"Those Who Accuse Me of Hanging On to Power, Are Right"

Dictator Augusto Pinochet shows no sign of wanting to lift his military boot.

Photo by Archivo Novedades

A burial in Santiago following the September incidents; the banner reads: "How much longer will you go on killing, fascist beasts"

Augusto Pinochet began 1987 by lifting the state of siege declared for the nth time last September- and announcing that some 3500 exiles previously barred from returning to Chile could now do so. He justified these measures citing the strength of his government, now in its fourteenth year.

The opposition, on the other hand, claims that Pinochet has never been weaker than he was by the end of 1986, making his fall almost imminent. Both Pinochet and his opponents have arguments to back up their statements.

Pinochet doesn't claim to have grass-roots support for his administration or for the regime he heads; he doesn't have it and hopes to prolong it through the use of the force that brought him to power. That force is now joined by a new Constitution, written by and for Pinochet and approved in a rather questionable plebiscite in March 1980. He also has several other factors in his favor: a technically perfected and well— equipped repressive apparatus; the "monolithic unity" of the armed forces; the vacillations of the Catholic Church, which despite its defense of human rights in Chile, has not used its traditional capacity to exert pressure in a direct challenge to the dictatorship; and support from the United States.

The opposition is clearly in the majority, but it is still divided. It has yet to come up with a platform capable of unifying people around an alternative and truly national political project representing

the broad range of ideologies and democratic conceptions present in the country. There are two major opposition coalitions, the Democratic Alliance (AD) — made up of Christian Democrats, rightist Republicans, Radicals, moderate leftists and Social Democrats— and The Popular Democratic Movement (MDP) —made up of Communists, Socialists and the Revolutionary Leftist Movement (MIR). Reflecting a real division in Chilean society, they both recognize the need to put an end to the dictatorship, but differ on how to do it and on the project to be implemented after Pinochet's fall.

MILESTONE EVENTS OF 1986

Both the military government and the opposition can point to important events in 1986 that strengthened their respective position. On the opposition side, the successful national work stoppage on July 2nd and 3rd was particularly significant. It not only showed that the opposition could agree ahead of time on the activity, but also that it has the necessary mobilizing capacity to be able to move on to more difficult kinds of actions. Another important step was taken with the creation of the Civil Assembly, made up mostly of both MDP and AD members. It has proposed a "civilian occupation" of the country in response to the dictatorship's military occupation, and its goal is to make the country ungovernable through broad social mobilizing.

On the other side, the dictatorship has been able to capitalize on its discovery, supposedly with the help of U.S. military intelligence, of hidden arsenals in the northern part of the country. As a result it was able to alert the armed forces, center-right sectors and the United States to the possibilities of the "Central Americanization" of the Chilean conflict. Thus, it was able to strengthen its argument for continued support for Pinochet as the only guarantee that the situation won't get out of control.

A third major event was the failed attempt to assassinate Pinochet on September 7. A clandestine, political-military organization, the Manuel Rodríguez Patriotic Front (FPRM), thought to be backed by the Communist Party, claimed responsibility for the action. Curiously enough, both sides gained ground with the attempt. For that part of the opposition which favors the use of all forms of struggle (MDP), the action showed the FPRM's high degree of organization, as well as the vulnerability of the government security apparatus. The government, for its part, could reiterate the legitimacy of its hold on power, claiming once again to be the only force capable of neutralizing the "extremists."

Opinions on the action were varied. The opposition appeared to be divided once again. One part repudiated the use of violence as a means of struggling for democracy, and the other declared that the assassination of a tyrant is not only legitimate —as recognized even by an ancient Catholic theological tradition— but also possible. The Chilean Catholic Church, together with Pope John Paul II, both deplored the action and called on those responsible for it to respect the sacred value of human life. Neither the Chilean hierarchy nor the Pope issued a statement about the five political killings by government security forces that occurred immediately after the assassination attempt. The victims' names were simply added to the endless list of those eliminated by the regime during

