

CHILE: 1973 - 2013

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The morning of September 11, 1973 was sunny and bright.
Rumours of a military coup had been spreading for months.
But catastrophes don't happen on a beautiful day.
Or do they?

Exactly one week before, I had joined a crowd of tens of thousands at Valdivia's main square to commemorate the third anniversary of Allende's election as President of Chile. But this gathering had not displayed the free-flowing joy that had filled the streets three years before. Now, a divided country sat at opposite ends of a teeter-totter and the Right and their allies were on the verge of ousting Allende through violent means.

In contrast to the opposition's rock-solid unity, government supporters had grown increasingly divided. Some called for a strengthening of popular organizations; others, for further negotiations and compromises with the opposition. A real revolution or a significant abandonment of Allende's program were the two contradictory positions of the Left.

Salvador Allende was a self-declared Marxist and socialist who, in 1970, for the first time in world history, was democratically elected head-of-state on a platform of a peaceful road to socialism. The US-owned copper mines were nationalized, an agrarian reform gave land to impoverished peasants, workers took control of key industries, shantytown dwellers and squatters built their own houses, education and health-care services became more accessible, an expanded literacy campaign benefitted thousands and popular culture flourished. Those who had never owned a thing were taking a stab at controlling their own destiny.

But the ones who had always owned everything and held a monopoly on power didn't take long to start sabotaging the new initiatives. They did so with the political and financial support of the U.S. government. Between 1970 and 1973 the CIA poured millions of dollars into Chile and financed all kinds of organizations, from extreme right wing terrorist groups and the Association of Truck Owners to *El Mercurio*, the country's most widely read daily newspaper. Anything and everything in order to create sufficient chaos to justify a military coup. Finally, when it became evident that support for Allende had not waned and that he would not resign, the powers that be didn't hesitate to strike will full force so as to turn the clock back.

7:00 a.m., September 11, 1973.

I opened the curtains.

The morning was sunny and bright.

Perhaps the weather gods had taken pity on us and spring had arrived early to the south of Chile. But most likely, this was just a meteorological accident and the incessant rain responsible for the lush landscape, would return in a few hours.

At any rate, it seemed like a good omen. Catastrophes and beautiful days don't jibe; so, most likely, the much-rumoured coup d'état would not happen today.
But the radio was quick to prove me wrong. Instead of the usual newsreel, the announcer repeated the same communiqué over and over again: "Sectors of the Armed Forces have revolted and are advancing towards the presidential palace. Sectors of the Armed Forces have revolted..."

A few minutes later, President Salvador Allende addressed the country:

"...The military have the force to overpower us, but neither sheer force nor crime will ever put a stop to social processes. History belongs to us and is made by the people... Sooner rather than later, the great avenues where free men walk towards a better society will open once again..."

By noon, the presidential palace had been bombed, Allende was dead and the military had seized power and installed a brutal dictatorship that would last seventeen years.

A few weeks after the coup, my husband and I concluded that we had to leave Chile. Members of our families and many friends had been imprisoned, tortured, killed or "disappeared". We had been fired from our jobs as university professors, our house had been raided and I had been interrogated. The writing was on the wall.

So, we left behind everything we knew and loved, and flew towards an uncertain future.

A future called "Canada."

I was 25 years old then.

Now I'm 65.

I arrived in this country with no material possessions whatsoever, but with the passion and determination to do everything in my power to help build a better world for all.

Did I reach my goals?

Yes and no.

In spite of my hard work and the hard work of millions of others, greed and corruption are rampant among those in government and business who seek to broaden the economic divide.

Because of all our hard work, millions continue to open avenues of hope.

In Chile, university and secondary students are demanding free-of-charge, quality education for all. In doing so, they have also brought to the forefront the injustices inherent to Chile's entire economic model and the inadequacies and limitations of the country's democracy -- the long-reaching legacy of the Pinochet dictatorship.

In Canada, the Idle No More movement has emerged in strong opposition to the government's legislative agenda aimed at eroding treaty and indigenous rights and in defense of First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples' sovereignty to protect water, land and air.

Around the planet, millions continue to dream, organize, dissent, challenge and propose.

This September 11, when I open my curtains, no matter what the weather gods have in store for us, the morning will be sunny and bright.

As long as young and old continue to strive for a just world for all, every morning will be sunny and bright.

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