

Influencing Society:

The Role of El Mercurio in Allende's Coup

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Introduction

On September 11, 1973 the military forces of Chile began a coup against the Socialist government of Salvador Allende. The navy took over the port of Valparaiso. The carabineros, the police force that guarded the president, left the presidential palace to join their commander in the coup. Instead of accepting offers for safe travel out of Chile into exile, Allende chose to stay and fight for the country he had ruled for the last three years. He would not surrender to the insurgents. They attacked the palace with rockets. In stead of giving in to the invading soldiers Allende chose to die.¹ Whether he was killed by the invading soldiers or killed himself before they got there is still a debated question. Nevertheless, this was the way the first democratically elected socialist government of Chile came to an end.

Salvador Allende was elected as president of Chile in September 1970. As the first democratically elected socialist president he was closely watched by the rest of the world. Many factors of Allende's presidency and the coup that took his life have been studied in great detail. Both the reasons for Allende's rise to power and the reasons for his fall have been thoroughly examined. Scholars disagree on the reasons for his fall but the main ones given are economic crisis, US involvement, and Allende's failure to capitalize on his support base. American scholarship, however, focuses mainly on the United States' role in the overthrow and their perspective on it.² The Chilean perspective has been largely overlooked in US historiography, including the media and how it

¹ Thomas E. Skidmore and Peter H. Smith, *Modern Latin America*, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University P, 1997), 140-141.

² Mark Falcoff, *Modern Chile 1970-1989* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1989).

Ricardo Israel Z., *Politics and Ideology in Allende's Chile* (Tempe: Arizona State University, 1989).

Edy Kaufman, *Crisis in Allende's Chile: New Perspectives* (New York: Praegen, 1988).

Edward Boorstein, *Allende's Chile* (New York: International Publishers, 1977).

portrayed Allende and his socialist reforms. This paper will analyze how *El Mercurio*, Santiago's leading right wing newspaper, represented Allende to the public. The main question leading my analysis is how *El Mercurio* influenced its readers in the last months of Allende's presidency. Were they pushing for a coup? If so, to what audience did they direct this argument? Hence, this analysis looks at the power of the press and how Allende was being perceived inside Chile.

To determine whether *El Mercurio* did indeed advocate a coup I will analyze the articles that were run in the last month or so of Allende's rule to determine how the economic, social, and political aspects of Allende's government were portrayed, as the attacks became greater in the later months. Were stories told in an unbiased way? Did they reflect what was indeed going on in the country? Were some view points emphasized while others were not mentioned? A fuller picture requires a look at the background of the company owning the newspaper and their political leanings. To compare what was reported and the actual circumstances and events in the country I will rely on secondary sources that are less biased. While the journalists of the time had a political motivation historians seek to analyze history in a less biased way. I will also be comparing *El Mercurio's* stories to the articles run in other periodicals of Chile. Who were the people that *El Mercurio* was representing and who was it trying to influence?

This project analyzes Allende's overthrow from a new perspective; that of a group of people who were very influential in determining how the rest of society viewed their world. Many scholars, such as Edy Kaufman, say that the coup that ended Allende's rule was the result of outside influences. A local newspaper, while it can be influenced by outside sources, by definition reports things that are going on inside the country, what

people are doing and their opinions. This essay explains the power of the press and how it can be used for or against a government through the way it emphasizes or down plays certain events and facts. Indeed, I ask, did *El Mercurio* help swing enough people against Allende to make a coup possible?

Despite its seemingly obvious importance, the historiography on the role of the press in Allende's overthrow is limited. Most historians have focused on the coup and the United States government's involvement. Studies of the United State's role in Chile vary in placing the guilt of Allende's overthrow. Mark Falcoff, in *Modern Chile 1970-1989*, takes the view that, yes, the U.S. government was involved in Chile during Allende's presidency but that does not mean that it really had anything to do with his overthrow.³ Ricardo Israel Z. in, *Politics and Ideology in Allende's Chile*, takes a more middle of the road position arguing that the U.S. government had a role in the collapse of the Allende government but that the collapse would not have happened if there had not been significant internal factors as well.⁴ In *Crisis in Allende's Chile: New Perspectives* Edy Kaufman also goes along with this vein of thought, though leaning more towards U.S. influence than Israel does.⁵ Edward Boorstien, in *Allende's Chile*, makes the strongest argument for the role of the U.S. in the end of the Allende regime.⁶ This debate reveals that the issue of U.S. involvement is very complex. Overall, however, the U.S. government played a significant role in undermining Allende, but the coup would not have happened were it not for significant internal factors as I will illustrate later.

³ Mark Falcoff, *Modern Chile 1970-1989* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1989).

⁴ Ricardo Israel Z., *Politics and Ideology in Allende's Chile* (Tempe: Arizona State University, 1989).

⁵ Edy Kaufman, *Crisis in Allende's Chile: New Perspectives* (New York: Praegen, 1988).

⁶ Edward Boorstein, *Allende's Chile* (New York: International Publishers, 1977).

Historiography on the press in Chile is harder to find. However, some of the scholars that focus on the coup also deal with the media's role in Chile. In looking at the press in Chile scholars look at who had the upper hand, and mention that the opposition had control of the majority of the media. They had 115 of the 155 radio stations and 47 of the big newspapers compared to the 16 controlled by the left-wing.⁷ Obviously the Right had a large advantage in the amount of news that they got out to the public. On top of the numerical disparity, Israel says that the opposition press was technically better as well, "The ideological balance was shifted in the opposition's favor by the weakness of the Left press and the skill of the nonsocialist press, which was qualitatively superior and quantitatively overwhelming."⁸ He attributes the fact that Allende failed to gain the support of the majority of the middle classes to these differences. The main focus of the rest of the authors is on the question of the freedom of the press. Falcoff is the only one who says that the freedom of the press was really in any danger. He says that the government, by only placing their funding, in the form of advertisements, in the leftist papers, seriously endangered the opposition press. In fact he says that it was only through U.S. subsidies that the opposition press did not go bankrupt.⁹ Kaufman counters that by arguing that by the time that the government withdrew their ads the opposition was already being funded by the United States and outside corporations, thus the opposition press was never in danger of closing and the freedom of the press was maintained.¹⁰ He states, "Government attempts to subdue that deadly opposition media were not pursued to their natural end, and until the last days of the UP the written warfare

⁷ Israel, *Politics and Ideology*, 122.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Falcoff, *Modern Chile*, 230-231.

¹⁰ Kaufman, *Crisis in Allende's Chile*, 92.

escalated and full freedom of the press was maintained.”¹¹ Edward Tassinari, clearly taking a middle view, says that Allende’s government did indeed try and “underscore” the opposition press, specifically *El Mercurio*, the leader in anti-Allende propaganda.¹² However, in the end he says that freedom of the press was maintained. The end conclusion seems to be that freedom of the press was maintained and that the opposition press had the upper hand. Probably, then, the articles printed by *El Mercurio* were not subject to censorship because of the government’s inability to control the media.

Background

In order to fully understand the situation it is necessary to know the events that led up to the coup. Salvador Allende was elected as president of Chile on September 4, 1970 in his third presidential race. He won with a plurality of the vote of 36.6 percent compared to the 35.3 percent of his opponent Jorge Alessandri.¹³ Allende was the leader of the coalition party Unidad Popular (UP), which included the Radical, Socialist, and Communist parties. Allende was considered a threat to many people because of his socialist ideology, which called for the nationalization of industry and the gradual change to a socialist society. US Secretary of the State, Henry Kissinger, describes the threat that Allende posed to the United States government, “He was an admirer of the Cuban dictatorship and a resolute opponent to ‘American Imperialism’”. His stated goal had been

¹¹ Ibid., 91.

¹² Edward Tassinari, “The Chilean Mass Media During the Presidency of Salvador Allende Gossens” (PhD diss., University of Miami, 1982), 103.

¹³ Boorstein, *Allende’s Chile*, 54.

to undermine our position in the entire Western hemisphere.”¹⁴ He froze prices and raised wages so that workers could afford to buy products they couldn’t before, creating a consumer boom. He nationalized the copper mines and certain international corporations, including American corporations such as International Telephone and Telegraph (ITT) and Ford. He gave little or no compensation to these companies saying that in the past they had made “illegally high profits”.¹⁵ In doing this he angered many Americans who in turn looked to their government to defend their property.

Allende tried to make the change to socialism slow so that society could adjust. However, this only put him awkwardly in the middle between the upper and middle classes, who thought he was doing too much, and the working classes, who thought he was doing too little. This difficult situation would lead to dissatisfaction by both sides, making his position very shaky. Still, he had a very strong base of support in the working classes; he just never really learned how to manage them. Falcoff says that Allende called for the mobilization of workers but could not control them, “The result was that the president could not control all of the bodies for whose conduct he was ostensibly responsible, and therefore could not effectively negotiate with the opposition on concrete matters- such as the return of factories seized by his followers in moments of crisis.”¹⁶

Allende called for nationalization of factories but when workers took it into their own hands to take over their factories he would give them back to their owners because he did not want to alienate the middle class. He wanted the workers to be his base and his protection but he would not arm them so as not to alarm the rest of society. In these ways Allende failed to truly use the strength of his support and even alienated some of the

¹⁴ Kaufman, *Crisis in Allende's Chile*, 4.

