

## CHAPTER ONE

# The Coup and Its Causes

At 8:30 A.M. on September 11, 1973, Radio Agricultura in Santiago interrupted its regular programming to play the Chilean national anthem, following it with the announcement, "This is the network of the armed forces and carabineros." Citing "the grave social and moral crisis in the country, the government's inability to control the chaos, and the constant increase in paramilitary groups trained by the Popular Unity parties which will lead Chile to an inevitable civil war," the pronunciamiento demanded that President Salvador Allende turn over his office to the military and the national police, and declared that "the armed forces and carabineros are united in carrying out their historic mission and responsibility to fight for the liberation of the fatherland [*patria*], to prevent the country from falling under the Marxist yoke, and to seek the restoration of order and institutionality." The military declaration promised that the workers would not be deprived of their "economic and social conquests," advised Santiago residents to remain in their homes, and ordered the progovernment press, radio, and television to cease to function "beginning at this instant" or be subject to attack by the Chilean army and air force.<sup>1</sup>

Informed earlier that the Chilean navy had seized Valparaíso, President Allende had left his residence in Santiago's fashionable Barrio Alto for the presidential palace, La Moneda, shortly after 7:00 A.M. He was joined there by his ministers of foreign affairs, economy, and interior, as well as his close friend, José Tohá, former minister of interior and defense. In addition, several doctors, his two daughters, his personal secretary (and, as the pro-junta press noted after the coup, "intimate friend") Miria Contreras, along with a well-known journalist, Augusto Olivares, and the undersecretary of the interior, Daniel Vergara, came to the palace. The armed personal bodyguard of the president (usually referred to as the GAP, an acronym for Allende's description of them as a group of personal friends, "Grupo de Amigos Personales"), twenty detectives from the Investigation Squad (Investigaciones), and the three hundred carabineros of the Special Services section of the national police were also on hand to defend the

palace. (After the carabinieri were informed that the national police had joined the coup, they left the palace, dismantling the machine-gun emplacements which had been set up in front of the building.)

Allende replied over the radio to the military ultimatum, expressing his determination to resist "by whatever means, even at the cost of my life." The military countered with a communiqué which accused his government of violating fundamental rights, "artificially fomenting class struggle, violating the constitution, destroying the economy, and endangering the security of the country," concluding that the Allende government was "illegitimate, immoral, and unrepresentative of the overwhelming sentiment of the nation."

By 9:30 A.M. only one progovernment radio station continued to broadcast, and on it Allende delivered his last message to the Chilean people:

This is surely the last time that I will be able to speak to you. . . . My words are not spoken in bitterness, but in disappointment. In the face of these events, I can only say to the workers, "I am not going to resign." At this historic juncture, I will pay with my life for the loyalty of the people.

Allende thanked the workers for their support and insisted that he had kept his promise to respect the constitution and the law. Blaming "foreign capital and imperialism allied to reaction" for creating the climate which persuaded the armed forces to break their tradition of nonintervention, he said he was speaking to

the worker, the peasant, and the intellectual, to those who will be persecuted because fascism is already present in our country, blowing up bridges, cutting railroad lines, destroying pipelines in the face of the silence of those who should have taken action. History will judge them. . . . My voice will no longer come to you, but it does not matter. You will keep hearing it; it will always be with you. At the least you will remember me as an honorable man who was loyal to the revolution.

During the speech, Allende said that the people should "defend themselves but not sacrifice themselves," which seemed to indicate that he did not wish the workers to carry out armed resistance if it was evident that the armed forces possessed overwhelming military superiority.

The military leaders in charge of the siege of the presidential palace were situated in the Ministry of Defense just across Santiago's main boulevard, and Allende was in telephone contact with them throughout the morning. They gave him until 11:00 A.M. to surrender, repeating several

