

Allende's Undoing: A Middle Class Stung

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BUENOS AIRES, Sept. 14— "I am not the President of all Chileans," Dr. Salvador Allende Gossens said a few months after taking office almost three years ago.

What the Marxist President meant was that he had been elected by the urban squatters, the industrial workers and the landless peasants, and that he considered his Government most beholden to them.

News Analysis

Dr. Allende succeeded in gaining the alliance of the poorest Chileans, but during his crisis-ridden tenure he also gained the undying enmity of the middle classes, whose support he never really sought.

The military coup d'état

that toppled his Government and took his life was not the usual Latin-American palace revolt. It came in the wake of political strikes by middle-class sectors and open calls from the opposition parties for Dr. Allende's resignation or military action against him.

Tradition of Neutrality

Despite their conservative appearance, the Chilean armed forces have a strong tradition of neutrality on politics and support for constitutional government. For 40 years, before this week's coup, they had not interfered in the political process, and at crucial times—like last October's general business and transportation strike—President Allende had appealed to their patriotism and drawn them into his Cabinet.

When the armed forces finally did act—ruthlessly and

violently, according to news reports citing thousands of casualties — it came after Chile's long-stable political institutions had been strained to the limits.

A virtual stalemate existed between the Marxist coalition of Socialists, Communists and other leftists, and the opposition — mainly the center-left Christian Democrats and the right-wing Nationals.

President Allende used his executive authority to the maximum to push through ambitious income-distribution plans, to carry out the most extensive agrarian reform program on the continent and to nationalize hundreds of foreign and domestic companies, large and small.

But he was prevented from further action by an implacable legislature controlled by his

opponents, who nevertheless were unable to roll back his programs or legally remove him from office.

So bitter were relations between Dr. Allende and the legislature that he openly called that body a "circus" and legislative opponents, in turn, systematically impeached key members of his many cabinets.

The stalemate extended to the court system as well. Judges ordered workers to evacuate illegally seized factories and peasants to return illegally occupied land. But almost invariably the Interior Ministry refused to authorize police forces to carry out the orders.

During the final months of the leftist Government, Dr. Allende and the Supreme Court justices exchanged acrimonious public letters and Government officials and supporters dismissed the court system as reactionary.

A climate inexorably built up that prevented any sort of institutional solution. Dr. Allende was under heavy pressure by ultraleftists, who urged him to press ahead with programs no matter what the social, political and economic costs. And the voices of moderate opponents were drowned out by hardliners who urged nothing less than the President's removal.

Toward the end, the only dynamic process in Chile seemed to be the rapidly deteriorating economic situation. Official prices rose by more than 300 per cent in 12 months, agricultural and industrial production declined steeply with bad management in state enterprises and no investment in the pri-



Associated Press

Santiago firemen removing the body of Dr. Salvador Allende Gossens, wrapped in a poncho, from the presidential palace after the coup on Tuesday.

by Declining Fortunes

ivate sector, and in every city there were lines of people waiting for food and consumer products.

Not everybody suffered. A small upper class with easy access to dollars that could be exchanged on the black market for astronomical rates survived comfortably, and confidently awaited Dr. Allende's overthrow.

But the middle class—that broad, loosely defined group ranging from white-collar workers and young professionals to shopkeepers—suffered a precipitous decline in its living standards and expectations.

Middle Class Blames Rich

"We have been asked to pay for the excesses of the rich," said Eduardo Pérez, a young construction engineer, a few months before the military coup. "Things have got to change, or there is no hope for people like me."

It was a refrain that was increasingly repeated among middle-class opponents of Dr. Allende. And it was the motivating force behind the strikes by thousands of truck owners, shopkeepers and professionals that paved the way for the military take-over.

"If President Allende does not leave, we will bang on the doors of the military barracks," the wife of a truck owner vowed in a speech during a demonstration by about 100,000 women in Santiago last week.

Dr. Allende never lost the fervent support of the lower classes, which will undoubtedly consider him a martyr.

He gained their loyalty not

only because of the real economic benefits of the first 18 months of his Government, but also because they had been, as Chileans constantly remark, "politicized."

"I feel I am living the greatest adventure of my life, that we are creating a new society," said Alvaro Abarca, a Socialist labor leader in an industrial district seized by Santiago workers. "And everybody else here feels the same way—just ask them." Indeed, many did.

At this stage it seems unlikely that the military Government will gain even a modicum of affection from the 40 per cent of the people who backed Dr. Allende even in the midst of the economic crisis.

One Civilian Government

The coup has left the southern half of South America with only one civilian government—ironically, former dictator Juan Perón's Argentina.

And the aging Mr. Perón—who almost certainly will regain the presidency in elections later this month—has pointedly cited the Chilean experience as a lesson to his youthful left-wing followers.

"If you want to do the same things Allende did in Chile," He told a group of left-wing Peronist youth leaders three days before the coup, "well, just look at what is happening to Allende."

Mr. Perón notwithstanding, it is doubtful that the failed Chilean experiment will dim revolutionary fervor on the continent. But it may well revive the polemic between the peaceful and violent roads to socialism.