

# An Epitaph for Allende's Dream

New York

Three years ago, shortly before the end of Salvador Allende's fourth campaign for the presidency of Chile, he reflected on his previous failures and said: "If I lose this time, too, I'll just keep trying until the day I die. And if I don't make it then, my epitaph should read: 'Here lies Salvador Allende, a future president of Chile.'"

The military coup d'etat that overthrew the first freely elected Marxist in the Western Hemisphere also ended the nearly life-long dream of a driven, complex man whose own biography encompassed many of the paradoxes of the revolution he led.

Even as a young medical student, preparing for the most middle class of professions, Allende had been jailed for radical political activities; as a Marxist chief of state, pledged to rescue the millions of Chilean peasants from exploitation by the ruling wealthy families, he never lost his taste for \$30 bottles of scotch.

## LIFE

Salvador Allende was born July 26, 1908, in the port city of Valparaiso, the son of Chile's privileged class. His father, also named Salvador, was a wealthy lawyer who died when Allende was 17.

The young Allende first became involved in politics as a medical student at the University of Chile during the dictatorship of General Carlos Ibanez, who ruled from 1927 to 1931. He was jailed twice for his activities, but was popular with his fellow students, who elected him vice president of the Student Federation in 1932, the year he received his medical degree.



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ALLENDE AND HIS WIFE IN 1970  
He had just been sworn in as president

## PARTY

The next year, Allende and a group of former student leaders and Marxists founded the Chilean Socialist Party. His political activities made difficult for him to find a job, and he practiced medicine in provincial cities.

In 1937, at the age of 29, he was elected a deputy from Valparaiso to the lower house of Congress. Two years later he became minister of health in the popular front government of President Pedro Aguirre Cerda.

That year a major earthquake killed 20,000 Chileans, and Allende was appointed to head the relief efforts. He won a national reputation during that disaster, and also met his future wife, Hortensia Bussi, a student at the University of Chile.

Soon after the earthquake, Allende published a book, "Socio-Medical Problems of Chile," in which he blamed the country's capitalistic structure for many of the health problems of the poor. Politics rather than medicine had become the central focus of his life.

He was elected to the Sen-

ate in 1945 and soon began planning for the day he knew he would run for the presidency. He received only 6 per cent of the vote in his first try in 1952, a campaign he later minimized by calling it "a mere salute to the flag." But he increased his margins in 1958 and 1964.

Meanwhile, he enhanced his national stature by successfully introducing more than 100 bills in the Chamber of Deputies, mainly dealing with social security, health and women's rights, and his stature as a Socialist leader by visits to the Soviet Union, China, North Korea and North Vietnam and friendship with Fidel Castro.

Allende won a plurality in the national election on Sept. 4, 1970, but tensions that less than three years later would bring about his downfall were evident even before he was officially elected president by a joint session of Congress on October 24. A national state of emergency,

invoked after an attack on the life of the commander in chief of the army, prevented any public celebrations to mark his election.

The next three years saw a steady erosion of support for his government as Allende was forced to turn from his goal of reforming Chilean society to an increasingly desperate attempt to hold onto power.

Allende and his wife had three married daughters. They lived in Santiago in a pink stucco house filled with paintings, sculptures and souvenirs of Allende's world travels. He was a connoisseur of wine and in younger days had earned the nickname El Pije (The Dandy) for his stylish dress.

Even before the pressures of the presidency became acute, he rarely slept more than five hours a night.

"I really don't work," he said in 1970. "Working for the people is a pleasure."

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