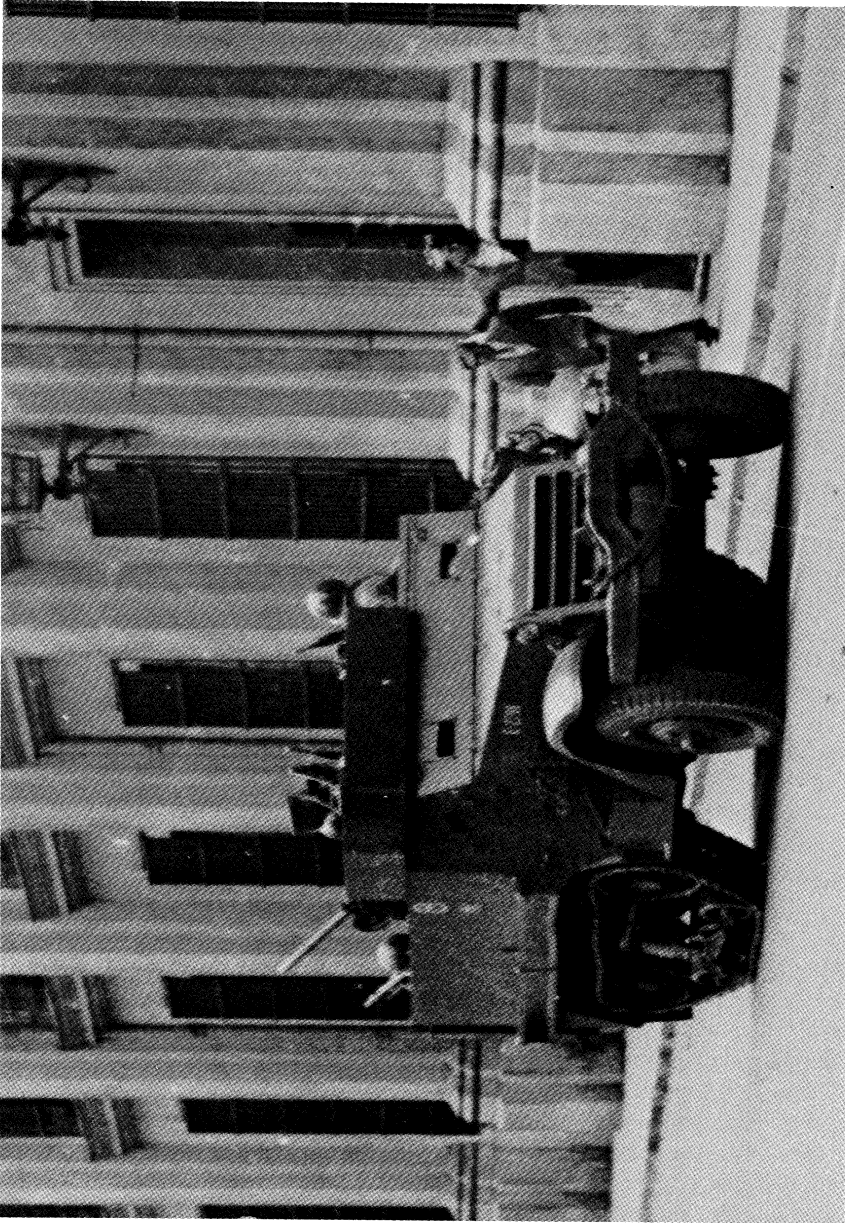
times an offer of safe conduct out of the country for him and his family. At about 10:00 A.M. the president permitted his military aides to leave, as well as those of the twenty-man detachment of detectives from Investigaciones who wished to do so. Over their objections, Allende finally persuaded his two daughters to leave the palace an hour later. He donned a helmet, gas mask, and bulletproof vest, and carried a submachine gun which had been a gift to him from Fidel Castro, inscribed "To my friend and comrade in arms, Salvador." Along with progovernment snipers located in the upper floors of government buildings around Constitution Square behind the palace, the only armed defenders of the palace besides Allende himself were the thirty members of the personal bodyguard and some detectives from Investigaciones.

When the telephone negotiations were concluded with the announcement by the military that Hawker Hunter fighter bombers were already on their way to bomb the palace, those within took refuge in its side subcellars on the theory that the pilots would hit only the central portion to avoid damaging surrounding buildings. At 11:55 A.M. the rocket bombing runs began. A total of eighteen rockets hit the building, and when the seven bombing runs were completed at 12:15 P.M., a thick cloud of black smoke billowed out of the north central facade and flames leapt out of the main entrance. After 140 years of almost uninterrupted constitutional rule, the Chilean armed forces, long known for their adherence to constitutionalism and civilian rule, had set fire to the building that for most of that period had been the symbol of civilian constitutional government in Chile.

