

Was Ford Conned On Chile?

By Tom Wicker

WASHINGTON—The disclosure that the Central Intelligence Agency financed the series of strikes that preceded the overthrow of President Allende in Chile ought to make Gerald Ford hide his face. Either he has been conned by the C.I.A. into grossly misleading the American people and giving his approval to international gangsterism, or he did it on his own.

Mr. Ford, confirming at his recent news conference that the C.I.A. had carried out covert operations in Chile, suggested that it happened "three or four years ago" and that it was merely an attempt to "assist the preservation of opposition newspapers and electronic media and to preserve opposition political parties."

The facts are that the Allende Government did not try, as Mr. Ford charged it did, to "destroy opposition news media . . . and to destroy opposition political parties." The parties continued to function throughout the Allende regime. No Government censorship of the press was established. A one-day shutdown of an opposition paper, *El Mercurio*, was made possible by a libel law passed in the previous regime of Eduardo Frei, who was supported by the C.I.A.

Even that one-day shutdown did not occur until June 22, 1973, just a few months before the military coup that overthrew Mr. Allende. The Inter-American Press Association said then that the shutdown was the "first deliberate attempt to silence or intimidate" *El Mercurio*. Mr. Allende had been elected in 1970.

The Ford statement was misleading in every particular. Whatever pressures Mr. Allende occasionally brought on the opposition press, he imposed no censorship and made no attempt to "destroy" it. He did not try to destroy opposition parties. The C.I.A. intervention was not "three or four years ago." It was by no means

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limited to support for opposition press and parties, as the latest disclosures make clear.

Even if any part of Mr. Ford's statement had been true, the plain fact is that the United States supports any number of regimes where press and politics are harshly repressed—South Vietnam, South Korea, until recently Greece, just to name a few. But when the Chilean military junta, its path paved by the "destabilization" paid for and fomented by the C.I.A., took power, it immediately silenced both the press and the political parties, murdered thousands of Chileans and jailed thousands more.

Aside from misleading the American people, Mr. Ford's statement was one of the most unfortunate ever made by the head of a supposedly law-abiding government. It claimed the right of this nation to go clandestinely into others and "take certain actions in the intelligence field to help implement foreign policy and protect national security." That is a beautified way of saying "to subvert legitimate governments by bribery, trickery and violence."

Mr. Ford then justified this claim by saying Communist governments did the same thing, and that other countries did too. He took this to the ultimate length of saying that, in the case of Chile, the subversion had been in the "best interest" of the Chilean people. Who gave the United States the right to make such a judgment in opposition to a free Chilean election?

The "candor" of Mr. Ford's remarks, far from being praiseworthy, had the effects not just of admitting that international subversion goes on, but of giving it public, official approval, and from the President of the United States. What does this tell us about a man who in pardoning Richard Nixon said he believed that "right makes might" and who has just called in the United Nations for a cooperative world order based on "accommodation, moderation and consideration of the interests of others"?

It probably tells us that Gerald Ford has been sold a bill of goods by the C.I.A. and Secretary of State Kissinger, who presided over the national security body that authorized the C.I.A. interventions in Chile. Inexperienced in foreign affairs, no doubt intimidated by the "experts" at his elbow, unwilling to reverse long-standing policies of previous Presidents, politically dependent on Mr. Kissinger at home and abroad, Mr. Ford—an instinctive hawk anyway—no doubt said what they wanted him to say in *their* best interest.

And that tells us further that if the wings of the C.I.A. are to be clipped any time soon, and if Mr. Kissinger's responsibility for the reprehensible events in Chile is to be clarified, Congress will have to do it, with no help from the White House.