¹⁵ Skidmore and Smith, *Modern Latin America*, 136.

¹⁶ Falcoff, *Modern Chile*, 258.

workers by going back on his supposed ideology. The economic changes combined with the blockade the United States put on Chile made the Chilean economy struggle. This led to inflation and unemployment and large strikes by the end of Allende's rule. All this was fueled by anti-Allende propaganda dispersed by the media. Social unrest and outside pressures eventually led to the military coup that ended Allende's government and led to the rightist dictatorship of General Augusto Pinochet.

The role of the United States government in the overthrow of Salvador Allende has been studied in great detail. For example, both Edy Kaufman's *Crisis in Allende's Chile* and Mark Falcoff's *Modern Chile* look at this question. As a democratically elected socialist Allende was perceived as a great threat to the Nixon administration, which was in the middle of the Cold War. The CIA had been trying to undermine Allende since before his election by conducting a "spoiling campaign" of propaganda during the 1970 elections. Allende's government did not pose a military or economic threat to the United States but he was seen as posing a big ideological threat. The Nixon administration was worried that having a democratically elected socialist government in the heart of South America would pose as an example to other governments already leaning towards the left and away from the U.S. and that socialism would spread throughout the continent. Kissinger describes this threat in comparison to the Cuban threat,

In this case you would not have...an island off the coast which has not had a traditional relationship and impact on Latin America, but a major Latin American country, a communist government joining for example Argentina which is already deeply divided...joining Peru which has already been heading in directions that have been difficult to deal with, and joining Bolivia which has also gone in a more leftist anti-U.S. direction.¹⁷

¹⁷ Kaufman, *Crisis in Allende's Chile*, 5.

This was Kissinger's favorite domino theory that had been used to justify the intervention in Vietnam. If one state fell they would all fall. For this reason Richard Nixon decided that the Allende government could not be allowed to survive and planned to use the CIA to bring about its downfall.

There are four main phases of U.S. involvement in Allende's presidency: a "spoiling campaign" before he was elected; an effort to make sure he did not take office after he won a plurality, which was divided into two phases, Track I and Track II; and efforts to destabilize Allende's government once he obtained office. Throughout these four phases the main goal was always to keep Allende from having power in the government. The CIA had regularly backed a candidate in the Chilean elections but in the 1970 election they decided not to do so. Instead the government gave the CIA between \$425,000 and one million dollars to run a spoiling campaign of propaganda.¹⁸ This money went to the dispersal of propaganda against Allende, particularly to spread fear about what would happen if Allende was elected. This plan did not work in keeping Allende from being elected. The next phase of the plan was to keep Allende from being confirmed by the congress. Edy Kaufman describes the first track, "The first was aimed at interfering in the congressional vote through covert activities ranging from bribes, support for opposition groups, parties, and media, to threats of an overall economic "squeeze".¹⁹ The CIA hoped to convince enough congressmen from the Christian Democratic Party (PDC) to vote for Alessandri so that he would get elected instead of Allende. Alessandri would then resign, starting new elections in which the current president, Eduardo Frei, could run. Two hundred and fifty thousand dollars was set aside

¹⁸ Falcoff, *Modern Chile*, 204.

¹⁹ Kaufman, *Crisis in Allende's Chile*, 7.

to bribe congressmen.²⁰ The second track to the CIA's plan was to try and facilitate a coup by the military. The plan was to use propaganda and economic sanctions to create the atmosphere that was right for a coup and to instigate the coup within the military. The attempted coup was a failure and resulted in the murder of General Rene Schneider, head of Chilean armed forces and a resolute constitutionalist who would not go along with the plans for a coup. Allende was confirmed as president in November 1970. The American government sought to figure out a way to get Allende out of power. They settled on a policy of destabilization based on propaganda, giving money to opposition parties and groups, and the use of an "invisible blockade".²¹ This destabilization campaign was carried on throughout the remainder of Allende's presidency and is thought by many scholars to be one of the main reasons that Allende's government fell.

El Mercurio Background

El Mercurio was only part of a media empire owned by a prominent Chilean family, the Edwards family. In 1965 ten financial groups controlled 34.3% of the Chilean corporations. The largest group was the Banco Edwards group directed by Augustin Edwards. In addition to a bank and several agricultural societies the Edwards family also controlled much of the Chilean media. Empresa El Mercurio, owned by the Edwards family, controlled three Santiago dailies, five provincial dailies, and two tabloids from Valparaíso. Lord Cochrane Editorial, also owned by the Edwards, printed

²⁰ Falcoff, *Modern Chile*, 213.

²¹ The "invisible blockade" was a blockade of funds put on Chile by the United States. The government used its control of monetary institutions such as the World Monetary Fund to make sure that Chile was not granted any more loans or aid. This greatly helped in the destabilization of Chile's economy and led to many of the problems that the Chilean public blamed on Allende.

eight magazines nation wide.²² On top of all that the Edwards family had exclusive control over the services of several of the largest international press agencies, including: AP, Reuter, AFP, and the New York Times.²³ The Chilean press was widely considered the best in Latin America with Chileans being some of the best informed in the region in part due to the 80 percent literacy rate.²⁴ *El Mercurio* alone had a very large readership; it printed 128,000 daily copies and 300,000 to 320,000 on Sundays. Including the rest of its publications the group published 861,000 daily newspapers, 90,000 weekly political journals, and 540,000 weekly children's magazines.²⁵ As Tassinari puts it, "By the very extent of its readership, the *El Mercurio* group could be considered a powerful force in shaping public opinion and conveying interest group persuasions."²⁶

With this kind of influence obviously the Edwards family was part of the elite in Chile. This was exactly the group that was most threatened by Allende's rise to power and his proposed reforms. Indeed, in the months after Allende was elected many of the upper class families left Chile and sold their properties. Augustine Edwards left Chile shortly after Allende was elected and went to live in the United States where he was offered a job by the Pepsi Cola Corporation. The Edwards family did not, however, sell *El Mercurio*. Instead the company gained a new directorship. The chairman of the board was given to Fernando Leníz and the vice-chair was given to Sonia Edwards, Augustin's sister. At first the newspaper underwent a significant change, and became less critical of the UP politics, but with in a few months it was back to its right wing criticisms.

²² Edward Tassinari, "The Chilean Mass Media During the Presidency of Salvador Allende Gossens" (PhD diss., University of Miami, 1982), 92-94.

²³ Kaufman, *Crisis in Allende's Chile*, 92.

²⁴ Ibid., 91.

²⁵ Tassinari, "The Chilean Mass Media", 95.

²⁶ Ibid., 94.

El Mercurio was also funded by the CIA as part of their plan for undermining the Allende government. The Church Committee, charged with investigating the CIA's involvement in Chile, found that between 1971 and 1973 \$7 million was authorized to support opposition groups in Chile and that *El Mercurio* received \$1.5 million of this money.²⁷ The amount of money demonstrates that the CIA understood that *El Mercurio* was a very influential force on society. If they had not thought that this newspaper would have a large effect on the people of Chile the CIA would not have spent so much money on it. This money was necessary to *El Mercurio* because in an attempt to curb the power of the opposition press Allende had taken all government funding away from the right wing papers. In June 1971, however, the congress passed a resolution that said that the government had to divide its advertisements equally between all the papers, requiring that *El Mercurio* receive funding.²⁸ The CIA funding was, however, one of the main money sources for *El Mercurio* for awhile. In addition to that, the CIA sent journalists from 10 different countries to Chile to report on Allende's election and how it would affect the world.²⁹ The newspaper was obviously anything but unbiased. In fact, Kaufman says that, "Between October 1971 and March 1972 alone the newspaper printed on its front page 111 articles on Chile's economic and social problems, 66 articles pointing to the government's dangerous inclination to embrace communism, 50 pieces denouncing attempts by the left to violate the law, and 36 descriptions of what it labeled public

²⁷ Falcoff, *Modern Chile*, 230.

²⁸ Jerry W. Knudson, "Allende to Pinochet: Crucible of the Chilean Press 1970-1984," *Studies in Latin American Popular Culture*, no. 6 (1987): 46.

²⁹ Kaufman, *Crisis in Allende's Chile*, 96.

disorders.³⁰ *El Mercurio* was clearly hostile to the UP government. Tassinari sums up the main line of thought of the historiography on the subject,

El Mercurio was the recipient of financial support and technical assistance from the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency and according to certain UP supporters, served as a source for strident anti-Allende editorials, propaganda pieces, exaggerated reports of consumer shortages, and ultimately as a conduit for blatantly subversive articles and advertisements pressing for military intervention in the final months of the Allende presidency.³¹

This all has to be kept in mind when looking at the articles run in the last months of Allende's presidency. Obviously *El Mercurio* had a history of reporting articles against Allende but the question is were they only emphasizing the bad aspects of the presidency in an attempt to instigate a coup?

