

CHILE

# For Which We Stand: II

By Anthony Lewis

BOSTON, Oct. 1.—When Americans hear about repression in another country, about concentration camps and torture, our concern is often limited by a sense of distance from the horror. After all, what has it to do with us? In any case, what can we be expected to do about it? There are so many wrongs in the world.

It is true enough that the United States cannot right all the world's inhumanity. Recent history permits no confidence in visions of global American benevolence. But it does not follow that we can feel detached from particular outrages to human rights, in terms either of responsibility or of the ability to help.

The reasons we cannot escape involvement are indicated by the example—the acute example—of Chile. It is two years now since the Allende Government was overthrown. The killing and torture and mass arrests that followed might have been thought a transitional phenomenon. But by all accounts, the military junta that governs Chile has institutionalized repression.

The junta admits that it has 5,000 political prisoners now; others say there are twice that many. By official count, 40,000 persons have been held in detention camps altogether since the coup; sources in the Catholic Church put the figure at 100,000—one in a hundred Chileans. The equivalent in this country would be two million political prisoners.

Torture has been widely used by the secret police and military. There are numerous verified reports, so gruesome in detail that one shrinks from description. An unknown number, probably thousands, have been killed.

Why does the terror go on without end in Chile? Part of the answer may

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be beyond reason, the paranoid character that right-wing military regimes assume. The Economist of London, a most conservative paper, said recently that such dictatorships tend toward "senseless, undirected, confused brutality."

But the repression may also be related to an economic policy that could not be imposed on a free society. Consumer prices rose 370 per cent in the junta's first year, and inflation is still running at about that rate—225 per cent from January to August this year. Unemployment is around 20 per cent. Industrial production fell 20 per cent in the first six months of 1975. The real income of lower-income families has been cut in half in two years.

What has it all to do with us? Why should we feel any connection with the cruelty and misery in Chile?

The first inescapable reason is that we share responsibility for bringing about the situation that exists. The Central Intelligence Agency, under orders of the Nixon White House, worked to destabilize Allende's legitimate government by helping opposition forces. Overtly, the United States cut off financial aid to Chile at a time when the result was devastating to her stability.

Even beyond the official connection there are areas of American responsibility. A very interesting one is economic. The Chilean junta's economic policy is based on the ideas of Milton Friedman, the conservative American economist, and his Chicago School. Friedman himself has visited Santiago and is believed to have suggested the junta's draconian program to end inflation.

The policy, in keeping with the Chicago School's theories, is to cut public expenditure, curb monetary expansion and sell off publicly owned facilities. If there is a growing disparity between the incomes of rich and poor, that would in the Friedman view have the desirable effect of increasing investment and eventual economic growth.

Of course, any political or economic theory may be perverted from what its framers intended. But if the pure Chicago economic theory can be carried out in Chile only at the price of repression, should its authors feel some responsibility? There are troubling questions here about the social role of academics.

American universities should feel particular concern about Chile because academic life there has been so decimated. Just two months ago the junta expelled seventy faculty members from the University of Chile and the Catholic University, many of them with degrees from the United States. Some were arrested.

In fact, many American institutions have been concerned and helpful. For example, pressure from deans of medical schools has helped some Chilean doctors get out of prison, though not all, and invitations to lecture in American universities have led to the release of some former officials.

American attitudes do make a difference—an enormous one. We cannot remove totalitarian regimes, but we can shame them. And we can help their victims. All of which makes it depressing that the reaction of the United States Government to official terror, in Chile and elsewhere, so often appears to be a studied indifference. The attitude was exemplified by Secretary of State Kissinger's famous remark when he heard that Ambassador David Popper was cautioning Chile's junta about the repression: "Tell Popper to cut out the political science lectures."