

Talking Points: Reflections on Chilean refugees and solidarity with Chile in the USA

Discussion of Film 'La Barque n'est pas pleine'¹ and Swiss experience of Chile refugees and solidarity²

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Refuge & Exile:

I start with an overview of figures on Chilean refugees and emigration:

By UN and NGO counts, 200,000 refugees, exiles, and asylees fled and were dispersed across the world. 200,000 more left the country or remained abroad during the years of military dictatorship, as migrants–migrant workers– in Latin America, North America and across Europe.

UN data says there are nearly 700,000 Chilean-born people resident abroad today, not counting children and now grandchildren born abroad, suggesting that the Chilean 'diaspora' may be double that number, equivalent to some 7% of the population of 19.6 million in Chile today.

UN data on international migrants –foreign born in countries other than birth or citizenship– counts 7,600 Chilean born persons resident in Switzerland in 2020, and over 90,000 in the USA.

Building on the story told by the film we've just seen, *The Boat is Not Full*, I widen the contextual picture with an outline of the experience of Chilean refugees in the USA –particularly in Seattle– and the large if not immense solidarity in what is sometimes referred to as the «*land of the beast*».

Seattle experience, my own, as part of US national experience:

200 officially admitted Chilean refugees were received, settled and integrated in Seattle, 10% of the US total of South American refugees officially admitted. In the first round of admissions of 400 plus families, at least one member of more than 40 families arrived in Seattle was admitted directly out of prison. Most of these including women had been tortured, some severely, as we found out only later. One, Belarmino Constanzo, a Chile Air Force sergeant who opposed the military coup and refused to participate in it, had been condemned to death twice by Consejos de Guerra –so called War Tribunals. He and others were released into exile following international *prisoner of conscience* campaigns by Amnesty International et al, and finally, agreement by the dictatorship under international pressure to release some prisoners into permanent exile with cancellation of citizenship, if other countries would receive them.

The broad efforts of the USA solidarity movement –of which I was part as co-coordinator of the national NICH-*Non-Intervention in Chile* organization Seattle chapter– were key to pressing the US Congress to authorize in 1975 admission of some 400 refugees to be released from prison, accompanied by their families. A supplemental authorization followed in 1978 for 200 more refugees plus their families, including Chilean refugees in Argentina and political prisoners held by brutal military regimes then ruling Argentina and Uruguay.

1 Documentary film directed by Daniel Wyss. 56 min. Switzerland, 2014. <https://www.swissfilms.ch/fr/movie/la-barque-n-est-pas-pleine/5B31B519D0834834B2F173909C106AD2>

2 Film projection and discussion organised by Association Chili Genève 1973-2023 and FILMAR América Latina, coordination by Hayin-Ray Antileo. <https://chiligenève.ch/event/la-barque-nest-pas-pleine-projection-et-debat/>

Chilean and some other refugees from Argentina and Uruguay were also received and settled in California, New York, Chicago and elsewhere in the midwest, some in Florida, a few in Texas.

I was co-responsible for developing the *Chilean Refugee Resettlement Program* (CRRP) in Seattle in 1975-76 and directing it 1977 to 1980. Several other deliberate refugee support programs or projects for Chilean refugees were set up in California, in Chicago and elsewhere. The CRRP derived from the solidarity organization NICH, but it was deliberately set up separately as an independent professional social service agency based in the Church Council of Seattle and with its office at the Seattle downtown YMCA building , with a formal board comprising representatives of the Committee of Chilean refugees, church refugee sponsors, the local office of a national refugee 'voluntary agency («Volag»), the Seattle Religious Peace Action Coalition, and others including with professional social service backgrounds. The CRRP, later rebranded *South American Refugee Program*, obtained funding and other support from the City of Seattle, allowing us to hire up to four full-staff with professional social work experience. The program was able to engage health, schooling, and social service institutions, big and small employers, as well as many church congregations in the greater Seattle area.