Chile before the Coup

To fairly evaluate the stories that *El Mercurio* were printing one needs to know what was actually going on in Chile at the time the stories were published. First one should understand who Allende's main opposition was. There were two groups in the opposition, political parties and paramilitary groups. The two main parties against Allende were the Democratic Christian Party (PDC) and the National Party (PN). The PDC was the middle of the road party that was in power before Allende took office. The party started off as more left wing but during the course of Allende's government they moved more to the right under the leadership of former president Eduardo Frei.³² By the end of Allende's presidency the PDC had moved all the way to the right, aligning themselves with the National Party in 1972, to make up a big part of the Democratic

³⁰ Ibid., 92.

³¹ Tassinari, *The Chilean Mass Media*, 89.

³² Kaufman, *Crisis in Allende's Chile*, 144.

Confederation (CODE), a group determined to fight the socialist takeover of their country.³³ The National Party was the leader of the groups against Allende. The party was formed in 1966 by the merging of the Conservative Party and the Liberal Party. The party worked against Allende in Congress, blocking his programs and legislation. They also resorted to less political means of disrupting Allende's government. They sabotaged production, hoarded food, supported street violence, and organized strikes.³⁴

The paramilitary groups against Allende caused much of the criticism against Allende. There were groups from both the left and the right. The main group from the left was the Movement of the Revolutionary Left (MIR). This group was supported by students, peasants, and the poor. The group was formed in 1965 by the union of the Popular Socialist Party, the Trotskyist Revolutionary Party and the Marxist Revolutionary Vanguard (VRM) Rebelde.³⁵ This group was formed against the right wing government of the time but their terrorist activities ended up helping the National Party in the 1970 elections. While they were not directly against Allende, the MIR felt that the way to revolution was through violence, not the vote. Any terrorist acts committed by this group were attributed to the Marxists and therefore, to Allende, discrediting him in the eyes of the opposition. By 1973 the MIR and Allende had grown apart because of the terrorist activities and the fact that Allende had appointed military men to his cabinet. In August of 1973 General Prats petitioned to be able to try the leadership of the MIR and the group was forced to go underground.³⁶ The main damage

³³ Ibid., 139.

³⁴ Kauffman, *Crisis in Allende's Chile*, 153.

³⁵ Ibid., 159.

³⁶ Ibid., 165.

that the MIR did to the UP government was to undo its legitimacy before much of the public.

Patria y Libertad (Fatherland and Liberty) was the main right wing paramilitary group. The group was formed in 1970, in direct response to Allende's election. It was an offshoot of the group that killed General Rene Schneider, the head of the armed forces in 1970, in an attempt to kidnap him and overthrow Allende.³⁷ The group started with 200 hundred members in 1970 but grew to 3,000 by 1973. It was mainly organized by Walter Roberto Thieme, a pro-Nazi young man from an upper class family.³⁸ The group was motivated by the doctrine that Allende had no right to socialize Chile because he was not elected by a popular majority. They were the organizers of the coup attempt, also known as the *tancazo*, which failed in June, 1973. Due to this they were formally outlawed July 5, 1973. They were behind much of the street violence and the strikes that caused chaos in Allende's last year in office.

One of the most popularized anti-Allende demonstrations during his presidency was the so called March of the Empty Pots and Pans. On December 1, 1971 hundreds of women took to the streets on downtown Santiago, banging pots and pans to demonstrate their rejection of Allende's political policies.³⁹ The main impetus for this movement was the visit of Fidel Castro to Chile in December of 1971. Castro's visit was seen by much of the opposition as a threat of a communist takeover. The women's march was considered a perfect demonstration against this because women were largely seen as apolitical; therefore this was a protest by Chileans, not a political party. Indeed, the

³⁷ Kaufman, *Crisis in Allende's Chile*, 155.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Margaret Power, *Right-Wing Women in Chile: Feminine Power and the Struggle Against Allende 1964-1973* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002), 144.

march was advertised as not pertaining to a certain party, class, or ethnicity, but simply women. It was supposedly organized purely by women, without help from political parties or any other organizations. The march was driven solely by the women's natural concern for the safety and well being of their families and country. This, however, was not really the truth. In, *Right Wing Women in Chile: Feminine Power and the Struggle Against Allende*, Margaret Power says that, "Many of the women who organized the march were members or leaders of the opposition parties, and it is unlikely that they would have planned the march without the approval of their parties."⁴⁰ The march obviously had political undertones but the organizers were very careful to hide or minimize these influences. The march was advertised in *El Mercurio*, which was sure to emphasize the independence of the movement from the opposition parties and the fact that it had a classless base of support.⁴¹ In fact the movement did have a few lower class women in it to legitimize the claim that it was a classless demonstration. The march was advertised as being in protest to the "abuses" that were taking place at the University of Chile, where a professor had been harassed by a group of students, and because Allende had not lived up to the traditional role of a Chilean President. The pots and pans were used to symbolize the food shortages that were going on in the country, although they would only get worse in the following years. The organizers appealed to women as mothers, invoking the call of mothers to feed and protect their children. The women of Chile were coming together in defense of their country.

When the actual march took place it was not just the women who marched however. Members of the male youth brigades of the PDC, PN, and Patria y Libertad

⁴⁰ Power, *Right-Wing Women in Chile*, 147.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 149.

marched with the women, supposedly to protect them from attackers.⁴² It was the presence of these men that Allende and the Left would later use against the march. Violence broke out along the march route coming to a head at police barricades that were set up to keep the women from marching to La Moneda, the presidential palace. The group responsible for starting the violence was disputed. The Right claimed it was the UP supporters who were standing along the route. The Left put the blame on the men marching with the women who had armed themselves. In the end 99 people were injured and 187 people were arrested.⁴³ The march successfully jumpstarted the opposition movement that had been lagging in the months since Allende had been elected. Opposition activities would only increase as time went on.

The few months preceding Allende's overthrow were a very rocky period. The first sign that Allende's government was falling apart was marked by the failed coup attempt in June. On June 29 the Second Armed Regiment attacked the Ministry of Defense and the Presidential Palace. The coup attempt was a collaboration between Patria y Libertad and a few groups in the armed forces. The plan had been that five tanks would capture Allende and detain him while another five tanks would occupy the presidential palace. In the meantime Patria y Libertad would instigate riots in the street as a diversion.⁴⁴ The plan did not run as smoothly as they had hoped. The day before, June 28, a plot was uncovered by the police and one officer was arrested and detained. Several of the armed forces officers were told that they were under detention and to stay in their barracks. One of these officers, Colonel Souper was told that he was to give up his command in the morning. Despite this he decided to go ahead with the planned coup.

⁴² Ibid., 147.

⁴³ Power, *Right-Wing Women in Chile*, 155-156.

⁴⁴ Kaufman, *Crisis in Allende's Chile*, 252.

On the morning of the 29 he and a few of his men took a few tanks and left the base. Meanwhile members of Patria y Libertad took over a few trucks to help in the attack. A few of the tanks shelled the Ministry of Defense to rescue the officer who had previously been arrested. They then proceeded on to La Moneda, and surrounded it fighting with the police and presidential guard.⁴⁵ This attempt at a takeover failed however, and the insurgents were defeated after about five hours of fighting. General Carlos Pratts, the commander-in-chief of the armed forces, personally directed the soldiers who defeated the attempted coup. After it was all done there were 22 dead and 50 injured, including civilians.

Historians dispute the meaning of the attempted coup to the Allende government. Kaufman argues that Allende saw the attempt as a sign of a threat to his government. Israel, however, argues that the defeat of the coup gave the UP a false sense of security. The evidence seems to point to Kaufman's argument. The coup was put down by the army, supposedly showing that they were still loyal to the government. Contradicting this view is the fact that General Pratts said that it was not easy to get the soldiers to fight against the rebels and that it was only with the threat of giving weapons to civilians that the forces were motivated to fight.⁴⁶ Also backing up Kaufman's argument is the fact that Allende tried to impose a state of siege on the country. He called on the workers to prepare to fight and if needed they would be armed to fight for their government. Allende wanted congress to give him the powers of a president in a state of siege. This would have given him permission move people from one department to another, keep people under house arrest, suspend the army's right to reunion, and to restrict the rights

⁴⁵ Kaufman, *Crisis in Allende's Chile*, 253.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 259.

of the press. Congress debated the proposal but eventually denied it. Allende did impose a curfew on the Santiago area leading to quite a few arrests. This all led to a situation that was anything but normal in the months leading up to the coup that successfully overthrew his government.