After the bombing, a four-man delegation from Allende crossed over in an armored car from the palace to the Ministry of Defense to conduct surrender negotiations, but sniper fire prevented them from returning. Tanks and army troops began to advance on the palace amid sporadic firing from surrounding buildings. Shortly after 1:30 P.M. the besieging troops gave the defenders a four-minute deadline to capitulate. Allende, who was defending the palace from the second floor, is quoted as saying, "Surrender. This is a massacre. La Payita [Miria Contreras] should leave first. I will go at the end." A white handkerchief was tied to a broom, and the group began to file through the side door of the palace; but Allende did not follow them. Sniper fire forced those who had left the building to lie on the sidewalk, and the fighting continued within the palace between the members of the GAP and the soldiers led by General Javier Palacios, who had entered through the main gate. When they reached the Independence Salon on the second floor of the east side of the building, the soldiers found one of the president's doctors with the body of Allende. The doctor, Patricio Guijón, said that he had seen the president shoot himself through the chin with his submachine gun. At 6:15 P.M., after examination by medical and ballistics experts, Allende's body was taken out of the building wrapped in a poncho



*The Chilean presidential palace, symbol of civilian rule, after rocket bombing by the Chilean air force, September 11, 1973. (United Press International)*



*Daniel Vergara leads the delegation leaving the presidential palace after the bombing in order to negotiate its surrender at the Ministry of Defense. (Herman Morales)*

and flown the next day to Viña del Mar, a resort city near Valparaíso, where it was buried in the family plot. Allende's widow has said that she was not permitted to see the body and could only make a brief lamentation at the grave, telling the gravediggers, "Salvador Allende cannot be buried in such an anonymous way. I want you at least to know the name of the person whom you are burying."

A nationwide twenty-four-hour curfew was imposed as of 3:00 P.M., and military patrols were sent out to arrest wanted leaders of the deposed regime. Some turned themselves in as ordered in radio announcements, and many more sought asylum in various embassies. The head of the Socialist Party, Senator Carlos Altamirano, escaped the country, as did some of the leaders of the Movement of the Revolutionary Left (MIR). Allende's close friend, Augusto Olivares, committed suicide before the bombing of La Moneda, and Eduardo Paredes, one-time head of Investigaciones, was reported by the military to have died in a clash with an army patrol (it seems more likely that he and other captured members of the GAP and Investigaciones were shot in the Tacna regimental headquarters the day after the coup), but the coup itself had been relatively bloodless.

Much more blood was shed later, as the new military rulers initiated the brutal process of destroying the power of the Marxist left. In succeeding weeks the military junta headed by General Augusto Pinochet closed the Chilean Congress, outlawed the pro-Allende political parties and declared the other parties in recess, appointed military men to head all Chile's universities including those under private auspices, dissolved the Chilean trade union confederation, established censorship of the media, and conducted continuous roundups of real or suspected enemies of the regime, many of whom were held in Santiago's two large soccer stadiums. The courts continued to function, but they refused jurisdiction over the political arrests, citing the "state of siege in time of war" which had been unilaterally declared by the military. The junta legislated by a series of decrees-laws, one of which later stated that if any of the military decrees was in violation of the constitution it was to be considered as a constitutional amendment. Continuing reports came out of Chile from journalists, churchmen, and international investigating agencies of torture, repression, and prisoners "shot while trying to escape." One of the world's oldest constitutional democracies had become a harsh military dictatorship.

Why did it happen? Was it inevitable that Allende's *vía chilena*, which he had described as "a second model" of a peaceful transition to socialism, would end with the presidential palace in flames, blood in the streets of Santiago, and corpses in the Río Mapocho? How does one explain and understand the sequence of events that culminated on September 11—and the regime that followed? Initially, foreign observers blamed the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency and ITT, since their earlier anti-Allende activities had been widely publicized. The left attributed the coup to imperialism and its

domestic allies, citing the so-called invisible blockade organized by the United States and the continuing sabotage, black-market activity, and violence organized by the extreme right within Chile. Moderates such as the Left Radicals (PIR), the Chilean equivalent of Europe's Social Democrats, and the Christian Democrats, Chile's largest party, cited the runaway inflation produced by Allende's economic policies (an annual rate of 323 percent shortly before the coup) and his failure to maintain democratic legitimacy as the principal causes of the coup. The right pointed to the proliferation of armed leftist groups and claimed that a left-wing coup had been planned for September 1973 which would have involved the assassination of the military commanders and the leaders of the civilian opposition. Social scientists in other countries saw the coup as a confirmation of their theories about rapid social mobilization, the exhaustion of populism in Latin America, or the pernicious effects of an electoral and party system geared to proportional representation and frequent elections.<sup>2</sup>