Fundamental to the success of the CRRP/SARP was its deliberate approach of facilitating the ability of the refugees to function in the community, socio-economic and employment environment of the new place of residence while supporting refugees to reconstruct and maintain their own socio-cultural identity as Chileans. And eventually, '*Chilean-Americans*,' similarly to many other immigrant origin communities whose members integrate with the country of residence without renouncing-- instead strengthened by retaining-- their own roots and identity.

What Chileans in exile in Seattle accomplished with support of the solidarity movement and direct professional social service support:

- Re-established family and community
- (Re)built organizations such as the inclusive CORECH Comité de Refugiados Chilenos
- Reaffirmed their own identity –cultural as well as national-democratic
- Established groups such as a Chilean (folk)dance association to retain Chilean culture and transmit to children -- and share with others
- Built participation and influence in the communities of residence
- Had a big and positive influence on latino communities in US –previously subject to domination by anti-Communist pro-capitalist pro-intervention forces among Cuban exiles and Latin American elites established in US or commuting between own capitals and the US
- Popularized broadly models of what the broad Popular Unity coalition supporting the government and what Chilean popular organizing had proposed and accomplished: models relevant to struggles for unionization, decent housing, community based health, as well as local people and social justice centered politics
- Organized the first ever meetings/exchanges dialogues between Mapuche and other Chilean indigenous peoples with indian/First Peoples of the US Pacific Northwest and the coastal (Salish Sea) regions of British Columbia, Canada.
- Inspired organization and relevant activity across other immigrant and refugee communities, not only Latin American.
- Changed a lot of hearts and minds: the testimony, advocacy and cooperation by refugees with the solidarity movement was even more compelling than that of solidarity activists alone--far more effective together as joint efforts.

In personal and family terms, Chilean refugees in Seattle area:

- were taken upon arrival to sponsor homes or apartments pre-arranged for them
- got children into school promptly with immediate English as second language support
- all had access immediately to English language instruction and most learned English relatively quickly
- got immediate health assessments, health care, and were enrolled in some form of health insurance
- adults got into employment within weeks of arrival, first in 'entry level' jobs while learning English and had educational and professional credentials assessed and validated, to later get commensurate employment.
- Among the employment consequences directly or indirectly resulting from our efforts:
 - three Chilean refugees with engineering background became heads of teams at Boeing at the time of design and development of the 757 & 767 jet airliners
 - one with construction skills built up a family company building a dozen houses per year
 - another became head of the credit card department of the biggest bank in the State
 - several worked in Alaska canning crab and salmon consumed around the world
 - several refugees and/or their children became teachers and intercultural counselors in schools
 - all adults were employed in decent work –eventually commensurate with skills and education-- from early on.

Perhaps an even bigger story is the **Solidarity movement in USA** --without which no refugees would have been admitted to the USA, nor US aid to the military *junta* cut off, nor the dictatorship discredited and isolated among a large part of the US citizenry as well as the US Congress.

The core organization was NICH –with a nationwide 'footprint'. It was established in 1971 to impede US 'meddling' against the Popular Unity government, several other groups emerged in 1971-72, and many more after the September 11 coup. NICH took the lead, in cooperation with other solidarity organizations where they emerged, in fomenting and organizing mobilization, engagement of, and cooperation with wide spectrum and large number of civil rights, legal, social, community, union, church, student, anti-war, and political orgs in most major cities in country.

We took a broad popular front approach –based on and promulgating core demands shareable by broad sectors and many actors in society, including mainstream political parties and forces:
stop military aid, human rights everywhere, no to torture, free political prisoners, accept refugees, non-intervention by the government and/or corporate actors in other countries...

What solidarity did and accomplished --integrally linked with reception & inclusion of refugees:

- raised awareness across wide spectrum of US population –including centrist public opinion
- got voice of mass media reaching at least occasionally much of US public
- stopped military aid –and other cooperation such as Chilean military officer training in the USA and joint military exercises by the US involving Chilean forces
- impeded (somewhat) economic cooperation, trade and investment with Chile under the dictatorship
- delegitimized the coup and military rule among a large part of the 'public' and called into question not just US support –but also imposition of Chicago boys destruction of social economy and popular movement –smashing unions and imposing generalized deregulation to give free rein to 'market forces' namely US and other Western corporations to export Chile riches and make high profits for selves and Chilean capitalists.
- Obtained admission of 2,000 refugees, one of the higher country figures of official admissions; the USSR did 3,000 in formal admissions, Spain only 356, never mind zero in Switzerland in the first years after the coup, as described eloquently in the film we've just seen.