Economic conditions were also difficult at this time. There were many strikes during Allende's presidency but quite a few prominent ones in his last few months. The miners of the El Teniente copper mine, the largest in the country, were on strike for 77 days. Copper was the main export and therefore, the main source of income for the country. It accounted for 85 percent of Chile's foreign exchange earnings even though it was only 10.4 percent of the national product.⁴⁷ The miners were used to earning higher wages than the rest of the country because of the hard work that they did. When the country nationalized the copper mines they gave the workers a 40 percent wage increase. When the rest of the country was given a wage increase also, however, the miners wanted a full doubling of their wages on top of the 40 percent increase.⁴⁸ This is what started the strike in April 1973. The strike, however, was finally resolved the day after the failed coup on June 30. Allende proposed paying workers a "productivity bonus" which would allow him to keep existing government policies in place but would still give the miners more money.⁴⁹ This was the deal that ended the strike. Both sides were more willing to accept proposals after the government's power had been threatened.

Shortly after, however, on July 26, the lorry-owners started a new strike. The lorry-owners had been on strike in October the previous year, shutting down the country's commerce. They had gone on strike because a law had been proposed in a southern

⁴⁷ Kauffman, *Crisis in Allende's Chile*, 192.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 200.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 258.

province that would nationalize transportation services. The scared workers went on strike which they were able to continue for many weeks because they were funded by the CIA. The strike was finally resolved with the help of the General Carlos Prats, who had been appointed Secretary of the Interior. According to Ricardo Israel, "It cost the country 'more than US \$200 million and paralyzed the transportation of one million tons of foodstuffs, fuels, raw materials, and other products every day'."⁵⁰ The truck owners threatened to start the strike again on July 20, 1973, unless the promises made by the government to end the first strike were immediately met. The strike was once again to ensure that the transportation industry was not nationalized in addition to the lack of spare parts and the trucker's low wages. This time, however, the strike was mainly aimed at overthrowing Allende's government by destroying national commerce. The government fought back against the strike by limiting gas and oil to ten liters a week, causing shortages. Bakeries and gas stations were forced to close down because of lack of supplies and the Port of Valparaíso began prohibiting the export of foodstuffs because they were so needed at home.⁵¹ Once again the strike spread from the owners to public transport including taxis and buses. The whole country was affected. Allende ordered the requisitioning of trucks to carry on the needed transportation but the truckers would hide needed parts and say that they would not work because of parts shortages. Those who did go back to work were subject to attack by radicals including Patria y Libertad. On August 2 a general strike was called to support the truckers by many middle class unions. The information shows that the economic situation in Chile was falling apart.

⁵⁰ Israel, *Politics and Ideology*, 200.

⁵¹ Kaufman, *Crisis in Allende's Chile*, 266-267.

Kaufman considers the real beginning to the "crisis period" of Allende's government the resignation of General Prats as the head of the armed forces.⁵² Prats was the last strong constitutionalist figure in the military. The beginning of the end for him was an incident on June 27 when woman in a car pulled up beside his car and made some derogatory remarks and a threatening gesture. Prats, who was on edge expecting an assassination attempt, pulled his gun on her. He later publicly apologized claiming it was a misunderstanding but he never lived down the stigma. On August 21, a group of about a hundred women gathered in front of his house demanding his resignation.⁵³ The next day Prats called a meeting with his top generals and asked them publicly to condemn the women's demonstration the night before. The problem was that among the women in the group had been the wives of a few of the generals. The generals decided that Prats' popularity had gone downhill and that it was time that he resigned. On August 23 he gave Allende his letter of resignation. In his memoirs he wrote, "My career is finished. Without overestimating my role, I believe that my exit is the prelude to a coup d'état..."⁵⁴ Allende lost a valuable part of his defense in General Prats. It would only be a few more days before Allende would himself be given the choice of resignation or death.

Despite the many upheavals in Chile the UP maintained its support from the workers. The UP coalition was supported mainly by the lower classes and leftist intellectuals. The Left had always relied on intellectuals to lead the masses and bring the ideological aspect to the revolution.⁵⁵ It was, however, the lower classes that dominated the base of the UP. As Israel puts it, "The real strength of the government was always

⁵² Ibid., 286.

⁵³ Ibid., 286.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 287.

⁵⁵ Israel, *Allende's Chile*, 109.

among the workers..."⁵⁶ Allende's plans for the government were always to help the workers and so the workers stood by him. The most obvious signs of this support were seen in the groups that the Left formed. The government formed *juntas de abastecimiento y precios* (JAPs) which were supply and price councils designed to regulate the distribution of supplies and food in working-class neighborhoods.⁵⁷ These committees were intended to act as neighborhood associations and unify the workers through government institutions.⁵⁸ The workers also organized groups on their own. The October truckers strike in 1972 greatly polarized society and led to the organization of the lower classes. In response to the middle class union shutting down the economy the workers formed *comandos comunales* (community councils) and *cordones industriales* (industrial belts). The community councils were designed to link the factory committees with organizations within the community and the *cordones* were made to link together the different factories in a given area.⁵⁹ The *cordones* became the base of worker mobilizations. Peter Winn says that after the October strike, "They proliferated rapidly throughout the industrial zones of Chile, uniting workers of diverse factories and backgrounds and generating the dynamism, organization, and will to stalemate the counterrevolutionary offensive and transform it into an opportunity for revolutionary advance."⁶⁰ The workers did not just stand by and let Allende's government fall without a fight. Indeed, in the months after the initial coup attempt in June the *cordones* started compiling weapons and training workers to fight when the real coup should arise.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 141.

⁵⁷ Israel, *Allende's Chile*, 133.

⁵⁸ Kaufman, *Crisis in Allende's Chile*, 99.

⁵⁹ Israel, *Allende's Chile*, 133.

⁶⁰ Peter Winn, *Weavers of Revolution: The Yarur Workers and Chile's Road to Socialism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 238.

Although the Left was not as well organized as the opposition it still had a strong base of supporters that were willing to fight for the UP government.

Chilean society at this time was anything but stable. A large part of the population opposed to Allende's policies and they were not afraid to show it. Those in favor of Allende had a smaller voice as they did not have the money or resources of the opposition, but Allende did continue to have the support of much of the working class. This can be seen in the fact that in the face of all this opposition the UP actually increased its numbers in the congressional elections in March, 1973. In his article, "Capitalists in Crisis", Richard E. Ratcliff says that, "This enduring, an even increasing, popular support for the UP was grounded in part in a real identification among many groups with the socialist goals of the UP and in part in the recognition among workers and peasants that concrete improvements in social conditions had resulted from UP programs."⁶¹ Although things were far from perfect in Chile not all of the country had abandoned Allende just yet. It is within this context that one should look at the articles printed by *El Mercurio*.

Articles

The articles run by *El Mercurio* from June to Allende's overthrow were anything but favorable. They attacked Allende and his government on several different levels: economic, political, and social. While reporting on events that happened in Chile the writers underlined the many problems the country was experiencing. The articles revealed the opposition's main complaints about the Allende government.

⁶¹ Richard E. Ratcliff, "Capitalists in Crisis: The Chilean Upper Class and the September 11 Coup," *Latin American Perspectives* 1, no. 2 (1974): 81.

Quite a few of the articles run by *El Mercurio* highlighted economic problems. One such article is "Milk To Give Their Children" published on September 8, 1973. This talks about the fact that there was such a lack of milk in the country that children were starving. Even when milk could be found the prices were so high that lower class mothers and even middle class mothers may not have been able to afford it, because as the article said, "...the prices of the food in the international market are so high that the dollars that our country has are insufficient to import half of the registries accepted at the first half of this year."⁶² This argument told Chileans that the rate of inflation was so high that Chile could not afford to buy the things that were needed for its people. The lack of food in the country was also shown in "Drama in the Bread Line". According to this article, people had to stand for 15 hours in the bread lines just to get food for their families.⁶³ This highlighted the shortages that the country was going through due to the rise in consumption; considered one of the main problems caused by Allende's policies. Even though the workers gained large salary increases they still could not get what they wanted because inflation and shortages caused prices to skyrocket. The fact that people were going hungry made Allende's plans look irresponsible. If Allende's socialist policies were making the lives of the workers harder why should they support him? Clearly the information shows that the economy was beyond the governments control and the citizens were the ones to suffer.

Another big economic problem faced by the government was the effect of all the strikes on the economy. The article "The Total Transportation Strike Continues" refers to how the truckers strike was continuing to affect Chile. Despite a decision having been

⁶² *El Mercurio*, "Leche para dar a sus hijos," September 8, 1973, Section 1. Author's own translation unless otherwise cited.

