

I. LEGAL AND FORMAL REPRESSION OF TRADE UNIONS

**Central Unica de Trabajadores (CUT -The Chilean TUC) banned.

On September 29 1973, the Junta's Decree Law cancelled the legal status of the Central Unica de Trabajadores, CUT. It is illegal to suggest by word or deed that the CUT exists. CUT buildings, funds and properties were confiscated. At least one CUT property, a worker's holiday camp called Ritoque, has been converted into a concentration camp by the military.

**Individual unions lose recognition or are dissolved.

Many trade union federations, such as the Textile Workers, Metalworkers and Bakery Workers, have been dissolved, and their funds and property confiscated. Others, such as the peasant confederations, Unidad Obrera Campesina and Ranquil, are not officially banned. But their funds have been frozen or confiscated, their income cut off, and they are effectively prevented from functioning.

**Military decree to "restructure" some unions.

A few unions, like the Copper Workers Federation, have been decreed to be "in reconstruction". Effectively they are unable to take any action whatever without the blessing of the military junta, and their funds are frozen.

**Election of officers

Elections are forbidden at any level in the trade union movement, by military order. Vacancies are filled by appointing the oldest or most senior worker in the factory or place of work. In practice the appointment to a trade union post is often made by the employer, or, in state enterprises, by the military administrator. The person chosen is obliged to accept. Existing leaders can be replaced at any time. The entire leadership of the Telephone and Telecommunication Workers Union was sacked and replaced.

**Meetings

Trade union meetings must be held outside working hours. A copy of the agenda of the meeting, time and venue, and a list of those who will attend, must be handed to the local military police 48 hours in advance of the meeting for approval. If permission is granted, an armed policeman will normally attend the meeting.

**Collective Bargaining

All forms of collective bargaining are suspended indefinitely. ILO representatives were informed that normal bargaining would be restored when inflation in Chile is halted. As it is at present running at 375%, this seems to offer little hope of a return to 'normality'. It is actually illegal for workers to present a wage claim, whether verbally or in writing.

**Strikes

Strikes are illegal. Decree Law No.5 introduced 'work discipline' in Chile. Under the terms of this decree and those of the State of Siege, strikers are subject to court martial. The death sentence may be passed on any striker convicted of attempting to "paralyse an activity vital to the national interest".

**Arbitration

All the former arbitration and negotiating committees have been abolished. New ones have been set up in which the employers and members of the Armed Forces are in the majority.

**Dismissal

Anyone suspected of being an "extremist, saboteur, or a recognised activist" can be dismissed on the spot and without compensation. According to the Junta's own laws, mass dismissals are illegal, but in practice they often take place.

**Working hours

Working hours were extended by 4 hours per week soon after the coup, as a contribution to what the Junta calls "National Reconstruction". No extra pay was given for the extra hours worked. There have been reports of substantially longer hours being worked, with as much as two extra hours per day being added in some places, again without any wage increase.

**Education

Contracts for worker education classes between the trade unions and educational establishments, especially the State Technical University, have been torn up or quietly dropped. All the universities are under the control of military rector.

2. REPRESSION OF TRADE UNION LEADERS AND MEMBERS

Many leaders of the CUT are dead, in prison or in exile. Hundreds of trade unionists were killed during and after the coup. In October 1973, 17 peasant leaders were shot dead in Paine, near Santiago, and in the Port of San Antonio 10 dockers leaders were similarly executed. Luis Figueroa, exiled President of the CUT, estimates that between 50 and 60 percent of all trade union officials in Chile have been arrested at some time since the coup, although not all are still detained. Of those arrested, some were executed, and many simply disappeared. Of those acknowledged to be prisoners, the majority have never been charged with any offence. Most have been tortured.