While not explicitly so, the solidarity mobilizing and its content was objectively *anti-imperialist*, *anti-fascist* & anti-deregulated capitalism. It can also be said that a vision of ‘what we want’ behind at least some of the solidarity movement as implicitly and explicitly *democratic socialist*, linked with worker/labour union, community, and popular struggles in the USA and elsewhere. However, the movement avoided polarizing and trivializing the context and paradigm as somehow right vs left politics.

Solidarity discourse and action was often explicitly linked to local community demands in the US that in fact echoed those of what the Chilean Popular Unity mobilization and government had promoted: health for all; decent work; decent affordable housing, schooling for all children; adequate nutrition for all; equality of treatment and non-discrimination on grounds of class, ethnicity, gender, etc.; rights and equality for women; as well as corporate social responsibility and social responsibility of local governance. In sum, social justice in the broadest, most inclusive sense, one that echoed concerns of many people in the USA –and elsewhere.

Changed history, really and literally.

In the bigger picture and over the subsequent years, the mobilization, consciousness raising, and inspiration of the Chile solidarity movement in the USA:

- put *human rights* on US political, congressional and popular agendas; it was not there before, only *civil rights* with a specifically national context, history and engagement.
- raised consciousness and policy-political organization nationwide, along with parallel movements against the US war and occupation in Vietnam ended in 1975, and subsequently with national liberation and national democratic movements elsewhere in Latin America and in Africa
- The involvement of NICH and other solidarity activists as well as the solidarity movement socio-political legacy contributed directly to preventing US military intervention against Nicaragua to ‘take out’ the popular Sandinista government that overthrew the 40 year brutal Somoza dynasty dictatorship in that country in 1979. We –I was media outreach coordinator of the New York City component-- of mobilized 100,000 people to Washington DC from across the East Coast in 1983 –just as (I found out later) US navy ‘strike’ fleets were offshore both coasts of Nicaragua with troops and equipment for an ‘intervention’.
- That organizing and legacy seriously constrained US military intervention against national liberation forces in El Salvador and Guatemala, also with mass demonstrations in major cities nationwide conveying the message of mainstream opposition to military action. (Although at least one secret but substantial US airborne *operation* did take place in El Salvador and the Bush senior administration was open about support for the anti-government ‘Contra’ armed groups destabilizing the Sandinista government.)
- The solidarity movement legacy, awareness raising and organizing also undergirded significant US opposition and protest that discredited and undermined the official *constructive engagement* of the US (and other countries such as Switzerland and UK) with Apartheid South Africa.
- That legacy also constrained US support for destabilizing and thwarting national liberation struggles in Angola & Mozambique, struggles ultimately successful in decolonization and installation of *popular* governments in those countries and in Namibia.

In another aspect:

- Our Chilean Refugee Resettlement team of medical doctors attending to refugees, coincident with teams in France and Sweden, established *torture* as a recognized medical phenomena and health pathology in both medical/health literature and the international medical lexicon where it had been previously absent (despite widespread use across the world for a very long time. When our team members began to see the often not evident but serious post-traumatic consequences of torture in numerous refugees who had been in prison, they found no discussion of torture in medical literature, the only most-

relevant references written up were to the experiences and consequences for survivors of WWII Nazi concentration camps in Europe. The teams in these three countries wrote up what they saw and analyzed and, as a consequence, *torture* was finally recognized and listed in medical lexicons and dictionaries of pathologies.

Speaking of movies, mobilizing in the US was one of the factors that prompted and gave prominence to the prime time award winning movie *Missing* by Costa Garvas, starring no less than Jack Lemmon and Sissy Spacek, a mainstream film that reached tens of millions of movie-goers/viewers.