⁶³ *El Mercurio*, "Drama en la cola de pan," September 10, 1973, sec. 3.

reached by the truckers and the government negotiator the strike continued because Allende had not signed the agreement.⁶⁴ This strike stopped commerce from functioning nation wide because all the transportation, both of goods and people, was shut down. In a society where there were already shortages this simply exacerbated the problem. Another incident, "New Unions Join the Strike", addressed the fact that the strikes, instead of getting smaller, were getting bigger. Unions as diverse as doctors, engineers, teachers, and commercial workers got together to support the truckers in their strike by not going to work. If one was to gauge from these articles, Allende's government was alienating the important sectors of the economy. In particular the latter groups were influential middle class unions. The fact that they went on strike would make the entire middle class take another look at the government's policies. In addition to this, the black market, which had become a problem since inflation had driven up prices, was now a bigger problem. Jorge Martinez, the president of the Central Camera of Commerce, was quoted as saying that the government was basically feeding the black market by keeping prices so high.⁶⁵ All these articles made it very clear that *El Mercurio* reflected the opinion of those who were not happy with the way the economy was doing and wanted to make sure that the rest of the country agreed. They did this by blaming the Allende government for the problems of high prices, scarce food, strikes, and the black market.

The economic problems of Chile led to many social problems that were also publicized in *El Mercurio*. An obvious social dilemma in these articles is the apparent hunger that was rampant, especially among the lower classes of workers and peasants. Mothers having to stand in bread lines for 15 hours just to try to feed their children while

⁶⁴ *El Mercurio*, "Sigue paro total de transportistas," September 2, 1973, sec.3.

⁶⁵ *El Mercurio*, "Nuevos gremios se incorporan al paro," September 10, 1973, sec. 3.

they themselves were starving was clearly a problem. The newspaper quoted María Faroas Clavijos as saying, "I've been here since dawn. I have 8 children between the ages of 2 and 15. To come to the line I had to leave a baby with an 8 year old girl. I have a daughter in the hospital from malnutrition."⁶⁶ Families were struggling to feed themselves and to keep their children alive. Clara de Sierra was described by the newspaper as, "a mother of a little girl of 18 months, who publicly denounced the malnutrition of her daughter and the real martyrdom of going day after day to the pharmacies and stores of the area, looking for milk to feed her daughter." Mothers were reported as having to go to beg for food and milk for their babies. The newspaper was not using facts but simply giving emotional stories to win over its audience. No where was there any list of statistics presented. These stories struck home for a lot of the readers in ways that facts do not normally do. The picture of starving children is one that many associate with third world societies. Hunger and bread lines are not things that happen in countries that are doing well. The national economy was obviously doing poorly. These kinds of images made the Allende government look incompetent. If the government could not feed its people it should not be in power.

El Mercurio also highlighted the violence that was breaking out in the streets in response to the economic and political problems of the day. An example of this was told in "Drama in the Bread Line", in which people, standing in line to get food for their children, decided to sack the bakery and take what food they could grab. In the midst of all this two young men were shot by an unknown group of men.⁶⁷ It was clear to the reader that two basic needs, security and well being, were not being met. Even standing

⁶⁶ "Drama en la cola de pan."

⁶⁷ "Drama en la cola de pan."

in line trying to get food was no longer safe. At the end of the article it mentions that guards had to stand watch outside of bakeries so that no one tried to rob them. The violence in the street was escalating and, to the reader, the government seemed to be doing nothing about it.

Violence also broke out while people were demonstrating, trying to strike to get a better living condition for themselves. Jorge Martinez of the Central Camera of Commerce said that the reason his union joined the other unions in the strike was because,

"We are with all the unions because at this moment we are protesting for the same cause, because it is impossible to continue the activities of professionals, the technicians, the merchants, the transportation workers, and many other sectors with dignity and efficiency when they demand jobs they receive bullets, the same bullets that were shot at mothers who begged for bread for their children in a compelling public manifestation."⁶⁸

The fact that there were strikes at all was a social problem in itself, but it was worse that the strikers were shot at. If people could not protest without being in danger of being shot their right of free speech was being violated, and they had no safe way of demonstrating their feelings.

The violence in the last few months of Allende's presidency had become very political. Just from the title "Six Nationalist Youth Gravely Hurt- Bloody Marxist Battle, Diplomat Rodolfo Ramírez Hit" the reader could tell that political violence was being described. The article outlines a fight between a group of young men belonging to the Nationalist Party and a group of leftist extremists. The National Party Youth Brigade was ending a march in support of the transportation strike. As they finished their march

⁶⁸ "Nuevos gremios se incorporan al paro."

they were attacked by a "Marxist brigade" who was wielding automatic weapons. These brigades were joined by civilians shooting out of the surrounding windows. The youth had no weapons and so fought back by throwing rocks. The police were called but it reportedly took them a half hour to arrive, signaling to some that they were supporting the Marxists against the Nationalists. The newspaper said that "At the fight of the Popular Unity against the militants of the National Party violent political repression was used against them."⁶⁹ Six young men were gravely injured by bullets and a diplomat was hit in the head with a stone, sending him to the hospital. The message *El Mercurio* was sending was that if a congressman was not safe from social upheavals then no one was. Just the fact that the words Marxist, diplomat, and battle were in the same article discredited the government who was trying to publicly distance itself from these descriptions. Indeed, the violence in the street was not simply random attacks but struggles between the two different political views. Politics had left the halls of Congress and was being fought out by the people. The streets of Santiago were portrayed as the site of a civil war being fought by civilians not soldiers.

All these social problems make it appear that the country was falling apart and the government seemed unable to fix the problem. This leads to the political attacks that *El Mercurio* made against the Allende government, attacks that came in many different forms. The mothers trying to find food for their children were quoted by the paper as blaming Allende for their problems. In the bread line Graciela Ahumada was quoted as saying, "The President is the guilty one for all that is going on. He's the commander."⁷⁰ Allende was the President, therefore it was his fault that the people did not have enough

⁶⁹ *El Mercurio*, "Seis Jóvenes Nacionales heridos graves- Sangiento baleo Marxista: Golpeado el Diputado Radolfo Ramírez," August 22, 1973, sec. 1.

⁷⁰ "Drama en la cola de pan."

food to eat. This was a direct attack against the government. This also illustrates, however, that Allende was recognized as the leader of the country. He may have been seen as responsible for the people's hardships but he was still recognized as the head of the state. As for the milk, in that article the newspaper says that hundreds of women came together to ask the government to provide them with milk for their children. If the government did not respond Clara de Sierra said that, "We will call on the international organizations to ask them for the food that our malnourished children need."⁷¹ It was the government's responsibility to provide food for the children, but if they did not do it the women were willing to go over the government's head and ask for international help. The government was so poorly managed, according to *El Mercurio*, that a group of concerned mothers had to do the things their government should have been doing.

Another attack on the government was that they had no real plans to ever compromise with the strikers to get things back to normal. "The Total Transportation Strike Continues" talked about how an agreement was finally reached between the transportation union and the government intermediary. All that needed to be done was that Allende had to sign the document, showing that he agreed. The problem was that although Allende had been given the document, after several days he had still not signed it, causing the strike to continue. The newspaper quoted a declaration signed by Juan Jara Cruz, the director of the National Confederation of Land Transport, and Adolfo Airola, the general secretary of the union, denouncing, "...this attitude that reveals the intention of the government to not give a solution to the plans."⁷² The union members saw the stalling of the government as a sign that they were not truly willing to end the strike and

⁷¹ "Leche para dar a sus hijos."

⁷² "Sigue paro total de transportistas."

were simply playing with the negotiations. If the government was not willing to compromise the strikes would go on forever creating chaos within the country.

Another political attack was the fight between the police and the National Party youth. The newspaper argued that the police were siding with the Marxists; primarily because it took them 30 minutes to get to the fight, allowing more injuries than there otherwise would have been. They also argued that the police, instead of stopping the violence, joined it, attacking the youth along with the Marxists. They said that when the police arrived they used everything in their power against the youth including water hoses and tear gas, instead of trying to help them. Diplomat Juan Luis Ossa stated, "...the body of the police is not worthy of wearing the uniform because it is politically under the arbitrary orders of an administrative authority that has lost all of its legitimacy and for this should not remain in power for one minute more."⁷³ A diplomat speaking out against the government was a very strong argument against Allende. If the police were corrupt who was going to protect the people from the government? This situation, argued *El Mercurio*, could not be allowed to continue.

The argument that the government had lost its legitimacy was made more than once. The article about the different unions joining the strike also says that the government had no right to rule anymore. It said in reference to the many unions joining the strike,

"These groups that are integrated in the national activity are uniting with the transportation workers for diverse reasons, among those that are common denominators, the protest against the political-economic-social situation, that the country is living and the petition that the President of the Republic present his resignation, and if not that he is disposed to rectify his politics."⁷⁴

⁷³ Sangirento Baleo."

⁷⁴ "Nuevos gremios se incorporan al paro."

The unions were on strike to get Allende to resign or promise to change his policies.

Quite simply, they no longer wanted him as president. The middle class workers were rising up against Allende.

This argument was also made in "A Special Session of the Camera Proposes to Declare the Illegality of the Government".⁷⁵ This describes a special session of congress that was called with the purpose of talking about the "arbitrariness and illegal acts committed by the government".⁷⁶ The congressmen in this session believed that the government was illegal or illegitimate. The vice-president of the National Party, Patricio Mardones, said that, "The diplomats are elected to guarantee the state of rights and they see it as impossible to truly fulfill their functions in a moment where the Constitution and the laws are being annulled."⁷⁷ From their point of view Allende's government had not kept its sworn oath to protect and uphold the constitution and the laws, and should therefore have been renounced as illegitimate. In the face of congressmen saying that the government should be overturned it is hard to see how normal citizens were not expected to reach the same conclusion.