Who was right? In the complex patterns of this hyperpoliticized country one could find confirmation of almost any theory, and left and right could produce completely consistent—and totally contradictory—interpretations of recent Chilean history. Inevitably the many Chileans who were forced into exile by the coup have produced selective accounts of the Allende period which are highly sympathetic to the Popular Unity government, while the Chilean government has attempted to reply with government publications and documents aimed at demonstrating that Allende had been solely concerned with self-aggrandizement and, aided by thousands of Cubans and other Latin American leftists, the establishment of a Marxist dictatorship.<sup>3</sup> The lessons to be derived from a careful examination of the Chilean experience are in danger of being lost in the partisan propaganda which has followed the coup.

To understand what happened on September 11 and to evaluate the conflicting interpretations of its meaning, it is necessary to go back before Allende's accession to power in 1970. Some might say that one should begin with the early 1950s, when a considerable expansion of electoral participation took place in Chile and political leaders began to promise more to the electorate than the Chilean political and economic system could deliver. The 1958 presidential election, in which the figures that were to dominate Chilean politics for fifteen years—Jorge Alessandri on the right, Eduardo Frei for the Christian Democrats, and Salvador Allende on the left—first ran against one another, is another possible point of departure. However, 1964 seems more appropriate as the year with which to begin, both for reasons of space and because of the close relationship between what happened during Eduardo Frei's six-year term—dubbed by him "the revolution in liberty"—and the policies carried out between 1970 and 1973 by his successor, Salvador Allende.

A comparison of the policies of Frei and Allende is also useful as an

illustration of the alternative possibilities available to, and the limits upon, the democratic reformer. Both promised “revolutionary” changes in Chilean society within the framework of that country’s democratic institutions. Both were faced with policy choices which often, although not always, involved trade-offs between conflicting goals. The problem for both was how to achieve development, reform, and social justice, while maintaining a productive economy, popular support, and political democracy. The methods they chose, however, and the choices they made, were very different.

There are fairly precise indicators to measure the effects of government policy on stability, economic growth, democracy, and social justice. A government is stable when antigovernment violence is nonexistent or at a low level. Economic growth is usually measured by the annual rate of increase in per capita income. Political democracy is indicated by competitive elections, civil liberties, and the percentage of adults of voting age who vote. Social justice is more difficult to measure, but recent writers have emphasized income distribution and, in agricultural countries, land-tenure arrangements.

Along with a generally shared objective of national autonomy and a reduction of *dependencia*,<sup>4</sup> these goals and measures have become central elements of Chilean political debate in recent years. Part of the fascination of the Chilean drama is the extent to which a highly ideologized multiparty system in a centralized but democratic state offered the Chilean voter alternative policy choices which ranged from the conservative’s preference for order and stability to the socialist’s belief in equality and equity—and successive governments of right, center, and left tried to implement their political philosophies.

Dissatisfied with the conservatism of the Alessandri “businessman’s government” which had ruled Chile since 1958, Eduardo Frei, the victorious Christian Democratic candidate in 1964, called for a “revolution in liberty,” altering property relationships in the countryside, asserting national control over the copper industry, and mobilizing the “marginal” sectors of the population. This was to be carried out within the framework of constitutional democracy through an appeal for broad popular support to overcome the opposition which would inevitably arise on both left and right. There is no doubt that Chile was a more prosperous, just, and democratic (if less stable) society at the end of Frei’s term of office than it had been at the beginning. Yet he did not succeed in solving Chile’s chronic problems of inflation and economic stagnation, and in 1970 he turned over power to the very forces to which he had offered himself as an alternative six years before. This study will attempt to determine whether his policy was a failure, as its critics on the left and right (for different reasons) contend, and whether the problems he encountered were an inevitable consequence of the inherent contradictions of populist reformism, or were related to particular characteristics of the Chilean political system, or, alternatively,



were the result of policy errors and wrong choices at crucial points by his administration.

