971-October 1972

- "Government by legerdemain" (Davis)
 - Tohá case
 - Requisitions following government-inspired strikes and factory seizures based on 1932 decree
 - Use of development funds to buy stakes in private corporations
 - Negotiations with opposition over nationalizations break down
- Chaos in countryside over radical land reform
 - MIR seizing land
- Mounting violence
- Deepening economic crisis; inflation
- Allende tries to steer middle course, but far Left propels him
- Culminates in October 1972
 - Tanks called in to put down street disturbances in Santiago
 - Government seizes last private distribution company
 - Truckers go on strike
 - Allende suffers heart attack
 - Military brought into cabinet

UP coalition divided

- Far Left strategy (Socialists)
 - Attack material base of bourgeoisie
 - Mobilize, even if it means polarizing
 - Arm the workers?
- Moderate UP strategy (Communists)
 - Consolidate what we have; Don't shock the economy anymore
 - Suppress the MIR
 - Dialogue with Christian Democrats
- **Does this seem strange?**

Opposition restive

- Christian Democrats increasingly frustrated
- Right begins to openly call for military intervention

Temporary respite? October 1972 to March 1973

- Military involved in government
 - Prats is commander
 - Order restored in 4 days
 - Strike ends
 - Street mobilization dies down
- Provocations and missteps by government
 - unified educational curriculum
 - rationing scheme (images of Cuban-style social control)
- run-up to elections
 - opposition wants two-thirds, to impeach Allende (unrealistic)
 - UP says they will win more than in 1973 (likely)
- Elections solve nothing
 - Opposition wins 56%
 - Insists on clear, legal, orderly plan of nationalizations

- Military presents grievances
- Supreme Court decries unconstitutional measures
- Allende moves to center, but doesn't break with far left
- Military withdraws from Cabinet

Final stages, April 1973-September 1973

Constitutional solution increasingly unlikely

- Jump in leftist paramilitary activity; melees in streets
- Truckers go back on strike; stay there until coup
- Economy continues to tank
 - High inflation
 - Constant shortages
- Successive groups (Supreme Court, Congress, Comptroller, military) declare that government is acting outside the law
- Media and opposition parties call openly for military coup

Meanwhile, the military is readying itself

- Active coup planning in all services
 - In July, Pinochet alters army contingency plan. **Note that military contingency planning is what military staffs do when they are not actually fighting. What would a plan for a terrorist attack on Congress look like?**
- Purges inside military
 - Leftist junior officers
 - Senior Constitutionals forced out or reshuffled by Allende
 - Prats forced to resign; Augusto Pinochet takes over
- Conditions don't improve; no agreement with CDs
- September 7, all commanders sign on to a coup
 - Pinochet one of the last to agree

Allende appears to move finally toward break with radical left

- plans speech offering to submit himself to referendum
- plans break with MIR
- not clear what would have happened
- His speech is scheduled for September 10
- He postpones it by one day

But the military has moved

- Institutional military coup on September 11, 1973 ("institutional" in the sense that the whole military as an institution basically moves against the government, and the chain of command inside the military is intact)
- Navy seizes Valparaíso rapidly; Concepción falls by 9 a.m.
Military has disrupted leftist communication
Air Force requests Allende's resignation and guarantee safe passage
Allende refuses to resign, but also refuses to call for revolution
Troops advance on La Moneda; several killed by leftist snipers
Carabineros split, but most refuse to fight for Allende
- Some resistance within military, but not chain of command mostly intact
- Navy offers president safe passage
Junta gives 11 a.m. deadline
Allende signals willingness to resign, but insists officers come to him;
Junta suggests Allende come to them at Ministry of Defense

Continuing negotiations over surrender fail

La Moneda bombed; tanks surround palace and fire tear gas, then invade

- Allende kills himself (?); most of supporters in La Moneda surrender
- Martial law and strict curfew imposed; only scattered resistance in factories and universities 3,000-10,000 die; many of them executed; hundreds murdered in National Stadium, where 7,000 detained
- 10,000 Chileans flee country claiming asylum