Lessons for today & tomorrow

drawing on my USA experience and manifestly similar histories in Geneva and elsewhere, all of which remain applicable here and now:

- Organization and organized solidarity are key to delegitimizing and stopping military aid and political intervention propping up regimes that may be ‘business friendly’ but objectively deny social justice and democratic participation by people in the countries. In the Swiss case,
 - Swiss arms exports to Chile before and after the coup, including Pilatus attack-trainer aircraft, Piranha armored vehicles, and multiple types of automatic rifles, also to other places where they end up used in contemporary conflicts against self-determination, repression, and to maintain western exploitation of local resources ...
 - For example, 10 CH Pilatus attack/trainer aircraft were obtained by Chile in 1980 –at height of dictatorship –indeed when US arms embargo was in effect
 - Today, «Swiss companies exported armored vehicles, weapons and other military equipment worth 955 million Swiss francs (\$1.02 billion) last year» (2022) up 29% from 2021.
(<https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/switzerland-s-war-material-exports-hit-record-level-in-2022/2839309>)
- It is essential to build and maintain a broad front with CSOs, human rights groups, community and neighborhood associations, church and other faith-based groups, youth groups, women’s organizations, etc.
- Much more must be done in public education and outreach, such as using films and events like this in schools, universities, at community groups, in local association events and meetings, etc. to raise awareness, stimulate debate and encourage engagement, linking local and international struggles and revindications.
- Regarding Chile specifically, I suggest an immediate priority is to look into, monitor and, as appropriate, raise questions about consequences and implications of current Swiss ties to business and the military in Chile and to Chilean politics, namely whether there is any influence in mounting the aggressive campaigns against the current government and recently against a model, progressive, rights-based Constitution. I note that a Swiss government website reports 200 Swiss companies are actively present in Chile and total Swiss investment in Chile is now on the order of 1.5 billion CHF.

For reference, there are an estimated 90,000 plus people in Chile of Swiss origin, reflecting large-scale emigration in the past from this country, notably to Argentina, Chile and Uruguay, since the 19th Century!

For your reflection and consideration, and preferably for action and activity individually and collectively.
Thank you.

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A Very Brief Bibliography

A few of many articles and documents on Chile solidarity and Chilean refugees

USA & Canada

Power, Margaret. *The U.S. Movement in Solidarity with Chile in the 1970s*. In *Latin American Perspectives* Vol. 36, No. 6, SOLIDARITY (November 2009), pp. 46-66 (21 pages). Sage Publications, Inc.

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0094582X09350763?journalCode=lapa>

Abstract

The international movement in solidarity with Chile that developed and flourished in the 1970s first emerged when the Unidad Popular government of Salvador Allende (1970–1973) was still in power but gained strength after the Chilean military overthrew the government and imposed the military dictatorship that ruled that country from 1973 to 1990. The power of the movement stems from the historical context in which it arose, the tremendous appeal exerted by the Allende government, North Americans' familiarity with and support for the UP government, the outrage and horror many felt at the atrocities committed by the dictatorship, and the presence of Chilean political refugees in the United States. The work that the solidarity movement engaged in ranged from securing entry for political refugees and direct action against the Chilean ship Esmeralda to raising funds for the Chilean resistance through cultural programs. While political tensions among the refugees undermined the movement to a degree, the presence of the refugees brought their experience into the lives of North Americans and inspired them to support the Chilean resistance.

Peddie, Francis. *Shaming an Unwilling Host: The Chilean solidarity movement*, Left History (An Interdisciplinary Journal) 17.2 Fall/ Winter 2013. York University (Canada)