As a Marxist, Salvador Allende pursued a policy which was actuated by very different value priorities from those of his predecessor. For both ideological and political reasons, the rapid expansion of state control of industry and agriculture and an immediate increase in the living standards and political participation of low-income groups were given first priority, and the political instability and economic dislocations which were likely to result were accepted as "the costs of revolution." In the course of Allende's three years in power, class polarization, violence, and, after mid-1972, runaway inflation convulsed Chilean society and made it increasingly unlikely that the transition to socialism could be carried out peacefully. Allende's domestic problems were exacerbated by external pressures, chiefly from the United States, and by the intransigence both of the left wing of his own coalition, whose predictions of the inevitability of a violent confrontation eventually became a self-fulfilling prophecy, and of the extreme right wing of the opposition, which did not hesitate to use subversive methods and armed violence to overthrow him. Again the question will be asked whether the violent end of the Allende regime was the result of factors that were systemic (the contradiction between democracy and Marxism), national (the fragile Chilean economy and archaic political system), or personal (Allende's policy errors)—or more accurately, how one is to weigh the importance of each, since they all played a role in the Chilean tragedy.

I conclude with a brief examination of the policies pursued by the military junta which overthrew Allende's Popular Unity government. All sides agree that September 11, 1973, marked the end of an era in Chile. The military government is committed to a very different policy—postponing for many years a return to democratic rule, giving first priority to economic recovery and the elimination of Marxist influence, and relying ideologically on a combination of Catholic integralism and free-enterprise economics. Why that government has felt it necessary to engage in repressive measures is also related to what went before, and this study will attempt to determine why one of the freest democracies in the contemporary world has been replaced with a government which, legally and psychologically, is in a permanent "state of siege." Once again the systemic explanation ("fascism" as the only alternative to socialism) is offered, but historical factors (the particular situation of Chile in 1973 in an economic and political "blind alley" from which only an authoritarian government could extricate it) and personal factors (the Chilean military's political socialization, or lack thereof) provide alternative or additional explanations.

The political experience of Chile since the early 1960s suggests a broader range of questions of fundamental importance for modern politics. First,

it provides a series of case studies of the policy prescriptions of the ideologies of the left, right, and center, and compels the observer to define his own attitude toward them, as they apply not only to Chile but more generally. Is it true, as the left suggests, that capitalism and imperialism are the major obstacles to the achievement of social justice in the contemporary world, and that only a socialist system can provide a minimum level of human dignity to mankind? Or is the problem, as the center maintains, that formal democracy has not yet been translated into genuine effective participation by the poor and less privileged so that they can make use of the mechanisms of the modern state to moderate the excesses of private enterprise, and provide the populace with access to the advantages of modern life, while maintaining political freedom and pluralism? Or is the solution basically economic, as the right maintains, lying in economic development which can only be achieved by restraining political demagoguery and social unrest—by authoritarian means, if necessary? All three of these positions are represented and can be evaluated in the policies of the various Chilean parties and governments that are examined in this book.

The period under study raises related questions about democracy and development. In the decade before 1973, increasing sectors of Chilean society (although by no means a majority) began to question Chile's tradition of constitutional democracy. The democratic center believed that social reform and economic development could be carried out through incremental change within a framework of freedom, legality, and compromise. But the center found itself increasingly under attack both from the left, which insisted that any "fundamental" change must inevitably involve a violent confrontation with the forces of reaction, and from the right, which looked to military intervention to give Chile the stability required for economic growth and social peace. For the left and the right, Cuba and Brazil respectively offered examples of the successful implementation of alternative models of political change to the democratic system which in theory had previously had a quasi monopoly on legitimacy in the Western Hemisphere. Chileans and "Chile-watchers" were compelled to ask themselves, Is democracy compatible with basic socioeconomic reform, and if not, what are the alternatives?