El Mercurio brought to the attention of its readers all the problems the government was having and all the things that they felt were wrong with the country. Economically the country was falling apart. There was high inflation making essential products hard to buy. There was, therefore, a lack of food because the government could not afford to pay the price for imported food. The black market was undermining the

⁷⁵ *El Mercurio*, "Sesión especial de la Cámara- Proponen declarar la ilegalidad del gobierno," August 22, 1973, sec. 3.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

efforts of legal commerce to stay afloat. In the social arena people were starving and children were undernourished and the government was not doing anything about it. Violence was breaking out in the streets because of the economic and political situation of the country. Politically the government was being attacked by many different groups who were saying that the government was not doing its job and therefore should step down. With all of these arguments *El Mercurio* was making a very strong case against Allende's government, leading the reader to think that a change in government would be beneficial. The conclusion reached by these stories was that any end to the UP government would be beneficial to the country, even a coup. The public had been conditioned into thinking that if violence was the only way to get Allende out of power it was acceptable as long as it ended the violence already taking place.

Directed Audience of *El Mercurio*

Who was *El Mercurio* trying to convince with these arguments? The newspaper was run by a wealthy upper class family and most of the upper class had a history of mainly being conservative. The upper class was strongly capitalist made up of landowners and business owners, dedicated to the conservation of the capitalist way. The middle class and the lower classes were much more susceptible to being politically influenced. Small business owners and university students could be swung to either the right or the left. Workers and peasants, although traditionally on the left, could be influenced by their bosses and landlords. Winn describes the fact that many workers, afraid of being fired, voted for their boss's party. The newspaper was trying to convert

these classes to their side. There were arguments within their articles that were aimed at each group.

The middle class was the group that the upper class most wanted to convert. They had some of the same concerns that the upper class had and they were not completely sold either way. In fact the middle class had a history in Chile of swaying from one side of the political spectrum to the other and were often the deciding factor in the elections. For these reasons most of the articles seem to be aimed at convincing the middle class that Allende was not a good president. To begin with, the problem of low amounts of bread and milk were aimed at the middle class because although these problems may affect the lower classes more they still did have effects on the middle classes. In "Drama in the Bread Line" the newspaper pointed out that although the bakeries obviously had a lot of business other stores did not. It said that specialty stores such as soda fountains, pastry shops, and automotive stores were receiving no business because no one could afford to waste their money on these luxury items.⁷⁸ It was the middle class that owned these stores and who were losing business and money. Also, this article along with "Milk to Give Their Children", were also pointing out to the middle classes that it was not just the upper class that was against Allende's policies. Both these articles showed lower class women berating the government for its failure to provide food for their children. The middle class did not have to feel like it was betraying the lower classes by being against Allende because the lower classes felt the same way. In fact, by being against Allende the middle class would be, in a sense, protecting those who were less fortunate than themselves.

⁷⁸ "Drama en la cola de pan."

The articles about the strikes were also mainly aimed at the middle class because it was unions made up of middle class jobs that were striking. The transportation strike was a group of truckers who own their own trucks that were striking against the government for threatening to nationalize the transportation sector. The lower classes did not own their own trucks so this was obviously aimed at the middle class who could identify with the truckers for not wanting to loose their area of commerce. They would be the most concerned with the government not living up to their end of the bargain in the article "The Total Transportation Strike Continues". The middle class unity behind the truckers could be seen by the support given to them by the other middle class unions in the article "New Unions Join the Strike." The unions mentioned in this article were the engineers, doctors, lawyers, dentists, teachers, and commerce.⁷⁹ These were all middle class jobs and so this article obviously meant more to the middle class. It was their jobs that were being compromised by Allende's policies and failure to negotiate. This information was showing the middle class that certain members of their class had already united against Allende and that they should consider doing the same.

Sections of the middle class were also more political, such as university students, so that the article about the illegitimacy of the government rang more true to them. This political attitude of the middle class can be seen in the article about the National Youth Brigade. Many middle class children went to the universities the breeding grounds for political groups such as the National Youth Brigade. The middle class youth joined together to protest in support of the transportation strike. The article says that, "...the young militants of the National Party had initiated a march along central streets to express their support for the wives of the transportation workers installed in the garden of

⁷⁹ "Nuevos gremios se incorporan al paro."

the National Congress to solidify the movement of their husbands maintained for 27 days."⁸⁰ This points out the fact that middle class women were supporting their husbands in their strike, which had been going on for almost a month. These women were marching with their husbands and participating in rallies. Beginning with the March of Pots and Pans, women had been uniting and going beyond their traditional roles, in this case, to protest Allende's government. The youth march gives another example of middle class solidarity against Allende; even the youth were joining in the struggle against Allende.

All these articles pointed out reasons that the middle class should be against Allende. He was ruining the economy, causing them to lose money. He was trying to nationalize their jobs and was not willing to negotiate with those brave enough to strike. He was the reason there was violence in the street; violence brought against middle class citizens. The articles also gave examples of other middle class workers and students coming together to fight for what they needed and believed in. With all this information *El Mercurio* was trying to convince the middle class to join their fight against the government. With the support of the middle class the upper class would have a much stronger case against Allende and his lower class supporters.

Although most of the articles seem to be aimed at the middle classes there were some instances where it seemed that *El Mercurio* was also looking to influence the lower classes. For example, both of the articles dealing with the food shortages seemed to be addressing the lower classes as much as they were addressing the middle classes. It was the poor who were most affected by the shortages; they were the ones standing in the bread lines and banging on the doors of pharmacies to get nourishment for their children.

⁸⁰ "Sangirento Balco."

These articles were showing the lower classes just how bad their situation was. On top of that they quoted other people of their class speaking out as a group. Clara de Sierra was quoted as saying, "I do not belong to mothers' centers, or groups of neighbors, nor any class of institution. I am simply a mother who represents her daughter and who has the right to rebel when anguish and impotence tugs at my soul when I see my baby cry because she does not have milk."⁸¹ This is an example of a lower class mother taking a stand against the government. This is a strong image that empowers women to fight for what they want; to demand that their government feed their children. As cited before, Graciela Ahumada blamed the government for the shortages, pointing specifically at Allende. These women's quotes were used to show the lower classes that it was not just the upper classes that were complaining about Allende. People of their own class were against Allende and were taking a stand to get what they need. This made the argument that it was okay to be poor and still be against Allende.

The violence in the bread line was also an argument against Allende that rang true to the lower classes. They were the ones standing in the bread line and were therefore the ones who were at risk of getting hurt. In this case it was two young men who got hurt while they were trying to get food for themselves and their families. If violence broke out in the cities it was most likely that the poor would be the most affected by it. The strikes were also affecting the lower classes. The fact that commerce was shut down affected their jobs as well as the jobs of the middle class. Even more than the middle class the lower class could not afford to lose work because then they would have no way to provide for their families. *El Mercurio* tried to convince the lower classes that they were better off without Allende.

⁸¹ "Leche para dar a sus hijos."

Most of the arguments in the articles of *El Mercurio* were aimed at the middle class in the hopes of bringing them over to the opposition. The fact that the economy was doing so poorly that people could not afford to use their services was very bad for small businesses. The black market only made this worse. Strikes kept the economy from recovering. Violence in the streets was a threat to anyone who lived in the cities. The fact that the violence had turned political was a restriction of citizens' rights. All of these were reasons the middle class should be against Allende. There were also arguments aimed at the lower classes. These arguments combined with those of the food shortages and violence demonstrate that *El Mercurio* was trying to persuade it's readers to think the same way they did.

Advocating the Coup

Was *El Mercurio* simply reporting the news or were they distorting the truth to try to prepare the public for a coup? An answer requires a comparison with other journals and in secondary sources. How did others feel about the events that were reported on? What exactly were the articles advocating? Were they truly calling for a coup or were they simply trying to get the government to save the country?

Even without looking at what other sources say about the state of Chile at this time one can look at the articles and tell that *El Mercurio* had a political agenda. "Drama in the Bread Line" directly blamed Allende for the problems of the country, therefore telling him and the reader that he either needed to change his policies or get out of office. People were starving in his country; mothers were forced to stand in bread lines for hours. The picture of a mother wrapped in a blanket with her starving baby in her arms is

not one that will go unnoticed by readers. These images were very convincing that Allende has failed as a president. "Milk for Their Children" said the same thing in an even more direct manner. This article said directly several times that the government should do something about the lack of milk. Clara de Sierra said, "If the government does not respond to our call and dispatch the milk that we need with urgency, we are ready. We will initiate our call for aid to foreigners."⁸² Allende's government was not doing its job and so the people should look to other countries for help and leadership. Considering that *El Mercurio* was funded by the CIA it is very easy to make the connection that the government that they were thinking of was the United States government. It probably was not a very big stretch of imagination for most Chileans too as the United States was one of Chile's biggest suppliers of imported goods and had been involved in Chilean politics for many years.