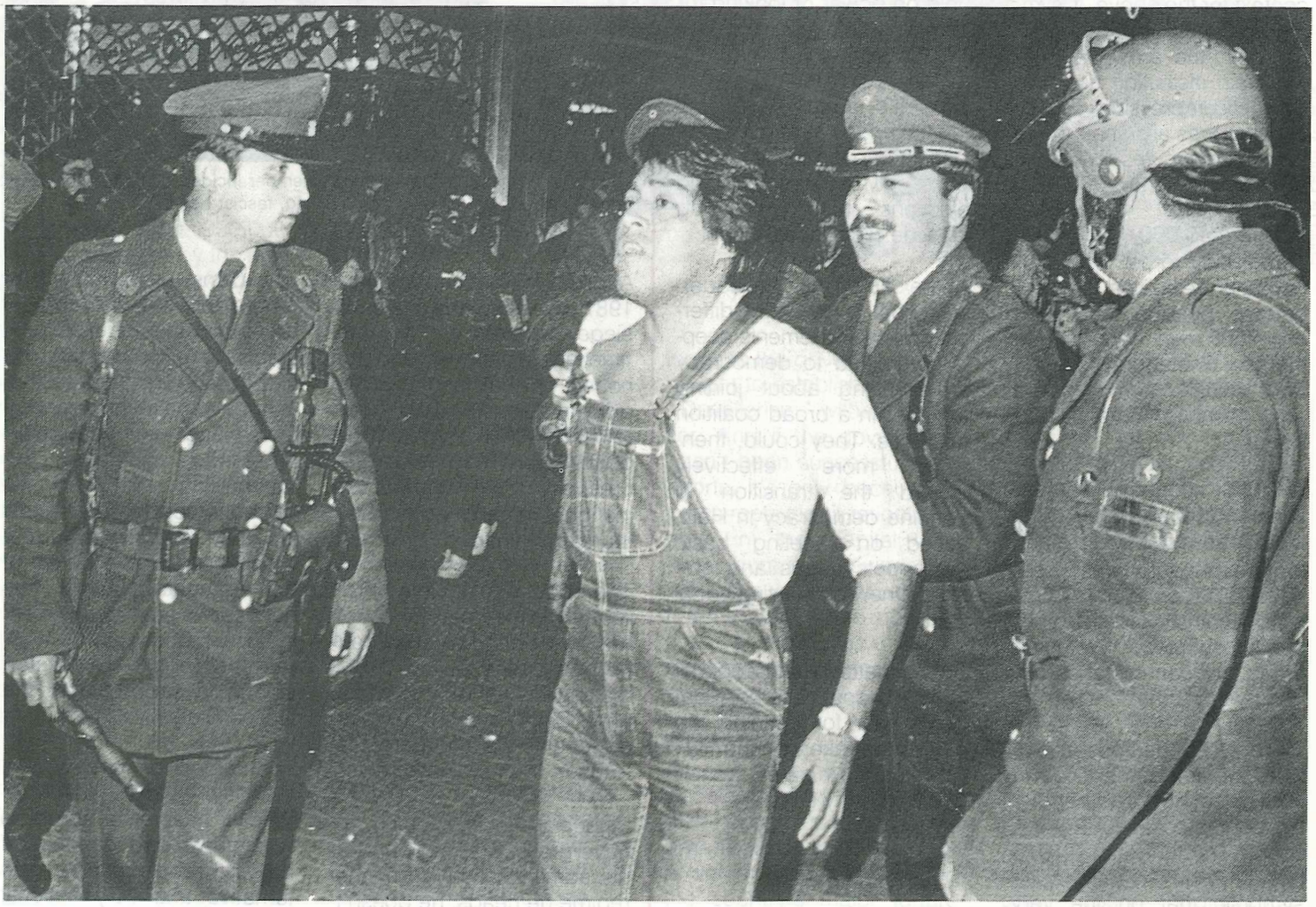

Photo by Archivo Novedades

A student being arrested during a demonstration

the past 13 years. The armed forces condemned the attempt and reaffirmed their unconditional support for their Commander-in-Chief, Augusto Pinochet.

THE UNITED STATES' REVOLVING COURSE

The United States has had a variety of policies toward the Pinochet dictatorship through the years. At first, it gave its open support to the regime. Later, it began a policy of "quiet diplomacy," using private channels to communicate its withdrawal of support and its commitment to democracy. Then, during the first part of 1986, the Reagan administration began to take a more active approach. Both Elliot Abrahms and George Schultz made statements to the effect that they would welcome a return to democracy in Chile. In addition, the U.S. voted in favor of a United Nations resolution condemning Chile for its flagrant, systematic and grave violations of human rights, and it voted against World Bank structural adjustments loans requested by the Pinochet government.