file:///C:/Users/invite/Downloads/admin,+lhv17n2_04-peddie-1.pdf

Introduction/Abstract

Throughout its history, Canada has often become a place of refuge for people who suffered oppression in their countries of origin. In the 1970s, one such group consisted of Chileans who fled their homeland after the coup d'état that toppled the government of President Salvador Allende on 11 September 1973. With the overthrow of Chile's experiment in democratic socialism and the state repression that followed, hundreds of thousands of people from all walks of life left the country, resulting in la diáspora chilena, the Chilean diaspora. Often they left under duress or out of fear for their lives and those of their families. In many cases, the persecuted had no plan to escape to a particular country of refuge; they took shelter wherever they could. In this context, by October 1973 Canada became a place of refuge for Chileans forced from their homes. While Canada did not shelter as many as some other nations, it nonetheless has played a significant role in the Chilean diaspora. As this study will argue, the presence of Chilean exiles in Canada is the result of the concerted pressure on the federal government by leftist or left-leaning parties and organisations, in the face of denial in Ottawa of the severity of the humanitarian crisis in Chile. The coalition working in solidarity with persecuted Chileans included the New Democratic Party (NDP), the Parti Québécois (PQ), and smaller parties, such as the Communist Party of Canada; organised labour, through the Canadian Labour Congress and the Confédération des syndicats nationaux; non-governmental organisations such as Amnesty International and Oxfam; concerned academics, under the banner of the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) and the World University Service (WUS); citizens' groups, such as the Toronto Welcome Committee for Chilean Refugees and the Comité d'accueil pour les Réfugiés Chiliens in Quebec; and, perhaps most importantly for the Chilean question, progressive elements within various Christian denominations, many under the umbrella of the Canadian Council of Churches (CCC). This agglomeration of disparate but like-minded bodies lobbied the federal government to allow Chileans in under relaxed immigration criteria and assist in their passage, citing the precedent of special admissions programmes for Hungarians (1956-7), Czechoslovakians (1968), Tibetans (1971), and Ugandans of Asian descent (1972).

Schoenburg, Arielle. *Before the Coup: The Solidarity Movement in the U.S. with Salvador Allende's Chile, 1971-1973*. A BA thesis, University of Michigan, 2016.

<https://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/bitstream/handle/2027.42/120618/aschoenb.pdf?sequence=1>

The thesis reviews the development of Chile solidarity organizations in the USA 1971-73, particularly CALA and NICH that emerged in Madison, Wisconsin. Although the pre-coup movement was smaller and less diverse than the post-coup movement, it played a significant role in enabling the quick mobilization of the latter movement and in influencing 1970s activism as a whole. CALA-NICH was the largest group dedicated to Chilean solidarity before the coup and developed resources and infrastructure that were instrumental for the immediate response to the coup. NICH would remain a strong presence in the post-coup movement, as the movement continued to mobilize people against U.S. support for the Pinochet regime in the following years. CALA-NICH's influence was not limited to the Chilean solidarity movement; the 1970s was marked by a form of activism that was distinctly focused on corporate power and responsibility in the global world. CALA-NICH's anti-imperialist activism was intrinsically anti-corporate and its campaigns against corporate injustices in Chile were on the forefront of this trend of activism that would carry on throughout the decade and into the 1980s.

Taran, Patrick. *Development of the South American Refugee Program*. Report. Seattle. April 1980. 119 pages. <http://www.globalmigrationpolicy.org/articles/integration/Development%20South%20American%20Refugee%20Program%20Seattle%201976-80%20PTaran%20apr1980.pdf>

A documental review and assessment of the organization, development and operational activity of the South American Refugee Program, originally Chilean Refugee Resettlement Program, from initial organizing and refugee admissions advocacy in 1974-75 to reception and direct social service support work with ultimately some 200 refugees in Seattle 1976-1980, among them 50 freed directly into exile from political imprisonment and in many case torture. The review highlights public education and community engagement efforts that contributed to successful local inclusion and employment outcomes for the refugee families that complemented and supported reconstitution of Chilean identity and community.