The article about the fight between the National Youth Brigade and the leftist extremists was used by *El Mercurio* to show that the government had lost control of the country and so should not be considered a real government. At the end of the article the secretary general of the National Party, Patricio Mardones, says of the fight between the youth and the police, "All these acts... do nothing but confirm that Chile has stopped being a democratic country, based on legal order, and has been transformed into a place where the law of the jungle reigns."⁸³ The fact that unarmed demonstrators were attacked by groups loyal to the government shows that, according to *El Mercurio*, the government was run by extremists. The fact that the police, instead of reinstating order, used undue force showed that as long as the government was in power no one was safe; even a

⁸² "Leche para dar a sus hijos."

⁸³ "Sangriento baleo."

congressman was hit in the head and injured. It was as Mardones said, the law of the jungle was what was conducting the country, and so someone should instate some order, even if that meant overturning the presidency.

Further attacks on the nature of the Allende government were made in the article about the transportation strike. This article makes the government seem underhanded and insincere. It says that by not signing the agreement between the transportation union and the government negotiator, Allende was showing that he never meant to agree to anything. This portrays Allende as if he were playing with the union, making it think that they would get what they wanted to keep them happy and then backing out of it. The article did not give any other explanation for Allende's actions. The idea that Allende might have been busy dealing with the country's many other problems or that he could have been reviewing the proposal did not appear to have been taken into consideration. Here Allende was portrayed as an underhanded politician that should not be in office.

The other two articles directly state that Allende should step down and hand the government over to someone else. The article about the special session of Congress *El Mercurio* talked about how several congressmen had gotten together to talk about the "arbitrary and illegal acts committed by the government".⁸⁴ It stated that this meeting "signals that various congressmen are in favor of raising the 'illegitimacy' or 'illegality' of the government."⁸⁵ This told the people that their own congress thought that the President should be overthrown. If congressmen running the government were against the head of state what was the rest of the country to think? Congressmen are elected to make political decisions for their constituents. In this article their decision was that

⁸⁴ "Proponen declarar la ilegalidad del gobierno."

⁸⁵ Ibid.

Allende should be overthrown. "New Unions Join the Strike" said that the new unions were not striking because of their employment conditions but because of the condition of the country. The College of Agronomy Engineers said that they were striking to "...reiterate our petition to the President of the Republic that in a patriotic gesture he renounce his charge."⁸⁶ This is a request made several times in the article by different unions. Obviously this article was advocating that Allende resign from office. According to this article all the major middle class unions thought that Allende had failed in his job and had a duty to resign. If Allende did not do his patriotic duty then others should do it for him.

All of these articles gave reasons to overthrow the Allende government. Allende had failed to feed the people and so they should look elsewhere for what they need. His government was seditious, not doing what they said they would. The country had turned into anarchy under his rule and something needed to be done about it. Unions and even congressmen thought that he should not be in power. It is pretty hard to get any message from these arguments other than that Allende should no longer be president.

Were these arguments true? Was the situation in Chile as bad as *El Mercurio* made it out to seem? Was it really Allende's fault that all these bad things were going on? The economic picture painted by *El Mercurio* is definitely bleak. One of the problems was the shortages of consumer goods that arose by 1972. This was indeed partly due to Allende's policies. When he came to office he gave all laborers a wage increase to balance out the wealth distribution in the country. The problem with this was that along with creating inflation, it caused the shortages of many goods. For the first time in their lives many peasants could buy things they thought they would never be able

⁸⁶ "Nuevos gremios se incorporan al paro."

to afford. This caused a high rate of consumption that was not matched by production. It was not that Allende's plans slowed down production; in fact production in 1972 was higher than it had been in 1970.⁸⁷ The problem was that even with increased production the economy could not keep up with the increased consumption. This was not the only source of the shortages however. There was also a huge amount of hoarding of goods by the industrialists and traders that kept the much needed goods out of the market place, aggravating the problem.⁸⁸ Although Allende's policies did have something to do with the shortages they were not the only reason. Parts of the upper class, the group that was complaining the most, were making the problem worse on purpose. Ratcliff also points out that, "...many of the highly publicized 'shortages' in stores that anger middle class consumers resulted from conscious UP programs aimed to distribute food and other consumer goods more equitably to peasants and working class communities."⁸⁹ The shortages that were made out to be so dire in *El Mercurio* were in part, the result of more even distribution. The middle class might not be happy but the lower classes certainly were not complaining as much as it appeared.

The black market was another example of the upper classes complaining about something that they perpetuated. The inflation inside of Chile made it more profitable for producers to sell their goods on the black market at heightened prices. This started in 1971 but did not become a universal problem until the October transportation strike in 1972. It wreaked havoc on the economy, canceling out the benefits of the income redistribution. It also undermined the price controls that the government tried to establish so as to protect people from inflation. It has been estimated that 35 percent of the

⁸⁷ Israel, *Politics and Ideology*, 206.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ratcliff, "Capitalists in Crisis", 81.

national income was spent in the black market.⁹⁰ In "New Unions Join the Strike" Jorge Martínez said that he denounces "...the sectarian distribution that prevails in the commerce of supplies and gives them to the intermediaries of the black market, maintained by the government..."⁹¹ This article claimed that the black market was maintained by the government. It was the transportation strike started by Allende's opposition and the hoarding and selling of goods to the black market by the industrialists that made the problem so bad however. Israel says, "The existence of the black market was presented as the consequence of the government's errors; thus the opposition made a political profit for the economic crisis which it had helped create."⁹² The black market really helped the opposition more than it hurt them. Once again, *El Mercurio* was complaining about a problem that its readers had helped create.

The main argument directed towards the lower classes was the fact that there was a lack of food. Both of the articles, "Drama in the Bread Line" and "Milk to Give Their Children" painted the poignant pictures of mothers with their babies in their arms, standing in line to get food to feed them so that they will not starve. "Drama in the bread line" actually quoted Allende as saying that there was only enough wheat left in the country for three or four more days. Allende actually said this on September 7, 1973.⁹³ However, he had seen this shortage coming weeks before and had been trying to get wheat from other countries on credit. The United States, one of Chile's main suppliers, announced on September 4 that they would not sell Chile any wheat because they did not have any money to back up the credit. Quite bluntly, the US government was not willing

⁹⁰ Israel, *Politics and Ideology*, 207.

⁹¹ "Nuevos Gremios."

⁹² Israel, *Politics and Ideology*, 207.

⁹³ Kaufman, *Crisis in Allende's Chile*, 294.

to help feed Chile if it meant helping Allende. In the end President Juan Peron of Argentina sent Chile 45,000 tons of wheat.⁴⁰ This amount, while not sufficient for the long run, was enough for the time being. The food shortages were not as bad as *El Mercurio* made them out to be. Actually, Ratcliff cites a study printed in *Latin America* in 1973 that states that food supplies in Santiago were actually fifteen percent more available in 1973 than in the last year of former President Frei's last year.⁴¹ There were undoubtedly food shortages, especially wheat, but things were not really any worse than they had been before Allende was in office. The articles about the bread lines and lack of milk were more to scare the middle class readers than report the facts.

Moreover, the article which covered the transportation strike was used against Allende by showing that the government was unwilling to compromise. It was also used to show that a great number of people opposed Allende and his policies. The fact that the strike was mentioned in several of the articles shows that it was important to Chilean society. It appeared that there were many different groups that were willing to stand by the truckers until they got what they wanted. The truth is, however, that for some of the actual strikers the strike had little to do with Allende and more to do with personal gain. For example, Ratcliff says that, "...one leader of the truckers, interviewed by a *New York Times* reporter a month before the coup, stressed his support for the greater social justice brought by Allende, for the new availability of credit for the small borrower, and for the nationalization of copper."⁴² Some of the strikers actually liked the general policies of Allende, they were just worried about their own jobs. Opposition to the UP government was not as strong as *El Mercurio* wanted their readers to believe.

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Ratcliff, "Capitalism in Crisis", 81.

⁴²Ratcliff, "Capitalism in Crisis," 81.

Left wing opinion

Another way to tell whether *El Mercurio*'s news reporting was biased or not is to look at how other periodicals reported the same news. *Chile Hoy* was a journal put out weekly that had a leftist leaning, and therefore reported on the state of the country in a much different way. First of all in the article "The Amassed Lie," in the August 31 to September 6, 1973, edition, the magazine claims that the right-wing media had been creating lies to push the public against Allende. They used as an example of this two headlines from the afternoon newspaper, *La Tercera* that said "Anguished by the critical economic situation, a mother kills her four year old son, using her silk nylons" and "Tragic 'solution' to the shortage of supplies: a doctor changes drugs for rice."⁹⁷ In response to these headlines the journal said, "The 'political information' published on the front page of the rightist newspapers constitute a perfect synthesis of a wanton campaign of misinformation and systematic distortion intended to support the coup project already in progress in the country."⁹⁸ This is directly attacking the validity of the information provided by newspapers such as *El Mercurio* that are controlled by the right. The reliability of *El Mercurio*'s reports becomes questionable if they are directly contradicted by another news source.