These last measures, however, only represent a tactical shift on the part of the U.S. It is not going to try to shorten Pinochet's self-proclaimed term in office or to speed up the elections slated for 1989 (at which time Pinochet will be the only presidential candidate and thus, able to extend his rule until 1997). While for the first time in 13 years the U.S. voted in the United Nations to condemn Chile, the vote must be viewed within a larger foreign policy context. The U.N. resolution came up just as Reagan was accusing the Sandinistas of violating human rights and pressuring the Congress to approve $100 million in aid to the contras. As one analyst pointed out, the vote against Chile was just a bit of "make-up" for the same old policy. In additon, Mexico and Cuba, among other countries, had proposed a much stronger condemnation than the one the U.S. supported in the final vote. In prior negotiations, the United States offered its vote in favor, if the original resolution would be exchanged for a softer one drawn up in Washington. That's what finally happened, and Pinochet came out the stronger from it.

In relation to the World Bank credits, the U.S. voted against them, once again citing human rights violations. But this was only after assuring that there would be enough votes from other countries to guarantee their approval, using "friendly" pressure in some cases to secure the votes. Even before the vote, Pinochet knew what the United States planned to do and what the final outcome would be. Robert Gelbard, Under-Secretary of State for Latin American Affairs, made a special trip to Santiago in July to explain the situation to Pinochet and tell him not to worry.

But Gelbard wasn't the only emmissary Reagan sent to Chile in 1986. General John Galvin, head of the U.S. Southern Command, went in September and Nestor Sánchez, Under-Secretary of Defense, went in October. Galvin met with Pinochet and, among other things, offered his government's willingness to get Pinochet, his family and closest collaborators out of the country and to Hawaii in the case of an emergency. Sánchez also met with the Minister of Internal Affairs, with Cardinal Juan Francisco Fresno and with center-right leaders such as Juan Luis González, President of the Civil Assembly, and Gabriel Valdés, President of the Christian Democratic Party.

Reports from Gelbard and Galvin, together with those from Harry Barnes, U.S. Ambassador to Chile, made it clear that the center-right opposition in Chile had not been able to develop a viable alternative project. To the contray, the process of democratization had actually stagnated over the previous months. At the same time, the left had gotten stronger, the Communist Party had grown and the political initiative was increasingly in the hands of social organizations such as professional society, unions, student federations, slum-dwellers' associations and others.

Faced with this situation, the Reagan administration chose again to modify its tactics for dealing with Chile, deciding that it is necessary to back Pinochet, at least until the 1989 elections. The administration hopes, then, to buy time to be able to assure a favorable outcome in line with its own interests. Pinochet knows this and plans to take advantage of it. In a late December interview that appeared in Santiago, in the right-wing newspaper, *El Mercurio*, Pinochet stated, "Those who accuse me of hanging on to power are right." He added that some public figures in the U.S. make "illiterate judgements" about Chile.

In the meantime, there have been some changes in the opposition. The Socialist Party decided to leave the Democratic Alliance (AD) in hopes of building a single party uniting a variety of different socialist tendencies and recovering its own autonomy, both in relation to the Communist Party, as well as to the center-right. The Radical Party may also soon leave the AD in search of other alliances.

Finally, despite repeated efforts by the opposition and by progressive sectors in the Catholic Church to turn the decision around, the Pope has confirmed that he will travel to Chile in March of this year. Pinochet is already touting the visit as a sign of the Pontiff's "moral support."

At the same time that Pinochet announced the lifting of the state of siege and permission for 3500 exiles to return, he also added that new laws will be written and registration opened for the electoral process, in keeping with the country's calendar for its return to democracy.

Is this Pinochet's strength or his weakness? That remains an open question.★

Ximena Ortúzar

Editor's Note: On issue no. 2, page 54, the painting "Dream and Foreboding" has been mistakenly attributed to María Izquierdo. In fact, it was painted by Remedios Varo.