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Film

NATIONAL GUARDIAN

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24 OCT 1973

Approved For Release 2005/01/13 : CIA-RDP88-01365R000300020003-2

'Que Hacer'

(WHAT IS TO BE DONE)

'Allende'

CIA 4 Chile

Films on Chile record struggle before the coup

TWO FILMS ON CHILE.

"Que Hacer" ("What Is To Be Done?")

directed by Saul Landau, Nina Serrano, Raul Ruiz;

"Allende,"

an interview with the late President.

Produced and directed by Saul Landau and Haskell Wexler.
Impact Films (144 Bleecker St., NYC).

Saul Landau's two films about Chile were, of course, made before the military coup. But they were first shown to an American audience while the news of the fascist take-over and Allende's murder were still fresh in everyone's mind.

The tragic difference between the political climate in which these films were produced and the reality of the events that transpired since is, therefore, their most fascinating, albeit unintentional, aspect.

The major effort is "Que Hacer," a full-length feature that combines Hollywood-style fiction, newsreel clips and documentary-style interviews and camera-work to describe Chile in the several weeks leading up to the election of Salvador Allende in 1970.

Apparently aware that any North American cultural intervention in Chile, no matter how sympathetic, is bound to have overtones of Yankee imperialism, Landau has also introduced several anti-cinematic devices designed to be wary of this inevitable form of neo-colonialism.

The most interesting of these is a series of interviews with a youthful militant of the Movement of the Revolutionary Left (MIR) who comments on various scenes in the film. In two instances, at least, he accuses the film of political incompetence—in an attempted fantasy kidnapping of a fictional CIA agent and in a contrived confrontation between a Communist deputy and his "radical" son who has become a member of a terrorist band. It is a criticism that might well have been extended to other aspects of this film that has borrowed its title, but little else from Lenin.

Also on hand to help separate fantasy from reality is Country Joe MacDonald who pops up from time to time, guitar in hand, to remind us that no matter what illusion the screen portrays, the reality is that it's still one more movie made by North Americans. "Making a movie in Chile, having a wonderful time," sings MacDonald early in the film. It's a bitter comment but it does not seem to have dissuaded Landau or his associates from proceeding anyway. Perhaps they felt that by trumpeting their inevitable complicity, they would somehow be absolved of its political consequences.

The film's purpose—to the extent that one can use such a specific word for what seems, at best, an ambivalent focus—would seem to be an exploration of different trends on the Chilean left at the time of the elections. Center stage is Allende and the Popular Unity coalition, represented primarily by the aforementioned Communist deputy who faithfully delivers his party's line on "peaceful transition" to socialism. Contrasted against this are a radical priest, an infantile terrorist group and the MIR. Playing an embarrassingly contrived counter-point are a business-like CIA agent and an idealistic young woman in the Peace Corps who, in the process of disengaging herself from the Corps manages a brief affair with the CIA agent and another with a youngster from the terrorist band.

It is this focus on the political and emotional ambivalences of the young Peace Corps woman that makes of "Que Hacer," despite its apparent anti-imperialism, a cultural artifact that exploits rather than aids the Chilean people's struggle. In addition, its political stance is so muddled that it provides neither enlightenment nor emotional reinforcement of revolutionary convictions.

A 30-minute filmed interview with Allende by Landau and Haskell Wexler ("Medium Cool") offers a painful ex post facto self-commentary on the political illusions of Chile's first "Marxist" regime. Describing himself as a "socialist parliamentarian," Allende's theme in this interview, over and over again, is his devotion to the law, to legal remedies, to "the highest possible constitutional procedures." Considering that he was the precarious president of his country at the time the interview was made, we hardly expect him to speak much differently. But the inescapable feeling is transmitted that Allende's commitment to a constitutional road to socialism was much more than tactical of the moment. His was a developed political view—shared, obviously, by his allies of the Chilean Communist Party—that Chile, somehow was "different," that it could proceed towards a socialist society within the framework of bourgeois legality.

The revisionists would have it that the "socialist camp" has grown so strong in the world that countries such as Chile (in fact any bourgeois democratic country, not excluding the United States) can now pursue the path of peaceful transition. Challenged, they accuse their Marxist-Leninist opponents of war-mongering, adventurism and advocating violence for its own sake. But the necessity for smashing the old bourgeois state apparatus if the working class is to seize and hold power is hardly a new idea in the revolutionary movement. It was the great lesson that Marxists drew from the failure of the Paris Commune and has been a cornerstone of Leninist revolutionary strategy ever since. Tragically, the advocates of "Chilean exceptionalism" have paid with their lives for their failure to comprehend this fundamental axiom of revolutionary strategy.

At the same time, it is clear that Allende represented the genuine aspirations of Chile's workers and peasants. Support for the Allende government was the only principled path for revolutionaries both within and outside Chile to take during the three years of the democratic regime.

The Landau-Wexler interview with Allende is as instructive a piece of political conversation on film as we are ever likely to encounter.

Allende himself emerges as a warmly sympathetic human being, a man who undoubtedly tried to serve his people with great courage and dignity. If at times he seems a trifle vainglorious or unduly prideful in his place in the Chilean legislative spectrum, we can forgive him such minor frailties in view of his obvious willingness to give his life for what he conceived to be the best interests of the people.

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