



United Press International

Chuquicamata in Chile's Atacama Desert is called world's biggest open-pit copper mine.

Output of Huge Copper Mine Raised By Hard Work—and Strike Ban

Special to The Washington Post
CHUQUICAMATA, Chile —The work ethic that the military junta says it wants to instill in Chile has had its clearest success here, in the country's largest copper mine.

Production in the huge pit and complex of crushers, smelters and refinery on the desert is up 42 per cent, thus far, over 1973. The mine is heading for a record year, "even better than when the Americans ran it," miners say proudly.

Managers assert that the production increase is due to the absence of strikes that used to plague Chuquicamata. Strikes were outlawed after the military coup last September.

A union leader put the explanation in different terms. "Before Sept. 11, we used to work four hours or six hours and get paid for eight," said Calos Ogalde, shop steward of the Miners' Union. "We work eight hours now, not because we're afraid but because we realize we have a responsibility."

The mining camp at Chuquicamata never gave the

late President Salvador Allende majority support. Calama, the town of 46,000, voted against him and politically-motivated strikes helped bring mine production down from the levels when it was wholly-owned by Anaconda, then jointly held with Chile. Under Allende, the mine was nationalized. Even his supporter concede that mismanagement contributed to the drop in output.

Oswaldo Mendoza, a Catholic leftist and former professor of philosophy, was named by Allende to the worker's council of administration at Chuquicamata. Two years later he resigned from the council and from a splinter party in the Allende government, as a result of what he saw.

"There was an indescribable disorder," he said. "Worker's participation was a total fake from beginning to end."

On the day of the coup, miners refused the guns management of the mine wanted to pass out as the first step of worker's resistance. And a month later the

mine unions pledged one day's pay each month for six months as a contribution to the military junta.

However, the initial enthusiasm has faded. The turnout for the pledged day of volunteer labor declined from 99 per cent in the first month to 15 per cent in the last, according to company figures. There was an attempted strike recently, hurriedly stopped by frightened union leaders before the soldiers who camp at the mine were called out.

"Where do the military think they're going?" a miner driver asked rhetorically. "How long do they think they have to go on arresting people and all that?"

And three shop stewards, in an interview, said that friction is building up between workers and supervisors, because the supervisors are being hard on some workers while the unions cannot fight back—since strikes are outlawed.

"We have warned the company that there may be a slowdown if this isn't solved," said Ogalde, the Miners' Union steward.