

Chilean Officers Tell How They Began to Plan the

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SANTIAGO, Chile, Sept. 26—Middle-ranking officers of all three military services began plotting the coup against President Salvador Allende Gossens as far back as November, 1972, conversations with officers and civilians close to the situation have revealed.

The officers planning the coup, which resulted in the death of President Allende on Sept. 11, held discussions with one another and with middle-class union and business leaders.

By August of this year, the military leaders had rejected any thought of a civilian political solution and had encouraged middle-class unions to continue their prolonged strikes against Dr. Allende's Government to set the stage for a military take-over.

"We would have acted even

if Allende had called a plebiscite or reached a compromise with the political Opposition," said an officer deeply involved in the plotting of the coup.

Although the actual order for the coup was given on the afternoon of Sept. 10, military garrisons throughout the country had been put on the alert about 10 days earlier.

To make certain that there were no breakdowns in the armed forces, officers considered loyal to the Allende Government were placed under arrest when the take-over began. In some cases junior officers arrested their commanders.

The details of the military coup were given and cross-checked in separate conversations with officers of all three military branches and with civilians who had kept themselves closely informed of developments as the coup was being hatched. The informants

asked that their names not be revealed or their service branches cited.

The vast majority of the officers of the Chilean armed forces were staunch anti-Marxists even before Dr. Allende assumed the presidency in November, 1970.

"After Allende came in, we believed that he deliberately set about to destroy this country's institutions," one officer said. "In the first two years, he had succeeded in destroying the economic power of the middle class, which is the base of our national institutions. At the same time, all political parties suffered a tremendous decline in prestige because of their ineffectiveness" in halting Dr. Allende's socialization programs.

Other officers asserted that they were further motivated by what they interpreted as an attempt by the Government to play on natural rivalries between the military branches

and prevent the formation of a common front.

"Under Allende, the defense ministers actively fostered competition between the services in fund allocations," said an officer. "Some of the examples may sound petty, but taken together there was a pattern."

"Sometimes," he continued, "the naval air force was favored over the air force in equipment purchases and sometimes it was the other way around. At one point, Allende's defense minister granted a 25 per cent pay increase to air force pilots, and then turned around and encouraged the army to oppose it."

But these officers asserted that the first attempts to coordinate action in the army, navy and air force against the Allende Government grew out of a 26-day general strike of business and transportation in October, 1972. The strike end-

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Take-Over Last November

ed when Dr. Allende invited Gen. Carlos Prats Gonzalez, the army's Commander in Chief, and two other officers into the Cabinet.

"Just about everybody in the armed forces welcomed this," an officer said, "because at the time we considered Prats a traditional military man who would put a brake on Allende."

But almost immediately, General Prats came to be viewed as favorable to the Allende Government. By late November, army and air force colonels and navy commanders began to map out the possibilities of a coup. They also contacted leaders of the truck owners, shopkeepers and professional associations, as well as key businessmen, who had backed the October strike.

"We left the generals and admirals out of the plotting," an officer said, "because we felt that some of them like Prats would refuse to go along."

The greatest obstacle, according to these officers, was the armed forces' long tradition of political neutrality. For more than forty years, they had not interfered in the political process.

"I could have pulled my hair out for teaching my students for all those years that the armed forces must never rebel against the constitutional government," said an officer who formerly taught history at a military academy. "It took a long time to convince officers that there was no other way out."

try and that eventually the Marxists might be even stronger." The Marxists' vote was 43 per cent.

By the middle of March, the plotting resumed and colonels involved invited a number of generals and admirals to join. "In April, the Government somehow found out that we were plotting," said an officer, "and they started to consider ways of stopping us."

All the officers interviewed asserted that the Allende Government began secretly to stockpile weapons and train paramilitary forces in factories and rural areas with the intention of assassinating key military leaders and carrying out a "countercoup."

The military informants, there were three episodes before the Sept. 11 coup that could have led to an unplanned, bloody military revolt and possible civil war.

On May 18, the commander of an air force base in Santiago threatened to carry out his own coup. But it was discovered by a pro-Allende colonel who commanded a neighboring infantry regiment, and who threatened to attack the air base.

The most publicized was the abortive coup of June 29, in which about 100 members of an armored regiment in Santiago, led by Lieut. Col. Roberto Souper, took part.

On Aug. 48, President Allende and, allegedly, General Prats, forced the resignation of Gen. Cesar Ruiz Danyau, the air force commander in chief. Jets streaked out of Santiago to the southern city of Concepcion to

Pause for an Election

prepare for an immediate coup. But leaders of all three branches urged their officers to wait until General Prats could be removed; General Ruiz also pleaded with his men to abandon the idea of immediate action.

The leaders of the three branches then confronted General Prats and demanded his immediate resignation.

As soon as General Prats resigned, on Aug. 23, along with two other general considered to be pro-Allende, the high command of all three branches began mapping out the detail of their take-over.