This article attacked many of the reports made by *El Mercurio*. It said that the National Party, in calling for Allende to "rectify or leave" was really telling him to capitulate to their demands. According to the article the Right would be satisfied by nothing less than Allende leaving office. This was demonstrated by the middle class unions' statement that they would only end the strikes when Allende resigned. All this

⁹⁷ Victor Vaccaro, "La Mentira Masificada," *Chile Hoy* 2, no. 64 (1973): 5.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

defends the article's argument that the Right was planning a coup and trying to promote it through the media. It pointed out that *Patria y Libertad* was calling for a coup even if thousands of people died. In response to the fourteen points that claimed the illegality of the UP government, made by the opposition in congress *Chile Hoy* said that, "The 14 points that 'prove' this supposed illegality are the summary of the biggest adulteration of reality."⁹⁹ As demonstrated by the article, all the attacks made by the Right were exaggerations or lies as part of the plan to bring about a coup. This opinion, even if it was by an opposition journal, gives the stories of *El Mercurio* less validity. The fact that another news organization in Chile contradicted the stories of *El Mercurio* shows that the situation was not as bad as it was made out to be.

The article "Big Fish Restrain Vilarín" addressed the transportation strike in a much different way than did *El Mercurio*. It attacked the truckers as being the cause of economic hardships for the country because of their selfish strike. It claimed they made it hard to reach an agreement with the government on purpose, lengthening the strike unnecessarily. According to the article, León Vilarín, one of the heads of the National Confederation of Land Transport, the truckers union, was the one to blame for the continued strike. Even after the union representatives and the government had reached an agreement Vilarín continued the strike. First he insisted on the resignation of Jaime Faivovich, the Undersecretary of Transportation. When this was agreed to he demanded a law be passed to protect the truckers, which he later changed to a constitutional amendment. "León Vilarín directed from the shadows every one of these maneuvers that signified the prolongation of the strike."¹⁰⁰ This is a much different picture than the one

⁹⁹ Vaccaro, "La Mentira Masificada", 5.

¹⁰⁰ Jorge Modinger M., "Peces Gordos Frenan a Vilarín", *Chile Hoy* 2, no. 64 (1973): 14.

painted by *El Mercurio*. Here it was not the government that was prolonging the strike but the strikers themselves. This takes away the supposed underhandedness of Allende in dealing with the strike and puts the blame on the union leaders. If Allende was not mistreating the strikers, there was one less reason to overthrow him.

The article's main attack, however, is against the supposed unity of the transportation workers. Instead of being one big unified group, as was portrayed by *El Mercurio*, the union was divided among three different groups. The main group leading the strike was headed by Vilarín. Adolfo Quinteros led "big fish" in the Union of Interprovincial Truckers, who were the owners of the biggest trucks. They were not as interested in the strike as Vilarín because they wanted to maintain relations with the government, which helped in the renovation of their trucks. The smaller transportation workers were also not satisfied with the strike. They were losing work to local businesses that had been forced by the strikes to create their own transportation. Instead of the united workers supported by their wives and the rest of the community that *El Mercurio* described *Chile Hoy* showed that the situation was not so simple. The truckers were not so strongly united behind the strike, but were instead divided among themselves. When looked at in this light the strike looks much more like an attempt to discredit the government than a true labor dispute.

Finally, in "A Disarming Dialogue" Marta Harnecker interviewed Miguel Enríquez, the Secretary General of the MIR. This article described the fact that there were indeed still many people that supported Allende up until the coup despite what *El Mercurio* described. Enríquez said that after the abortive coup attempt in June the Left had united again to fight the opposition. He said that the workers realized that everything

they had fought for was threatened and so they organized; "...everything crystallized, I repeat, in this phase, in a better level of unity of the left through revolutionary politics, or at least in a more offensive tactic and in the fortification of common action."¹⁰¹ *El Mercurio* made it seem that all of Chile was against Allende but obviously this was not true. Instead the lower classes and intellectuals were uniting to prepare for the final attack of the opposition. The workers used the *cordones industriales* and the *comandos comunales* to organize and prepare for battle. They still believed in Allende's message and were willing to fight for it. Even though the economy was failing and the political situation in the country was shaky the workers still believed in Allende's dream. If the workers still supported the government the situation in the country could not have been as bad as it was portrayed. Instead of giving the situation up as lost the Left decided to reorganize and prepare to fight. In their eyes, even if the country was experiencing some problems, was going in the right direction.

Enríquez did provide some criticism of the government as well, however. He said that when the Left united after the coup attempt the Right had to reorganize and come up with a new tactic to fight the government. This new plan was to divide the government through military emplacement and blackmail.¹⁰² This plan worked, causing a split in the Left's political policies, "So that while, on the one hand the masses radicalize and with them extensive sectors of the Left assume more radicalized politics resisting capitulation, on the other hand other sectors, the vacillating and the recalcitrant reformists, try once again to console the classes."¹⁰³ The government of Allende was trying to keep the middle class's support by giving back factories and land that had been taken illegally by

¹⁰¹ Marta Harnegger, "Un Dialogo Que Desarma," *Chile Hoy* 2, no.59 (1973):32.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

the workers and peasants. He also appointed military men to cabinet positions and allowed the police to raid the *cordoens* looking for stockpiled weapons. All of this only served to alienate his support base and weakens his government. Despite the fact that the government still had the support of the lower classes Allende was overthrown because he weakened his government by trying to please everyone and alienating and weakening his supporters.

Conclusion

The press's power in Chile becomes more apparent when one conducts an in-depth analysis of newspaper articles run shortly before the 1973 coup that overthrew Salvador Allende. What we learn from the articles of *El Mercurio* is that the elite part of Chilean society was willing to go to any lengths necessary to preserve the traditional Chilean social and economic hierarchy. The elite capitalist sectors of society, such as the Edwards family, were threatened by Allende's road to socialism because he was tearing down the system that ensured their prosperity. The nationalization of the country's top industries and the redistribution of land and wealth took away the property of the top sectors of society to give it to the lower classes. The Edwards family, not wanting to lose their economic empire, used their newspaper to try and persuade the public that Allende's policies were detrimental to all. On top of this, the right wing was willing to undermine the economy by prolonging strikes and perpetuating shortages just to discredit Allende. *El Mercurio* was used to persistently spread news of these problems. In the end the elite turned to violence. They finally found the solution to their socialist problem in a

military coup. The elite were willing to put their country in economic and military danger in order to restore the capitalist system from which they had benefited.

Another lesson learned from this analysis is that the middle classes can be swayed when faced with threats to their basic needs, such as hunger, security, and unemployment. *El Mercurio* struck at the very heart of society when it called into question the safety of these basic needs. Articles that portrayed women begging for food for their babies and young men being gunned down in the street by the police clearly questioned the ability of Allende to successfully run the country. Whether or not the situation was as bad as the newspaper made it out to be, much of the middle class was convinced that a change was necessary, even if it required drastic measures. In a situation like that of Chile, where the middle class was the swing group, the power to influence them was very important.

Contrary to what is commonly believed, it has also been shown that it was not simply the CIA that was responsible for the coup, but was also the result of inside forces. The elite used their resources to help initiate the coup by creating situations in the country that would require an intervention. *El Mercurio* portrayed the internal situation as dire. The middle classes, once convinced of the necessity for change, vocally and adamantly called for such an intervention. The "March of Pots and Pans" and the October trucker's strike are two such demonstrations. The military, influenced by the elite and convinced by the position of the middle class responded to the call for change and overthrew the democratically elected president. Although the CIA had helped to fund *El Mercurio* and had propagated the economic problems of Chile, it was the internal groups that led the coup. While the US role is unquestioned, what this research shows is

also the role of Chileans themselves in the coup that was fostered by the US but led by the Chilean military.

Finally, one of the most important lessons learned from this research is that the credibility of the press is questionable in dire situations. The instability of the country during the transition to socialism allowed the press to have much more power than would normally be possible. While people were unsure about their own well being in a new situation it was much easier to play on their fears. *El Mercurio* used this uncertain time to present the facts in such a way as to make the situation seem much more perilous than it was in reality. The articles in *Chile Hoy* demonstrated that not everything *El Mercurio* said was the absolute truth. Indeed the exaggeration and bias of *El Mercurio* was clearly shown through counterfactual stories and facts. By stressing emotional situations *El Mercurio* was able to convince much of its readership that the country was in desperate need of help. Through manipulation of the facts *El Mercurio* was able to make a coup d'état an acceptable answer to the country's problems. As the bombs fell on La Moneda and Allende lost his life many Chileans believed that they were simply protecting the democracy that they believed in.

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