The conduct of various social groups and classes within Chile also suggests broader questions about their role in the modernization process. Are the workers (or the workers and peasants, or the workers, peasants, and slum dwellers) a revolutionary force which once catalyzed by class-conscious intellectuals can transform society? Or are they basically conservative, especially once they receive better wages, a small plot of land, or a house of their own? Does Marxism unite or divide exploited groups in their effort to achieve a more human existence? Is the middle class revolutionary, reformist, or reactionary, or all three at the same or different times? Can

the upper classes be persuaded, cajoled, or frightened into sharing their wealth and power with other groups, or is violence the only way to achieve social justice, with repression by those in control of the instruments of political power the likely response? More generally, is man actuated primarily if not exclusively by motives of self-interest and competition which neither persuasion nor appeals to social consciousness and cooperation, nor even a fundamental alteration in social institutions, can modify?

The role of the United States in relation to Chile during the period has also been cited as an illustration of more general conclusions. At the beginning of the period, the Alliance for Progress appeared to symbolize a U.S. commitment to land reform, tax reform, and educational reform under democratic auspices, and the government of Eduardo Frei seemed to be one of the showcases for U.S. policy. Later, as Frei ran into increasing difficulties, it was said that U.S. policy was turning away from democratic regimes and toward those under military auspices, notably in Brazil. With the election of Salvador Allende, U.S. policy became increasingly hostile to Chile, and after his overthrow it was revealed that a deliberate policy of "destabilization" of his government had been pursued. It was therefore concluded by some that Chile demonstrated that U.S. policy always and everywhere is opposed to regimes—even democratically elected regimes—that are committed to social changes which may threaten U.S. power or economic interests. U.S. assistance to the military junta which followed the September 1973 coup was taken as additional confirmation. This book will give considerable attention to U.S. policy toward Chile and will attempt to determine the extent to which these assertions are true.

The most disturbing generalization which may be drawn from the Chilean case is not restricted to the developing nations or to recent U.S. foreign policy, but involves the relationship of politics, economics, and the modern state. It is the question whether in recent Chilean experience we have "seen the future" and perceived that it does *not* work. The trends that have been evident in accelerated fashion in Chile in recent years are worldwide trends. Not merely in Latin America or the Third World but everywhere in the world we see persistent inflation and unemployment, increasingly scarce resources, the extension of state regulation, heightened demands on government, and diminished capability of *any* economic system to satisfy those demands. Is the Chilean experience of increasing politicization, inflation, and polarization, followed by the imposition of authoritarian rule, likely to be repeated in many other parts of the world, including major democracies in the so-called developed world? Is it true, as Lord Acton asserted when he observed similar trends in nineteenth-century Europe, that "the passion for equality makes vain the hope of freedom"? A closer look at Chile since the early 1960s may give us some insight into these perennial questions.

## CHAPTER TWO

# The Context of Chilean Politics

Chile in the early 1960s was ready for reform. Coming to Chile from other Latin American countries, one was struck by the comparative weakness of conservative forces and the ferment and dynamism of those calling for change. Yet that change was to be carried out within the constitutional “rules of the game”—and, at least at the beginning of the decade, the proponents of violence on both the right and the left had little influence or support. Salvador Allende and Eduardo Frei were both elected to office on programs that promised “revolutionary” transformation in the distribution of power in Chile. Yet both also affirmed their commitment to the constitutional framework. This adherence to constitutionalism on the part of Chileans, while not unique in Latin America (Costa Rica, Colombia, and more recently Venezuela also have developed constitutionalist traditions), was more deeply rooted than anywhere else in the continent. Between 1833 and 1973 Chile had only two constitutions, and throughout most of its history it has been a constitutional democracy in law, if not in fact. With the exception of a comic-opera barracks revolt for higher pay in October 1969, prior to the 1973 coup the military had not attempted to interfere with the operation of Chilean constitutional processes since the 1930s.<sup>1</sup>

### The Institutional Context

It was the military that made it possible to write the constitution of 1925, under which Chile operated until 1973. The 1833 constitution had established a strong presidency, but this had been reinterpreted after the brief 1891 civil war to permit the establishment of a parliamentary regime in which the legislature dominated the executive. When the Congress resisted President Arturo Alessandri’s attempt to adopt a welfare program and to strengthen the presidency, the military stepped in to resolve the deadlock. President Alessandri left the country but was recalled five months later by a group of reformist military men. With the assistance of a civilian group