Europe & UK

Calenda. [European Solidarity with Chile, 1970-1990](https://calenda.org/202373) Call for conference papers. 2010. KU Leuven (Belgium). <https://calenda.org/202373>

During the Cold War, Western Europe witnessed the emergence of various social movements with an orientation to Latin America. One of the most important mobilizations for Latin America was without any doubt the movement in solidarity with Chile, which already emerged in support for the Allende government (1970-1973) but especially gained strength after the military coup of 1973. Indeed, the overthrow of the Unidad Popular government in September 1973 and the subsequent repression by the Chilean military dictatorship inspired a wave of protest and solidarity in Western Europe, which lasted until the end of the regime of Pinochet in 1990. Support for the Chilean resistance and for the many refugees which had crossed the ocean was concretized in the establishment of hundreds of Chile solidarity committees across Western Europe and in the action of a variety of other organizations, including trade unions, church groups and NGO's. The Chilean political opposition and refugees played an active role in this solidarity, although internal political tension proved to be an important obstacle for the Western European solidarity movements.

Dowling, Owen. *When British Workers Stood Against the Pinochet Coup*. Article in *Jacobin* (Journal). 2021 <https://jacobin.com/2021/09/uk-britain-chile-solidarity-campaign-csc-pinochet-regime-trade-unions-allende-labor-fascism>

For British interests . . . there is no doubt that Chile under the junta is a better prospect than Allende's chaotic road to socialism, [and] our investments should do better." Writing ten days after the military coup against Salvador Allende's Popular Unity government in Chile, UK foreign secretary Alec Douglas-Home provided an optimistic assessment of general Augusto Pinochet's putsch and the bloody reassertion of capitalist hegemony. But if Douglas-Home spoke for many in the British ruling class, his country's labor movement did not share his attitude toward the new junta. As organized labor saw things, its "interests" were aligned not with investors but with the working-class Popular Unity supporters who now faced torture and murder in the Pinochet regime's prisons.

Indeed, the coup d'état of September 11, 1973, and its aftermath, as the new US-backed regime acted upon its declared intent to "eradicate" the "Marxist cancer," horrified many in Britain's trade-union movement — helping to stir a campaign of practical solidarity with the people of Chile. The reaction was all the more heartfelt because Allende's government had pursued a democratic socialist program, and many of those persecuted following the military takeover were fellow activists in left-wing parties and trade unions. ...

The hurried organization of a Chile solidarity movement in the UK exasperated the efforts of successive British governments to maintain relations with the junta. Abhorrence at Pinochet's atrocities in Britain was not limited to the socialist left — many liberals and church groups came to oppose the regime on humanitarian grounds. But it was the distinctly left-wing Chile Solidarity Campaign (CSC), with its founding leadership associated with the Communist Party, that constituted the foremost anti-Pinochet voice in British civil society, through its broad-based work among the labor movement.

Trade unionists who engaged with the CSC throughout the 1970s and 1980s helped build an impassioned culture of international solidarity. This also meant practical demonstrations of support for the Chilean people: rallies and conferences, boycotts of Chilean goods and work on Chilean equipment, support for refugee resettlement, and union delegations to the country. The campaign's organization among the labor movement worked to associate the contemporary struggle against Pinochet's dictatorship with the proudly claimed traditions of British socialism, notably transnational working-class solidarity and struggles against fascism.

The effect was a highly emotive discourse around the Chilean cause that resonated with trade unionists in Britain — and inspired them to take collective action in support of a people thousands of miles away.

Andy Beckett. “*The 1973 coup against democratic socialism in Chile still matters – there, in Britain and beyond*”. The Guardian. 18 August 2023
<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/aug/18/1973-coup-chile-democratic-socialism-still-matters-britain>

Fifty years on, the 1973 coup in Chile still haunts politics there and far beyond. As we approach its [anniversary](#), on 11 September, the violent overthrow of the elected socialist government of Salvador Allende and its replacement by the brutal dictatorship of General Augusto Pinochet are already being marked in Britain, through a period of remembrance scheduled to include dozens of separate exhibitions and events. Among these will be a march in Sheffield, archival displays in Edinburgh, a concert in Swansea, and a conference and picket of the Chilean embassy in London.

Few past events in faraway countries receive this level of attention. Military takeovers were not unusual in South America during the cold war. And [Chile](#) has been a relatively stable democracy since the Pinochet dictatorship ended, 33 years ago. So why does the 1973 coup still resonate?

