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## CHILE

### A POLITICAL HUE AND CRY

Heated debate goes on over the Allende government's handling of the media, education, and public order as well as over the political role of the Chilean military.

The President's critics believe that a new government offensive is under way to silence their media outlets. They cite the closure of two radio stations as well as Allende's veto of legislation that would have provided funds to help radio and television outlets in danger of economic asphyxiation. They say the government is responsible for the condition the media are in. These claims are bolstered by the critical situation of Chile's largest company and main source of newsprint, brought on by official pressure. Some opposition media court martyrdom by their excesses, but pro-government competitors get away with similar behavior. The administration eased away from overt suppression of the media when this raised a public hue and cry, but many of Allende's supporters see an urgent need to muzzle the opposition spokesmen.

Results of the elections on 28 September for administrators of the University of Chile's 13 campuses and 26 faculties have been such as to allow both sides to claim victory. The united opposition forces made the better showing, but a high abstention rate, weighted vote rules, and geographical diffusion make it difficult to show convincingly that the government suffered a political setback. Secondary student demonstrations have become almost a daily staple and appear to be getting rougher, thanks to the activities of goon squads from both camps. On 3 October, after an unusually strong police crackdown that injured more than 20 students, a Christian Democratic legislator said he would bring charges to impeach still another interior minister.

There is growing evidence that the government is moving to ensure public order on its own terms. Police forces are being increased, and the justice minister recently announced that neighborhood "vigilance boards and crime prevention committees" will be formed to work with them. Harsher measures are being taken to track down

the owners and smugglers of arms. To argue its fairness, the government can point to moves against leftist extremists if it is criticized for singling out opposition activities.

The Chilean military, although it is deeply concerned over the present situation, apparently cannot get a consensus taking exception to Allende's interpretation of his constitutional powers. Army chief Prats has publicly criticized the opposition press for its "provocative treatment" of the forced resignation of coup-plotting General Canales. Prats restated his opposition to those who seek to undermine military discipline for political purposes and to subvert "constitutional normality." Canales responded with a protest of injured virtue and threats to publicize army documents injurious to Prats.

### ECONOMIC WOES

Chile is plagued by worsening consumer shortages and rising prices. The increase in the cost of living in August was even larger than feared, and inflation probably reached some 80 percent during the first nine months of the year.

Since wage rates were increased on 1 October to match these price rises, a further increase in demand is inevitable. The impact of the wage increases will be to widen further the large gap between supply and demand. At the same time, transport problems are growing and hampering the distribution of supplies. Because of massive port congestion, for example, wheat supplies in Santiago are already low and may cause a bread shortage. Delays in unloading are so long that shippers taking cargoes to major Chilean ports now are levying a surcharge.

Maintaining adequate supplies of foodstuffs will be a major problem for Allende. Beef supplies, already the subject of widespread consumer shortages and black marketing, will be further reduced following the recently announced ban on imports to save scarce foreign exchange. In addition, more than one half of Chile's farmland is now in the hands of the government and is having managerial problems. The result is a sharp drop in farm output, and the promise of further drops.

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Plantings of winter wheat are down sharply, and the upcoming harvest promises to be even smaller than last year, the worst in 20 years. As a consequence, Chile will have to import about one million tons of wheat, as well as 500,000 tons of corn. Because Chile is unable to obtain more than 50 percent of its needs from Argentina, Australia, and Canada, the Allende government will try to buy US grain. Chile plans to seek US export credits to finance its purchases, but is willing to spend some of its scarce foreign exchange if need be.

The government has announced several new policies to counter these supply problems. It plans to take over control of the marketing of all fresh vegetables and to set up a chain of government-run markets. In addition, it has established a basic "family basket" of staple foods that all stores will be obliged to sell. At the same time, the administration announced that the price of goods included in this "family basket" will be frozen. To enforce the freeze, "volunteer" inspectors will report on prices charged in private stores. The government added that further wage increases would be determined by changes in prices for this "basket." Although the administration has stated that it does not plan to institute either rationing or a wage freeze, these additional controls have much the same effect.

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