

On Orders of My Government...

A Commentary 10/11/73
By Nicholas von Hoffman

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*I have lived so much that some day
they will have to forget me forcibly,
rubbing me off the blackboard.
My heart was inexhaustible.*

Pablo Neruda, 1904-1973

In Santiago the generals are executing people. In Santiago the generals say they haven't killed as many as the refugees say they have. In Santiago they are burning books, Marx, Mao Tse-tung and the Marxist Neruda, Chile's Nobel Laureate. Rub him off the blackboard, not dead a week from cancer or other causes. In Santiago they warehouse the political prisoners.

In Washington the new government is recognized and the denials flow. After three years of using every economic lever to destroy the Chilean government, they tell us it wasn't a CIA hitman whose machine gun chattered the teeth out of Allende's skull. But hard on those assertions we have Howard Hunt, the 20-year CIA

man, giving us an on-camera demonstration of the kind of people that agency hires, promotes and commends. If Howard Hunt told you the CIA didn't have anything to do with Watergate in Washington or murder and incarceration in Chile, would you believe him?

For the first time, the Ervin hearings have given us a chance to judge CIA personnel. Recently we've seen Hunt, and last July, another retired CIA career man, William McCord, was on the stand displaying his kind of incompetence and deficient judgment. Is that whole place, into which it is estimated we put something like \$6 billion a year, stocked with such people?

Have we armed and paid for an army of marauding, simpletons who know how to plot cheeseball *coup d'etats* but are so out of contact with reality they think a major party candidate for the presidency could be on Fidel Castro's payroll? It's possible, since they have made a career of putting major party politicians in other countries on their payrolls.

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Nor does it seem to get better further up the line in the agency. The CIA's new boss, William E. Colby, distinguished himself in Vietnam as an architect of the Phoenix program of political assassination and midnight arrest. The society he helped build is one even a Russian might have difficulty adjusting to.

A generation ago CIA monkeyshines may have made some sense. Perhaps in 1953 overthrowing Premier Mohammed Mosadegh of Iran did save the oil for us and perhaps it was worth it if you think we must do such things to survive. But Allende's downfall isn't going to save the American copper mines or ITT's investments. The nationalization of American interests in Chile was voted for unanimously by the Chilean congress. The generals can't stay in power and hand them back to their former stockholders in New York.

Chilean democracy may never be restored, but neither will we; is another anti-American dictator like

Peron in Argentina preferable to an Allende? A William Colby or a Howard Hunt may have what they think is a rational answer to that question; a Henry Kissinger may tell us what's done is done, the generals are in power, and we have no more right to meddle in their internal affairs than we have to pass the Jackson amendment and meddle in Russia's.

The rest of us may ponder whether we are caught up in a gangbusting, nonideological careening around the world. We send killers into Cuba to get Castro, and perhaps he sends them back to get Kennedy. Brezhnev comes here and campaigns for Nixon. We give him wheat and campaign for him in Russia, which gives us title to help Thieu lock up 200,000 political prisoners, and the Chilean generals bomb the Moneda Palace.

A CIA world with Solzhenitsyn suppressed in Russian and Neruda burnt in Santiago, rubbed off the blackboard. But he won't be, and you don't have to be an idealist to know that. At night they hand-copy the forbidden texts in Russia; now they'll go into the mountains, into the Andes, to do the same with Neruda.

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