In the UK, one answer is that roughly 2,500 Chilean refugees fled here after the coup, despite an unwelcoming Conservative government. “It is intended to keep the number of refugees to a very small number and, if our criteria are not fully met, we may accept none of them,” said a Foreign Office memo not released until three decades afterwards.

The Chileans came regardless, partly because leftwing activists, trade unionists and politicians including Tony Benn and Jeremy Corbyn created a solidarity movement – of a scale and duration harder to imagine in our more politically impatient times – which helped the refugees build new lives, and campaigned with them for years against the Pinochet regime. Some of these exiles settled in Britain permanently; veterans of the solidarity movement are involved in this year’s remembrance events, as they have been in earlier anniversaries. The left’s reverence for old struggles can sometimes distract it or weigh it down, but it is also a source of emotional and cultural strength, and an acknowledgment that the past and present are often more linked than we realise.

Two weeks ago, it was revealed that an [old army helicopter](#) that stands in a wood in Sussex as part of a paintball course had previously been used by the Pinochet government, to transport dissidents and then throw them into the sea. The dictatorship was a pioneer of this and other methods of “disappearing” its enemies and perceived enemies, believing that lethal abductions would frighten the population into obedience more effectively than conventional state murders.

Not unconnectedly, the regime also pioneered the harsh free-market policies which transformed much of the world – and which are still supported by most Tories, many rightwing politicians in other countries, and many business interests. In Chile, the idea that a deregulated economy required a highly disciplined citizenry, to avoid the economic semi-anarchy spilling over into society, was exhaustively tested and refined, to the great interest of foreign politicians such as [Margaret Thatcher](#).

Another reason that the 1973 coup remains a powerful event is that it left unfinished business at the other end of the political spectrum. The [Allende government](#) was an argumentative and ambitious coalition which, almost uniquely, attempted to create a socialist country with plentiful consumer pleasures and modern technology, including a kind of early internet called [Project Cybersyn](#), without Soviet-style repression. For a while, even the Daily Mail was impressed: “An astonishing experiment is taking place,” it reported on the first anniversary of his election. “If it survives, the implications will be immense for other countries.”

The coup happened partly because the government’s popularity, though never overwhelming, rose while it was in office. This rise convinced conservative interests that it would be reelected, and would then take the patchy reforms of its first term much further. For the same reasons, the Allende presidency remains tantalising for some on the left. An updated version of his combination of social liberalism, egalitarianism and mass political participation may still have the potential to transform the left’s prospects, as Corbyn’s successful campaigns in 2015, 2016 and 2017 suggested.

[Files reveal Nixon role in plot to block Allende from Chilean presidency](#) [Read more](#)

There is one more, bleaker reason to reflect on the coup: for what it revealed about conservatism. When I wrote a book on Chile two decades ago, it was unsettling to learn about how the US Republicans [undermined Allende](#), by covert CIA funding of his enemies, for instance, and how the Conservatives helped Pinochet, through arms sales and diplomatic support. But these moves seemed to be explained largely by cold-war strategies and free-market zealotry, which was fading in the early 21st century.

Yet from today’s perspective, with another Trump presidency threatening, far-right parties in power across Europe, and a Tory government with few, if any, inhibitions about [criminalising dissent](#), the Chile coup looks prophetic. Nowadays the line between conservatism and authoritarianism is not so much blurred occasionally, in national emergencies, as nonexistent in many countries.

Some critics of conservatism would say that it’s naive to think such a line ever existed. In 1930s Europe, for instance, supposedly moderate and pro-democratic rightwing parties often facilitated the rise of fascism. Yet the postwar world, after fascism had been militarily defeated, was meant to be one where such toxic alliances against the left never happened again.

The 1973 coup ended that comfortable assumption. “It is not for us to pass judgment on Chile’s internal affairs,” said the Tory Foreign Office minister Julian Amery in the Commons, two months later, despite the coup having initiated killings and torture on a mass scale. When the coup is remembered, its victims should come first. But the response of conservatives around the world to the crushing of Chile’s democracy and civil liberties should never be forgotten.

✓ Listing to be expanded; there are many more articles and reports, also re Latin America, Eurasia and elsewhere.