3. THE ECONOMIC POLICY OF THE MILITARY JUNTA

The economic policy of the military junta has implied putting the entire Chilean economy into reverse. Not only the policies of the previous Popular Unity government, but those of all the governments of Chile for the past 40 years, are being drastically changed. The Junta is committed to total free enterprise. It plans to return to private ownership all the nationalised industries, with the possible exception of the largest copper and nitrate mines. Even public services such as health and education are being obliged to hand over some of their functions to private enterprise, and to charge competitive prices and make a profit on the rest. Foreign investors are being offered every incentive to come to Chile. Tarrifs are being removed, so that cheap foreign imports can flood into Chile and threaten local industry.

All of this is being done in the name of making Chilean industry more competitive. But since Chile is a poor and a small country, with, at the best of times, a very restricted internal market. And since its geographical position is unfavourable, and its ports and roads antiquated and congested, Chilean industry cannot hope to

compete, unless it does so by paying super-low wages. This is exactly what the Junta intends. The real level of wages has been reduced so far, that no free labour force could conceivably accept their present conditions. This explains the need for the continued military repression. Chilean workers are literally slaves.

However, while some industries may be able to produce more cheaply because of the miserable wages they pay to their workers, the general effect of low wages has been to restrict still further Chile's domestic market. Producers of such goods as clothing and shoes find that their sales have dropped by half or more. They must either export or go bankrupt. Many small industries and shops have gone to the wall in the past few months, and their workers have gone to swell the ranks of the unemployed.

*** Prices

The 'official' inflation rate in Chile in 1974 was 375 percent, but the World Bank calculated that it was probably more nearly 600 percent.

Bread, which on the day of the coup in 1973 cost 11 escudos per kilo, now costs about 650, almost 60 times as much.

In early 1975, fares on public transport were increased by 50 percent, medical attention by 160 percent, milk by 50 percent, and parafin by 100 percent.

** Wages

Meanwhile wages have been kept down to a level of increase far lower than that of the cost of living. Wage earners have lost at least 50 percent of their purchasing power since September 1973. A minimum wage earner now spends half of his monthly wage on bread, cooking oil and milk alone.

** Unemployment

In the first period after the coup in 1973, most of the massive lay-offs were politically motivated. Now, increasingly, they are for economic reasons. Since wages are so low, nobody can afford to purchase goods, and shops, transport companies, distributors and producers are laying off their workers. At the time of the coup unemployment stood at 3.1 percent of the labour force. According to Junta spokesmen, it now stands at 10 percent. But according to studies commissioned by the Junta itself, in Greater Santiago, 22 percent of all workers are unemployed.

4. RESISTANCE IN THE TRADE UNION MOVEMENT

The State of Siege, the continued repression, and the existence of DINA, Chile's Gestapo, make resistance extremely difficult and dangerous. Nevertheless, Chilean workers are organising themselves to protect their living conditions, and to strike back against the military junta.

** Strikes

Most strike action has been met with violent reprisals: when coal miners in Lofa, in Southern Chile, went on strike, more than 150 of their leaders were arrested and taken to the concentration camp on Quiriquina Island. Two were shot. But some strikes have been successful in gaining wage increases above the norm fixed by the junta.

Workers have shown a remarkable degree of solidarity with their fellows, starting special funds for the unemployed, and going on strike rather than accept lay-offs.

**Protest

In a country where every form of protest is illegal, scope is limited, and the risks are grave. Nevertheless, leaflets and broadsheets circulate, slogans appear on walls, the dockers send messages to trade unionists abroad, which they hide among the cargoes, and every chance is used to voice dissent. In November a religious pilgrimage, which gave a unique opportunity for legal assembly, became a massive popular demonstration, with the full support of Chile's Catholic Church. Recently, when new employment opened up in some of the Municipalities, thousands of the unemployed besieged the offices of the Renca Municipality to demand work.

Feeling runs so high against the military regime that a Chilean refugee in Britain reported that a relative who wrote to him from Chile said that it was now more dangerous to remain silent than to express dissent, since anyone suspected of being an informer or collaborator was liable to get a knife in his back.

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